

BOOK REVIEW

Catch a Falling Star: A Tale from the Iris the Dragon Series
Gayle Grass, with illustrations by Coral Nault, 45 pages, paperback.
\$15.95

Catch a Falling Star is a unique book written for children to help them understand and overcome mental illness. Using the medium of a fairy tale, Grass introduces the reader to the early warning signs of psychiatric disorders and the importance of communication and preventive intervention. This is the first of the "Iris the Dragon" Series of books for children and care-givers that examines different types of brain disorders in children. Each book takes us over the seasons of a year with Iris the Dragon and a child dealing with early symptoms of a particular mental illness.

The book recounts a simple tale of the life of a boy named Fish who is befriended by a dragon named Iris. Fish is a typical young boy who enjoys fishing off a bridge into the lake. However, he is often confused by feelings of anxiety and he often retreats to his bridge to lose himself in the moment. One particularly troubling day, Fish catches his line under the bridge and when he hauls it up he finds a hat on his hook. A voice under the bridge says "I think you've caught my hat!" He thus meets the Dragon, who lives under the bridge. Iris and Fish become friends, and slowly Fish confides in Iris that sometimes his brain becomes busy and noisy and he gets frightened. Iris playfully calms his fears and teaches Fish "Dragon secrets of a healthy brain" such as concentration and creative exercises to engage and calm his mind.

As the summer fades into fall, Fish tells Iris that in school he feels anxious and now needs extra help and testing.

Iris reassures Fish and gets him to understand that brain illnesses sometimes require "special help from special people," such as the professionals he is beginning to see. Iris also teaches Fish how to slow down racing thoughts with visualization and "dragon breathing"—imagining a protective place while practicing deep breathing exercises.

In school, Fish seems to be doing well but one day the anxious racing feeling returns and Iris implores him to go see a doctor in the city. Fish obliges and goes to the city clinic where he is given a tour, meets new doctors, and is tested to see what can be done to help him.

With the arrival of winter, Fish is

beginning to feel better and during the holiday season he and Iris resume their friendship. One night Iris tells Fish that the stars above them are the guiding lights for all living creatures and one of a dragon's solemn duties is to keep them from falling back to earth.

Fish stays at the clinic and begins making friends with other children and getting the help he needs from the doctors. By spring, Fish bids his new friends goodbye and returns to his house by the lake to a warm welcome home party. He finds Iris waiting for him under the bridge who tells him he made a new star in the sky for Fish to remember what he has learned about becoming well again. Iris tells him to believe in himself and know that there are people around him that can always help him.

Children who become afflicted with a brain illness suffer particularly as they do not yet have the experience and understanding to make sense of their perceptual and cognitive dysfunctions. *Catch a Falling Star* is valuable and highly recommended. This book reaches out to kids, using their own language, to show them that mental illness can be treated, and they can grow up normally with early intervention. □

—Greg Schillhab

