

Read the Room

From the practice of Elliott McCray, Ed.S., The McCray Learning Lab

What this builds (transformative SEL): Belonging (“I belong”) with a thread of Collaborative problem-solving (“We solve it together”).

Deja’s “Read the Room” is a relationship-skills story about **digital kindness**: the everyday, modern struggle of communicating with care in a place where your face disappears and only your words arrive. It’s also a **reading-tone** builder: a real literacy skill (inferring tone from written text using punctuation, context, and knowledge of the writer) taught as the same act as being kind online. Kids learn to (1) *pause* before they send or react, (2) recognize that a message with no face makes their brain “fill in” a tone, usually the worst one, so they should *check* it instead of believing it, (3) *read the real tone* from the clues that survive without a face, and (4) *send with care* by putting the tone back in, so their own words land the way they mean.

How to help at home or in class

- **Name the misread, not the child.** “The words probably landed different than you meant: that happens to everyone online” keeps it about the message, not their character.
- **Teach the pause.** Before sending anything with feeling in it, put the phone down for one breath. Thumbs are fast; kindness needs a beat.
- **Ask, don’t assume.** When a short message feels cold, model the clarifying question (“all good? 😊”) out loud. One question prevents most online fights.
- **Read tone together.** Take a real (harmless) text and ask, “How many ways could this be meant? What clue would tell us?” That’s the literacy skill, practiced.
- **Repair is the skill, not the failure.** The win in this story isn’t never misfiring: it’s fixing it with a real, direct, kind message. Praise the repair.
- **Model it.** Kids copy how the adults around them text. A calm, kind reply (and a visible pause before an angry one) is the strongest lesson.

Practice tool, not therapy. This story is a gentle SEL and literacy practice tool, not a diagnosis or a treatment. If a child is facing ongoing cruelty online, being targeted, or is frightened by something in a chat, that’s a conversation for a trusted adult, teacher, or counselor (and, where needed, the platform’s reporting tools), not something a comic can address.

Your privacy: if the optional “say it” recorder is used, the voice stays on this device: it is never saved, never uploaded, and it is gone when the page closes.

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