



## Little Ruth: Backpack Mishap

### Dee Write

Little Ruth

(24pp)

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*Modeling effective, constructive problem-solving strategies for children, Little Ruth: Backpack Mishap is a vibrant picture book.*

In Dee Write's educational picture book *Little Ruth: Backpack Mishap*, sisters take responsibility for their mistakes and engage in collaborative problem-solving.

After a fun day at school and a delicious snack, Ruth's decorated backpack catches the attention of her younger sisters, Annie and Abby, as she goes to put it away before her piano lesson. When they ask to play with it, Ruth refuses. Nonetheless, after she leaves, they sneak into her room to use it. Ruth is upset when she returns to find that Annie and Abby have made a mess of her room and destroyed her backpack. To resolve this conflict, their mother calls for a family discussion.

The story models effective, constructive problem-solving strategies for children. Rainbow text is used to highlight the "Campbell Family Discussion Ball": under their mother's leadership, the girls take turns passing around the ball, and the holder of the ball expresses how she feels from her perspective without being interrupted. Forgiveness is facilitated and reasonable consequences are upheld as Annie and Abby apologize, Ruth agrees to give her sisters a "second chance," and their mother tells Annie and Abby that they are to clean up Ruth's room, even if that means missing their favorite show. The book also models brainstorming "creative solutions to seemingly big problems" when the girls' mother suggests that they hold a pajama party and invite their friends to come over and join them in decorating new backpacks.

The book treats women and girls as central to family-oriented processes of conflict resolution and forgiveness, somewhat limiting its scope, though. Indeed, the girls' father and their brother, Timmy, disappear from the story, heading to lacrosse practice after snack time, never to reappear. More broadening is the fact that in the book's informational final pages, the Ghanaian Adinkra symbols featured throughout the book are explained: in a subtle touch against the liveliness of the women's mannerisms and colorful outfits, Ruth, her mother, and her grandmother wear necklaces with Mpatapo, Nyansapo, and Akoma symbols on them, representing a trifecta of positive values—reconciliation, wisdom, and "having heart."

In the illustrations, though, people's facial expressions become too monotonous. Ruth's disappointment is not differentiated enough from her younger sisters' excitement while playing in her room without permission a few pages before, for example. And—with the exception of Ruth's pink-themed room—the family's furniture is drawn as quite uniform and geometric, colored in shades of dull gray and drab beige. Against this understated background, the variegated, multicolor illustrations of the family members and their interactions command singular attention. But the white space on pages with images that are framed in circular zoom-ins is too abundant, causing them to look unfinished.

A gracious girl gives her younger sisters a second chance after they break her trust in the family- and women-focused

picture book *Little Ruth: Backpack Mishap*.

ISABELLA ZHOU (August 7, 2024)

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