

Make Your Own Courage Art Therapy Project

Developed by Samantha M. Clark and Bonnie Thomas, LCSW

The activities in this program highlight themes related to mental health and well-being noted in the middle-grade novel *THE BOY, THE BOAT, AND THE BEAST*. **These activities are intended for mental health professionals to use with clients and/or a therapeutic population.** For activities that can be used by parents, teachers, librarians or other child caregivers, see www.samanthamclark.com.

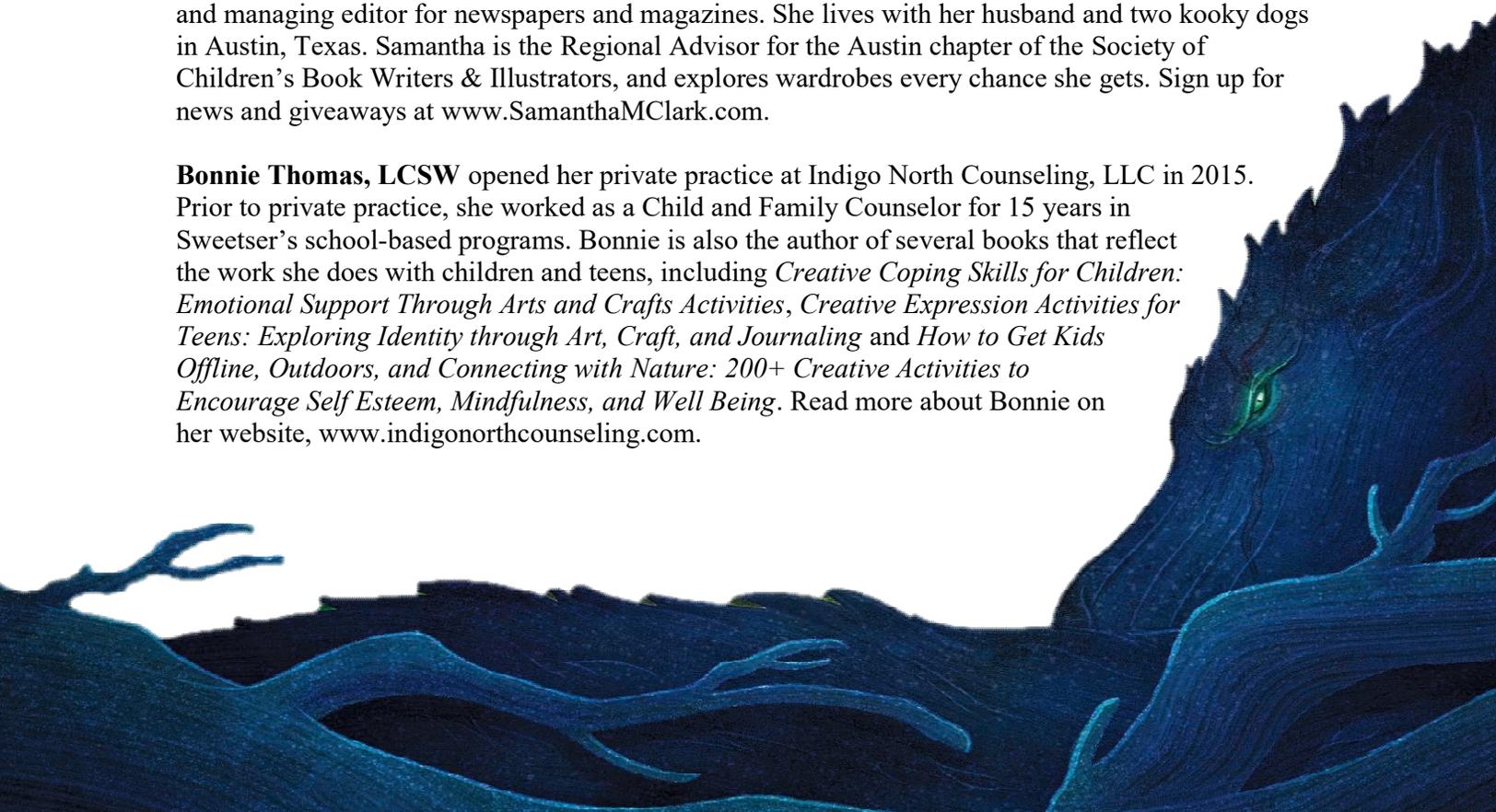
In the book, a Boy wakes up on a mysterious beach where everything's scary and he doesn't know who he is or how he got there. After a bright light shines over the Green Wall of trees, the Boy gathers up his courage and follows it, hoping to find answers and his family. But when he discovers the terrifying truth, he must face his biggest fear—going home.



THE BOY, THE BOAT, AND THE BEAST is written by **Samantha M Clark**
Paula Wiseman Books/Simon & Schuster
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Samantha M Clark has always loved stories about ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. After all, if four ordinary brothers and sisters can find a magical world at the back of a wardrobe, why can't she? While she looks for her real-life Narnia, she writes about other ordinary children and teens who've stumbled into a wardrobe of their own. In a past life, Samantha was a photojournalist and managing editor for newspapers and magazines. She lives with her husband and two kooky dogs in Austin, Texas. Samantha is the Regional Advisor for the Austin chapter of the Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators, and explores wardrobes every chance she gets. Sign up for news and giveaways at www.SamanthaMClark.com.

Bonnie Thomas, LCSW opened her private practice at Indigo North Counseling, LLC in 2015. Prior to private practice, she worked as a Child and Family Counselor for 15 years in Sweetser's school-based programs. Bonnie is also the author of several books that reflect the work she does with children and teens, including *Creative Coping Skills for Children: Emotional Support Through Arts and Crafts Activities*, *Creative Expression Activities for Teens: Exploring Identity through Art, Craft, and Journaling* and *How to Get Kids Offline, Outdoors, and Connecting with Nature: 200+ Creative Activities to Encourage Self Esteem, Mindfulness, and Well Being*. Read more about Bonnie on her website, www.indigonorthcounseling.com.



Make Your Own Courage Art Therapy Program

1. Tell Your Own Story About Braving a Storm

Discussion Points:

One of the stories the Boy tells himself in *THE BOY, THE BOAT, AND THE BEAST* is, “Once upon a time, there was a boy who braved the storm” (page 228). A storm is a common metaphor that people use to describe a challenging event because a storm is something that can be disruptive. Sometimes people have time to prepare for storms, and other times they have no warning. Difficult life events are a lot like storms in this matter—some are easier to get through than others. Larger, more destructive storms (and life events), however, seem to flip everything upside down and create a lot of destruction and change. The Boy in the story has a storm of his own to deal with.

Activities for Clients:

- Write and/or illustrate your own autobiographical story about braving a storm—a literal storm or a metaphorical storm.

2. Make a Poster Stating Something You Believe In

Discussion Points:

“The smaller something is, the more it needs protection.” (page 19)
The Boy in *THE BOY, THE BOAT, AND THE BEAST* reflects on this statement a few times in the book. It’s a statement his father told him and one the boy believes and embraces. In the story, we see the Boy act on this belief when he helps the crab and when he helps his little brother.

Activities for Clients:

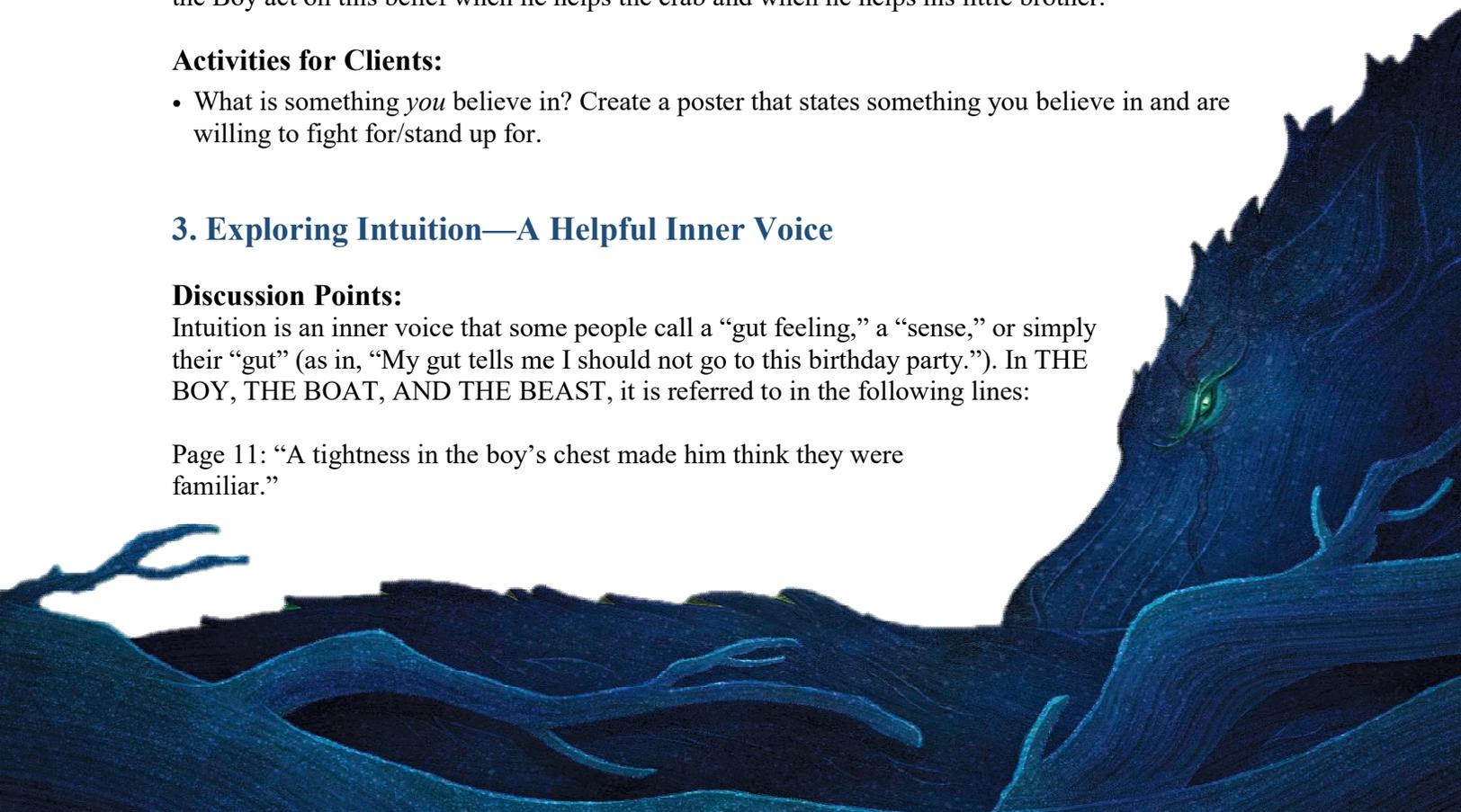
- What is something *you* believe in? Create a poster that states something you believe in and are willing to fight for/stand up for.

3. Exploring Intuition—A Helpful Inner Voice

Discussion Points:

Intuition is an inner voice that some people call a “gut feeling,” a “sense,” or simply their “gut” (as in, “My gut tells me I should not go to this birthday party.”). In *THE BOY, THE BOAT, AND THE BEAST*, it is referred to in the following lines:

Page 11: “A tightness in the boy’s chest made him think they were familiar.”



Page 33: “Something was different. Something wasn’t right. The boy’s beating heart told him so.”

Page 38: “He knew it. Almost to the bottom of his toes.”

Page 42: “So why did his heart want him to go?”

Page 67: “He didn’t look down—his gut told him he shouldn’t.”

Page 183: “A bad feeling had clamped onto his gut, and it was growing stronger.”

Intuition is like having a special radar that picks up on cues from people, places, and things around you. It warns you when something doesn’t feel right or safe.

There are moments in the book when the Boy uses his intuition to his advantage. It encourages him to pay attention to certain clues about his history; it sways him to make choices he is otherwise afraid to make; and his intuition warns him when danger is nearby.

Activities for Clients:

- Have you had any experiences with intuition? Write or draw about one of these experiences.
- If “Intuition” was a character in a book, what do you imagine the character would look like? How would this character act? Draw a picture of this character, if you like.
- Draw a comic strip titled, “Intuition Saves the Day” in which a character listens to their intuition. Or, if you like, draw the opposite—a comic strip in which a character *does not* listen to their intuition.

4. Exploring “The Bully”—An Unhelpful Inner Voice

Discussion Points:

The Boy in the book has an inner voice that he refers to as The Bully. This inner voice repeatedly gives the Boy discouraging messages about failing, shame, self doubt, danger, giving up, and other negative self talk.

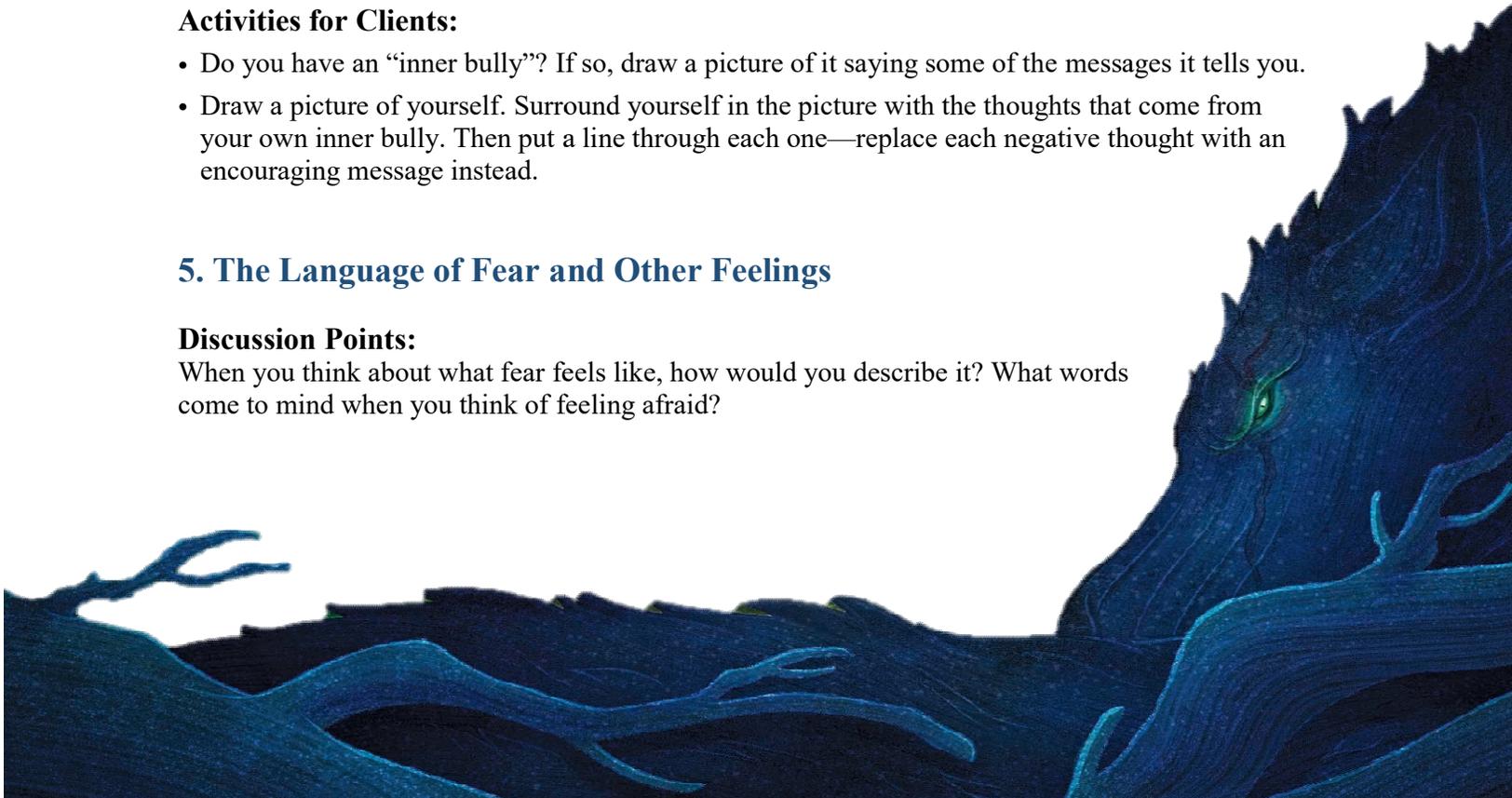
Activities for Clients:

- Do you have an “inner bully”? If so, draw a picture of it saying some of the messages it tells you.
- Draw a picture of yourself. Surround yourself in the picture with the thoughts that come from your own inner bully. Then put a line through each one—replace each negative thought with an encouraging message instead.

5. The Language of Fear and Other Feelings

Discussion Points:

When you think about what fear feels like, how would you describe it? What words come to mind when you think of feeling afraid?



THE BOY, THE BOAT, AND THE BEAST is a book that delves into fear—how it feels, what it looks like, and how it impacts the body. For example, look at these words and phrases that describe the Boy’s experience with feeling afraid:

Page 3: “flinched”

Page 4: “the boy’s jaw tightened”

Page 4: “fear sparked in his belly”

Page 5: “the boy ran”

Page 5: “gasping”

Page 5: “the boy cried out”

Page 5: “the boy fled”

Page 6: “he curled up as small as he could and shut his eyes tight”

Page 9: “the boy shivered”

Page 12: “collapsed into a pile”

Page 12: “nerves stabbed at his fingers and toes”

Page 18: “his stomach twisted”

Page 21: “fear crawled back in his chest”

Page 25: “the boy froze”

Page 25: “the boy’s insides twisted”

Page 34: “his pulse quickened”

Page 35: “he listened for danger”

Page 37: “the warning scurried up from the pit of his stomach”

Page 39: “a sob escaped”

Page 50: “panic squeezed his heart”

Page 51: “shaking hand”

Page 73: “the boy trembled”

Page 74: “the boy cowered”

Page 75: “the boy held his breath”

Page 81: “his heart hammered on his ribs”

Page 101: “fear curled into the boy’s stomach like a snake”

Page 115: “his back tightened as fear began to blister in his stomach”

Page 137: “the boy froze, not even daring to breathe”

Page 137: “the only part of him that moved was inside, where his nerves churned like a tornado”

Page 153: “his stomach burbled like volcano”

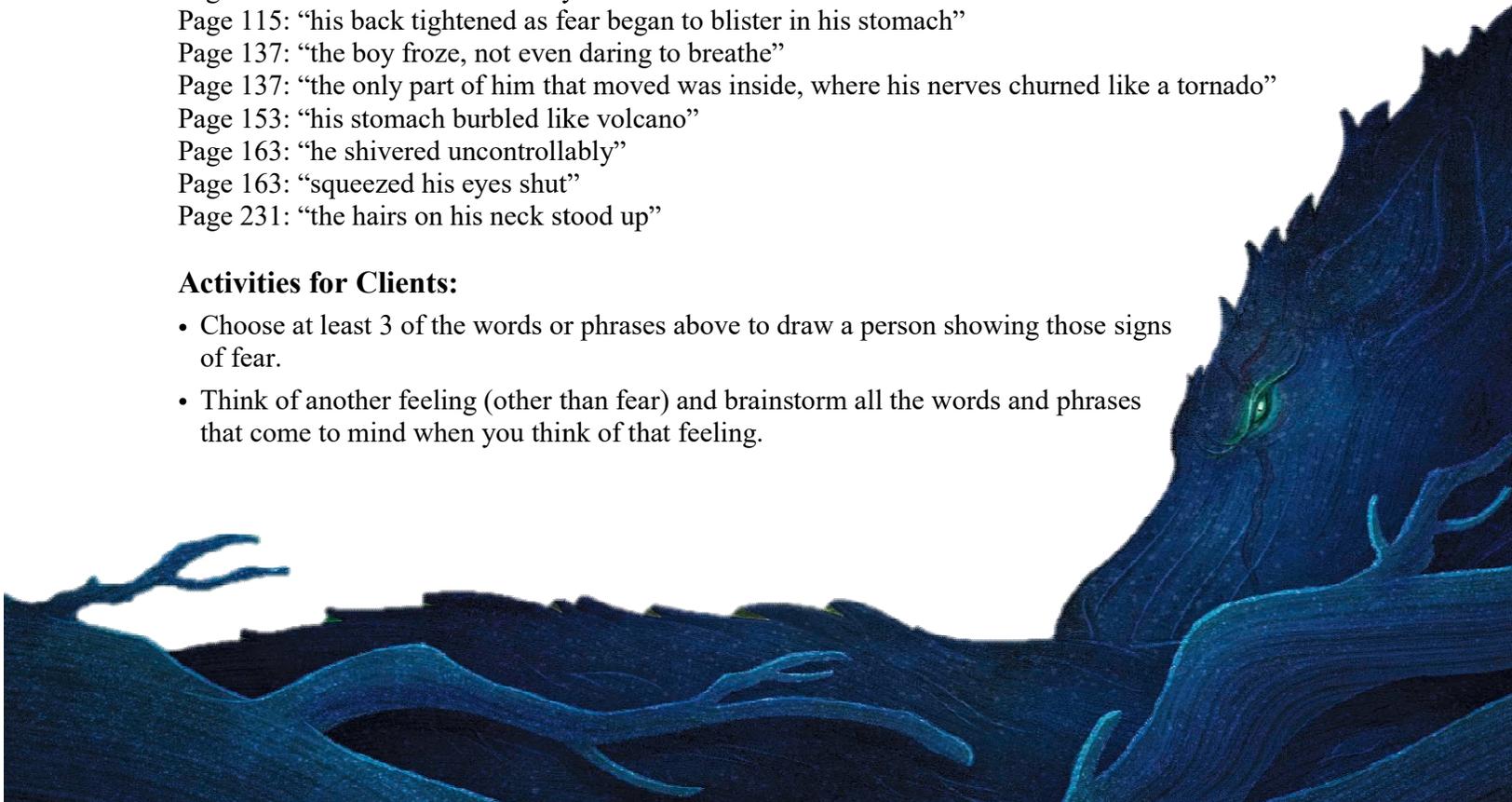
Page 163: “he shivered uncontrollably”

Page 163: “squeezed his eyes shut”

Page 231: “the hairs on his neck stood up”

Activities for Clients:

- Choose at least 3 of the words or phrases above to draw a person showing those signs of fear.
- Think of another feeling (other than fear) and brainstorm all the words and phrases that come to mind when you think of that feeling.



6. Use Coping/Calming Strategies

Discussion Points:

In *THE BOY, THE BOAT, AND THE BEAST*, the Boy experiences many stressful, scary events. He survives those events using various coping and calming strategies. Here are some examples:

1. Self talk via storytelling (throughout the book)
2. Self talk via affirmative messages/positive self talk (throughout the book)
3. Comfort object: “he clutched the blanket around him...hoping his one comfort would protect him” (page 30)
4. Deep breaths: “a few deep breaths” (page 34); “the boy took a deep breath” (page 80); “breathe, breathe, breathe” (page 85)
5. Reminding himself of times he was brave/times he succeeded (pages 44 and 53)
6. Focusing on the problem of the moment/breaking big problems down into smaller ones: “Panic squeezed his heart, but he tried to ignore it. He had to keep going.” (page 50) “Feet straight ahead, he told himself. Focus on Umbrella Beach.” (page 50)
7. Negating/rejecting internal thoughts: “The boy set his jaw, shooed away the bully’s words.” (page 53)
8. Humming and singing familiar music to self (page 68)
9. Humor, laughter: “The boy and the mirror laughed together.” (page 95)

Activities for Clients:

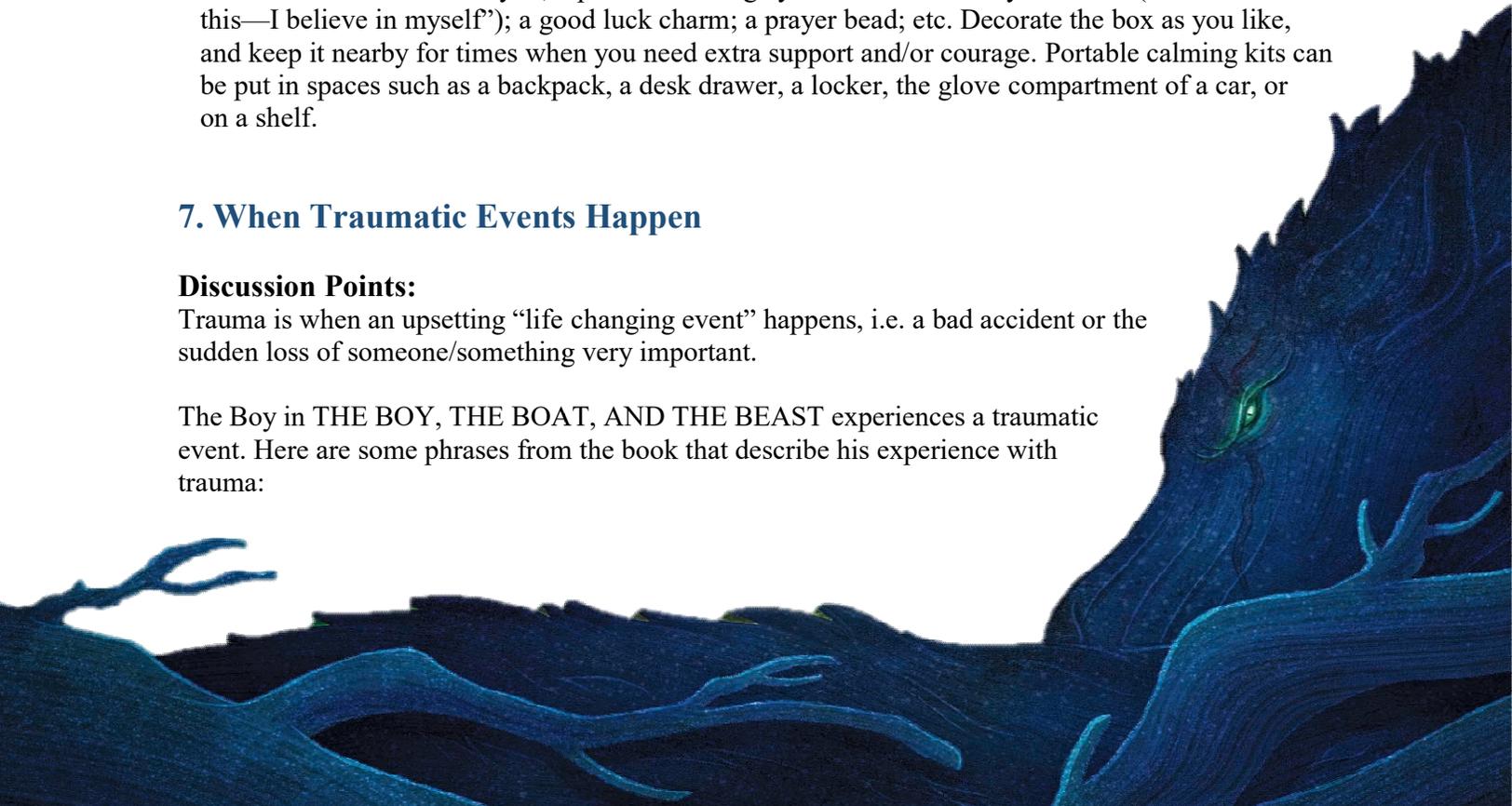
- What do you do to help yourself through difficult moments? What do you do to calm your fears? How many of the above strategies have you used?
- Make a portable calming kit: Find or purchase a tiny portable container such as a small mint tin, a sliding box that matches come in (the kind of box with a tray that slides out), or a box from a deck of cards. Think about small objects that you find comfort in or ones that are calming to you. This could include a small worry stone; a crystal or gemstone; a worry doll; an encouraging note from someone who cares about you; a positive message you want to remind yourself of (i.e. “I can do this—I believe in myself”); a good luck charm; a prayer bead; etc. Decorate the box as you like, and keep it nearby for times when you need extra support and/or courage. Portable calming kits can be put in spaces such as a backpack, a desk drawer, a locker, the glove compartment of a car, or on a shelf.

7. When Traumatic Events Happen

Discussion Points:

Trauma is when an upsetting “life changing event” happens, i.e. a bad accident or the sudden loss of someone/something very important.

The Boy in *THE BOY, THE BOAT, AND THE BEAST* experiences a traumatic event. Here are some phrases from the book that describe his experience with trauma:



Page 6: “Everything had turned scary. Everything had turned bad. How was that even possible?”

Page 6: “He knew he wasn’t safe on this beach. And he had nowhere else to go.”

Page 8: “The beach looked harmless now. But the boy knew different. It was a trickster that was trapping him.”

Page 40: “Saying it aloud, even in a whisper, made it real.”

Page 40: “When all the tears had left him, the boy lay on his side, staring out at the endless ocean. He felt empty, spent.”

Page 70: “Water haunted his dreams again.”

Page 93: “The despair he’d been trying to hold back leaked into the boy’s heart.”

Trauma can impact people in different ways. For example, some people may have trouble remembering specific details about what happened, just like the Boy in the book. The person might have nightmares about the event, or feel like the event is reoccurring. They might feel afraid or unsafe even after the traumatic event has passed. They might feel like their whole life got flipped upside down and that nothing is familiar anymore.

Activities for Clients:

- If you’ve experienced a traumatic event, draw a “before and after” picture that shows what your life was like before and after the event. Some might want to draw a picture of “during” as well, and that’s fine if it feels okay or appropriate to do so.
- When people experience a traumatic event, it might be challenging for them to remember the things they enjoyed before the event. Draw a picture or create a collage of people, animals, places, and things that you enjoy or that give you hope.
- Draw a picture or create a collage of what you would put in a care package for someone who has experienced something traumatic. When/if someone you love experiences something upsetting, consider putting together a care package for them to let them know they are loved and supported. Cards and pictures are nice also.



Buy **THE BOY, THE BOAT, AND THE BEAST** wherever books are sold.