



Eli and the Big Maybe

Ages 6-9
A story and 9 activities

Eli and the Big Maybe

Eli's family is moving to a new neighborhood on Sunday. The boxes have been stacked in the hall for a week. The old house feels like an echo.

"What if I don't make any friends?" Eli asks at dinner on Wednesday.

"Maybe you will," says Totty.

"What if my teacher is mean?"

"Maybe she will be wonderful."

"What if I get lost and I can't find my classroom?"

"Maybe you'll find it right away."

Eli puts down his fork. "Maybe, maybe, maybe. Nobody knows anything."

Mommy puts her hand on his. "It's hard not to know. Our minds don't like blank spaces. They try to fill them with the scariest guesses."

That night, Eli lies in bed with his eyes open. His brain won't stop spinning. What if the kids laugh at my glasses? What if nobody sits with me at lunch? What if I forget where the bathroom is?

Each thought makes his tummy feel like a tight little ball.

He pads down the hall in his socks and finds his Totty in the kitchen, taping up the last box.

"You're up," says Totty.

"My worries won't stop," says Eli.

Totty pulls out a chair. "Let's try something. Get a paper and a pencil. Write down every worry."

Eli writes them all down. There are eleven. When he finishes, he looks at the page. It is strange. Written on paper, the worries look smaller than they feel in his head.

"Now," says Totty. "Which of these can we do something about, and which can we not?"

Eli taps the pencil on the table. "I can't control whether the other kids like me."

"Right. We'll mark that one 'can't control.' What else?"

"I can learn where my classroom is. And the bathroom."

"Yes. What would help?"

"If I could see the school before Monday. And meet my teacher."

Totty smiles. "That, I can do. I'll call the principal in the morning and ask for a visit."

Eli keeps going down the list. For the worry about lunch, he decides he can bring a deck of cards and ask if anyone wants to play. For the worry about his glasses, he can remember that his cousin Shmuli wears glasses and is the most popular boy in the class. For the worry about getting lost, he can ask a teacher and draw a little map.

At the bottom of the page, Totty writes one more line. "What I can say to myself: I don't know yet, but I can find out. I can handle one step at a time."

"That sounds a little bit like a tool," says Eli.

"It is," says Totty. "Do you want to put it in your tool kit?"

Eli nods. He folds the paper and slides it into his pocket.

On Thursday, they visit the new school. The hallway smells like floor polish. The principal shows Eli his classroom, the bathroom, and the lunchroom. Eli's teacher, Morah Devorah, is setting up the bulletin board. She shakes his hand and says she likes his glasses.

"I like your glasses too," says Eli, and she laughs because she doesn't wear any.

On Monday, Eli carries his backpack into class. A boy with a striped kippah looks up. "Do you want to play cards at recess?" he asks.

Eli stares at him. "How did you know I brought cards?"

"I didn't," says the boy. "I just like cards."

Eli grins. The ball in his tummy has turned into a little flutter.

At the end of the day, Eli tells his father, "Maybe isn't so scary after all."

"Why is that?" asks Totty.

"Who sat next to you?"

"A boy with a striped kippah. He beat me at cards twice."

Totty laughs. Eli takes the folded paper out of his pocket, looks at it, and puts it in the drawer.



Activity 1 of 9

Remember the story

1. Why is Eli's family moving?

2. What does Totty ask Eli to do with his worries?

3. What do they do before Monday?

4. What does the boy with the striped kippah invite Eli to do?



Activity 2 of 9

Fact or guess? (circle one)

1. Eli writes down eleven worries. Fact / Guess
2. Morah Devorah wears glasses. Fact / Guess
3. Eli makes a plan for each worry he can do something about. Fact / Guess
4. Eli's cousin Shmuli wears glasses. Fact / Guess



Activity 3 of 9

Think and write

1. What worries do you have about something new?

2. Which of your worries can you do something about, and which can you not?

3. What can you say to yourself when your mind fills in the blank spaces?

Activity 4 of 9

Word search (find all 6)

Words: MAYBE, WORRY, PLAN, SCHOOL, GLASSES, PAPER

J	S	L	H	K	S	C	H	O	O	L
W	S	O	N	P	C	V	T	K	R	F
H	N	H	B	B	P	J	U	W	R	C
S	C	P	L	A	N	E	M	T	E	L
U	E	D	D	S	O	F	G	L	P	N
N	O	E	H	E	W	I	E	U	A	R
F	D	B	I	S	O	W	J	F	P	W
V	F	Y	F	S	P	L	O	K	N	H
A	S	A	Y	A	B	K	K	R	H	C
I	O	M	M	L	T	F	M	P	R	W
H	R	I	R	G	P	U	P	C	F	Y



Activity 5 of 9

Scrambled words (from the story)

1. RWYRO = _____

2. MBYAE = _____

3. SSGASEL = _____

4. OSHCOL = _____

5. DSRAC = _____



Activity 6 of 9

Say it out loud

Practice each line in a calm, steady voice:

"I don't know yet, but I can find out."

"I can handle one step at a time."

"Can I see the room before I start?"



Activity 7 of 9

My chart

My Worry Plan Chart

#	My worry	Can I do something?	My plan
Worry 1			
Worry 2			
Worry 3			



Activity 8 of 9

Draw it

Draw Eli's page of worries getting smaller as each one gets a plan.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for a drawing. It occupies the central portion of the page below the instructions.



Activity 9 of 9

Answers

Remember the story:

1. They are moving to a new neighborhood
2. Write them all down on paper
3. They visit the new school
4. Play cards at recess

Fact or guess: 1 Fact; 2 Guess; 3 Fact; 4 Fact

Scrambled words: WORRY, MAYBE, GLASSES, SCHOOL, CARDS

Think and write: answers will vary; talk them over together.