

FOR TEACHERS · LIBRARIANS · SCHOOL COUNSELORS · HOMESCHOOL FAMILIES

The Grumble-Gator's Greatest Raft

A Read-Aloud & Kindness Kit for the Classroom

Ages 3-8 · Read-aloud time about 8-10 minutes · A gentle story about kindness, empathy, and standing up to bullying without fighting back

A note from the author

Dear Teacher, Librarian, or Friend of young readers,

Thank you for the work you do. Every child deserves someone who will sit with them on the raft, and that is really the whole heart of this little book. Barnaby is big, grumpy, and used to being feared. Toby is small, and kind even when kindness is the harder choice. What happens between them is a gentle way to talk with children about bullying, empathy, and the good one kind person can do.

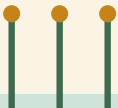
I hope this kit makes it easy to bring Barnaby and Toby into your room. Read it aloud, talk it over, and let your class build a kindness raft of their own. If I can help in any way, I'd be glad to.

Warmly, Cory Tarwater

Author, the Barnaby & Toby series · JCT Creations

What's inside

- 1 About the book & why it fits your classroom
- 2 Read-aloud discussion guide (before, during & after)
- 3 The Kindness Raft — a class activity + free printables
- 4 Bring the book to your school — copies & author story-time



1 About the book, and why it fits your classroom

At the shimmering center of Sunny-Stream Pond lives Toby, a young turtle with a shell as shiny as a polished penny. At the shadowy edge lives Barnaby, the Grumble-Gator, who splashes, roars, and makes life hard for everyone. When Barnaby knocks Toby right off his lily pad, Toby's friends tell him to hit back. Instead, Toby remembers his father's words and chooses another way. He swims toward Barnaby, offers a kind word, and invites him to build something together. By sunset, the bully has become a friend, and the strongest tail in the pond is putting itself to gentle use.

The heart of the story

Toby's father tells him: ***"A fist can break a branch, but a kind word can plant a forest."*** It is the line children remember, and the one that opens the best conversations about how we treat each other.

Themes you can build on

- Kindness as a choice, especially when it is the harder one
- Empathy — noticing when someone else is hurting
- Peaceful courage instead of hitting back or retaliating
- Friendship, and how it can change someone for the better
- Bullying prevention, handled gently and age-appropriately

A natural fit for social-emotional learning

It maps easily onto the five core SEL competencies, so it supports an SEL block, a counselor lesson, or a kindness unit without feeling like a worksheet:

Social awareness	Toby notices Barnaby sitting alone in the mud and senses the hurt behind the grumpiness.
Responsible decision-making	Told to "hit him back," Toby weighs it and chooses a kinder response instead.
Relationship skills	He opens with a kind word and invites Barnaby to build the raft together.
Self-management	Barnaby learns his size doesn't have to be scary; his growl turns into a hum.

A note on tone: the book is a warm, reassuring story first, with the lesson carried underneath. Read it for fun, and the kindness lands on its own.

2 Read-aloud discussion guide

Simple prompts to open conversation before, during, and after the story. Choose the few that fit your group; there are no wrong answers.

Before you read

- Look at the cover. Which animal looks friendly? Which one looks grumpy? What makes you think so?
- What does the word kind mean to you? Can you think of a time someone was kind to you?
- What do you usually do when someone is mean to you?

While you read

- When Barnaby splashes Toby off his lily pad, the minnows say “hit him back.” Do you think Toby should? Why or why not?
- Toby remembers his dad's words about a fist and a kind word. What do you think that means?
- Barnaby says nobody ever asked him to build anything before. How do you think that felt for him?

After you read

- Toby chose a kind word instead of hitting back. Was that easy or hard to do? Why?
- Why do you think Barnaby was so grumpy at the start? Was he happy being scary?
- Barnaby says, “I thought being big meant I had to be scary.” Toby says, “Being big just means you have more room for friends.” What does that mean to you?
- Who in the story was brave? What made them brave?
- What is one kind thing you could do for someone this week, even someone who was unkind to you first?

Carry it forward

Keep the last question alive all week. When a child does the kind thing they named, add a reed to your class Kindness Raft on the next page. Kindness sticks when children watch it add up.

3 The Kindness Raft — a class activity

In the book, Toby and Barnaby weave loose reeds into one strong raft that carries them both. Your class can build one too, one kind act at a time. It gives children a picture of something true: small kindnesses, tied together, hold a lot of weight.

What you need

Brown or green paper strips (the “reeds”), a large sheet or bulletin-board space for the raft, markers, and tape or glue. That's all.

How it works

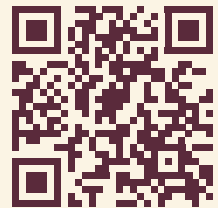
1. After the read-aloud, talk about what a “kind word” or a “kind act” can look like at school.
2. Each time a child does or receives one, they write it on a paper reed and add it to the raft.
3. Watch the raft grow across the week. When it's full, read a few reeds aloud and celebrate together.
4. Close by asking: does our raft feel strong now? That's what kindness does when we all add to it.

Younger classes (3–5): draw a kind act instead of writing it. Older classes (6–8): add a “growl-to-a-hum” reed for turning a grumpy moment around, like Barnaby did.

Free companion printables

More ready-to-print activities live on the website, free and with no sign-up: a coloring page, a kindness BINGO, a word search, bookmarks, and more. They pair perfectly with the read-aloud and the Kindness Raft.

Scan or visit jctcreations.com/printables



4 Bring the book to your school

Copies for your classroom or library

The book is available worldwide in paperback and hardcover. For a classroom set, a library, or a school-wide kindness unit, print-on-demand makes bulk orders simple, and discounts are available on larger quantities. Tell me how many copies you're thinking about and I'll help you get the best price and the fastest route to your school.

See every store, or ask about bulk copies: jctcreations.com/buy

Author story-time visits

I'd love to read for your class, either in person or over video. A visit runs about 20–30 minutes: a lively read-aloud of the story, a short kindness conversation with the children, and the Kindness Raft activity to leave behind. Signed copies can be arranged. It's a warm, memorable way to launch a kindness unit or mark Bullying Prevention Month in October.



Let's talk

For copies, a school visit, or anything else, I'm easy to reach and I answer personally.

Email	cory@jctcreations.com
Website	jctcreations.com
Free resources	jctcreations.com/printables
Where to buy	jctcreations.com/buy

Thank you for helping children choose the kind word. It's never too late to change your ways, and no lesson matters more.