

THE TIGER RISING STUDY GUIDE

created by Rachel Kiser

“Have you ever been inside a cage? Not a real one with metal bars and a lock, though I have had some experience with those. No, I’m talking about the kind of imaginary cage we build to protect ourselves. That’s the kind of cage my friend Rob and I were trapped inside when we were 10 years old, before we unearthed the key that would set us free, and before we met the magnificent creature, who would change our lives forever.” - Sistine

INTRODUCTION:

This film is based on Kate DiCamillo’s beloved novel, *The Tiger Rising*. Twelve-year-old Rob Horton finds a tiger in the foggy Florida woods, behind the motel where he lives with his father. On that same day, Rob meets Sistine Bailey, a girl who shows her feelings as readily as Rob hides his. Through their friendship they begin to understand that some things – like memories, and heartache, and tigers – can’t be locked up forever.

Once you’ve watched the film, take time in small groups to discuss the themes addressed in the story. Through the use of thought-provoking questions and related Bible verses, this guide will help you usher in a safe space for children to become more aware of their own internal narrative and acquire new tools as they learn to move through life with awareness and intention. By participating in activities, children will have opportunities to reflect, process and release negative emotions as they learn what it means to allow Jesus to heal their minds and hearts.

In each of the following sections, children are led through a study of the emotional process and are prompted to find the “tiger” in each of the characters, which will aid them in discovering the tiger within themselves. By delving into each of the characters, children are prompted to reflect on the specific emotion they each represent (sadness, anger, control, chaos, freedom). Activities that support release are included throughout as they explore what it means to move negative emotions out of their bodies and “rise up” towards a life of freedom.

- **Section I. Sadness (Rob Horton)**
- **Section II. Anger (Sistine Bailey)**
- **Section III. Control (Beauchamp)**
- **Section IV. Chaos (Miss Mills)**
- **Section V. Freedom (Willie Mae)**

In order for children to create and express themselves freely, a safe environment must be established for them. We recommend you sit in the space prior to your discussion time, and ask yourself the following questions:

1. Does the room feel warm, welcoming, and happy upon entry?
2. Are there any distractions in the room that could possibly hinder a child’s focus from the group?
3. Are there established varying areas in the room where children are given the opportunity to move, create, and participate in circle discussion time?

Have fun with this and make the space your own! Small changes can have a huge impact. For example, putting a round cozy rug on the floor for the discussion time is a simple way to create warmth while supporting eye contact within the group.

STUDY GUIDE OUTLINE:

The components of this outline are intended for daily use in the following order. Each time you meet with the children, begin with Creative Prep, followed by one of the Group Discussions concluding with the coinciding Release Activity.

1. Creative Prep

When kids enter the room, we suggest having them partake in a non-verbal, visual, and tactile activity, such as painting or molding clay, to prepare their creative flow. Simple inquiry prompts work great for this. For example, have a large sheet of butcher paper on the floor and invite the kids to draw how they feel today. The broader the query, the more disarming the outcome.

Examples of disarming questions:

1. What does your sky look like today?
2. How do we make the world better?
3. What does God look like?
4. What is your favorite super power?
5. What does love look like?

2. Group Discussion

The group discussion is a share time to check in and guide children through their emotions in a safe, collective setting. Create an environment where thoughts and feelings are shared out loud within the group and encourage children to offer responses that are uplifting and respectful. This time should also ignite a sense of safety for all individuals within the group. Start by asking the kids about their day so far...how are they feeling? What emotions did they walk in the room with today? This should be an open share time, as you move through the content of the study guide. Sometimes it takes a while for kids to formulate their thoughts, especially if they are more introverted. We encourage you to fight the urge to take up space with talking as they are thinking. As guides, we must learn to be comfortable in the silence while they are contemplating their responses, as it usually allows for deeper thought production.

3. Release Activities

Artistic expression is a beautiful way to move feelings out of the body. Rob's hobby of whittling wood and drawing allowed release for him throughout the day, and the result brought joy to those around him. There's so much we can discover about ourselves and the world by entering into a creative space. In the Bible King David often wrote music as he reflected and released his feelings to God. The following activities are a combination of creative and physical exercises to help children express themselves as they process through their emotions and move feelings out of their bodies.

GROUP DISCUSSION:

SECTION I: SADNESS

“You’re carrying all that sadness down in your legs and not letting it get up to your heart. You gotta let that sadness rise up.” - Willie Mae

As Willie Mae pointed out, Rob was carrying a lot of sadness inside which appeared in his legs. He lost his mother and his life changed dramatically, so there was a lot for him to be sad about. He had a difficult time talking about it and letting it out.

Ask:

- Why do you think Rob was so fascinated with the Tiger?
- What do you think Willie Mae meant when she told Rob to “let that sadness rise up?”
- How can sadness show up in Rob’s legs?
- Have you ever felt sick from being sad or from feeling strong emotions?
- What was it that made you feel sad?
- How did you move through your sadness?

“No point in crying. Crying’s not gonna bring her back.” – Robert Horton Sr.

Rob’s father was also in a lot of pain, and wasn’t available to help Rob work through his emotions. Being sad and crying is not about changing the circumstances that made us sad. We don’t have the power to change what’s already happened. Accepting and exploring sadness allows us to move through the pain of those circumstances so they don’t weigh us down in the future.

So often we try to suppress sadness because it’s uncomfortable, much like the tiger that was locked up in a cage. We make jokes to deviate from our true feelings because we fear being anything but happy. God made all of these emotions for a reason though, so it’s important for us to acknowledge them in a healthy way and move through them, because they are telling us something about what is going on inside.

Writing Activity: Stories of Sadness

Materials: writing journal or blank paper, pens

Invite children to spread out in the room and find a comfortable place to sit and write. Display the following questions and encourage them to write down any stories or thoughts that come to mind based on the questions. After 20 minutes, invite the children back to the discussion circle and allow them to share their reflections.

- Have you ever been scared to feel sadness?
- What made you fear being sad?
- Have you ever had a time when you locked your sadness up inside?
- How did you let the sadness go?

Read Psalm 34:17-18 and Psalm 30:5

Ask:

- Where is God when we are sad?
- What does God promise to do when we are sad?
- Does sadness last forever?
- Is our sadness ever too big for God to understand?

- Have you ever talked to God when you were sad?

Rob often revisits the past with his mom, like when the bus ceiling turns into a cloud and he's taken back to an afternoon in the park with his parents looking up at the sky, or when he remembers sitting on her bed sharing one of his wood carvings with her.

Ask:

- Have you ever gone into your mind and thought about a past memory that was sad?
- How did you feel when you did this?

Sometimes we must revisit old hurts in order to let them go. When we do this, we can ask Jesus to step into the memory with us. Remember, He was there with us. We can ask Him to take the hurt from us, for He is the only one capable of fully understanding and He wants to carry it for us.

Once we release sadness, we will eventually feel better. That doesn't mean that sadness will go away forever though. Oftentimes sadness will resurface, especially if the wound is really deep. That's why God's promise to be with us always is so important – we are never alone, no matter what the emotion! He goes through all of it with us and is the only one fully capable of understanding it all. It also helps to find a friend or a trusted grownup to talk to when you feel sad. Talking about our sadness out loud and getting it out helps to release what's inside.

Tiger Tips:

- Sadness is useful and is there for a reason.
- Sadness is part of being human, and God will always comfort us when we are sad.
- Crying is a form of release and helps us heal.
- We must choose to let sadness go and give it to God.
- Talking about our sadness out loud helps us to release it.
- Once we release sadness, we will experience joy.

RELEASE ACTIVITY: Color My Emotions

Materials: Paints, crayons or markers, blank paper, pencils

Give each child a piece of paper and a pencil, and invite them to draw their face on the paper. Self portraits can sometimes be difficult for children if they are highly focused on the literal nature of their depictions. Continue to remind them that you aren't expecting perfection, just however they see themselves is great. Once they've drawn their face, invite them to choose whatever colors they are drawn to, and color in the various components of their face. They can also draw various lines "Picasso style" and section off the various colors they choose. Encourage them to choose colors that they are feeling or drawn to. Once they are done with their self-portraits, invite them to the discussion circle to share as you prompt them with the following questions:

- How do you feel about your self portrait?
- Are you proud of your work? Why or why not?
- Why did you choose those colors?
- Did any feelings come up for you as you were drawing or coloring?
- What did you learn about yourself as you were doing this activity?
- Continue to ask questions based on the response from the children. Remember - there is so much to be discovered in these exercises, we just have to ask and keep digging.

SECTION II: ANGER

“I can’t wait for my dad to come and get me. When he gets here, I’m going to make him come out here and set this tiger free.” – Sistine Bailey

Sistine was angry about her parent’s choices, but just below that anger was deep sadness. Anger is the explosive result of built-up feelings inside which we have refused to acknowledge. “The place” Sistine actually wanted to be rescued from was the new reality she didn’t ask for, and her feelings about that came out in the form of aggressive behavior. As she exited the bus after school, Rob reminded Sistine that she doesn’t always have to get into fights. She responded, ***“I want to get in fights. I want to hit them back. Sometimes I hit them first. I don’t even know why.”***

Ask:

- Why do you think Sistine continued to insist on setting the tiger free?
- Can you recall a time when you had a “tiger” locked up inside of you?
- Were you able to figure out why you were angry?
- Invite the children to share stories of times when they felt anger.

When Sistine angrily shakes the tiger cage, Rob puts his hand on her shoulder and says, ***“I’ve got you, I’ve got good hold of you.”*** Sistine then begins to cry. Rob helped Sistine move out of her anger into a place of sadness, so that she can deal with her emotions and figure out how to let them go. If we ask ourselves where the anger is coming from, just below that anger we will likely find sadness or fear.

Ask:

- Why do you think Rob’s gesture caused Sistine to cry?
- Do you have a trusted friend or grownup in your life that you can process with when you have feelings of sadness and anger?

“Ain’t nobody gonna rescue you. You gotta rescue yourself.” – Willie Mae

Willie Mae reminded Rob and Sistine of the power they hold inside. While we can’t sometimes change the reality of our circumstances, we can change how we react to them. We are the owners of our thoughts and feelings, and we must make a conscious choice to let them go.

Read Psalm 4

In this passage, David takes us through his emotional process as he communicates his feelings to God. This is an important point to emphasize – God desires all of our emotions and thoughts, even the ones that don’t feel right. David was masterful at processing with God, something we all must learn how to do well. God doesn’t just want a part of our hearts, He desires all of it.

Ask:

- What does David suggest we do when we are angry?
- What behavior does David advise us to avoid when we are angry?
- What does God promise to do when David calls out to Him for help?

Read 1 Peter 5:7

Ask:

- Why should we give all of our worries to God?
- Have you ever talked to God about your anger or shared your angry feelings with Him?
- Have you ever heard God speak to you when you were angry?

Tiger Tips:

- Anger is telling us that something is not right on the inside.
- Anger is usually rooted in something else, often underneath there is deep sadness.
- When you feel anger, learn to notice it and breathe through it until the strong feelings become less strong. Then ask yourself where it might be coming from.
- Find a friend or a trusted grownup to process your anger with, so that you can start to release the feelings that are causing it.
- God is strong enough to handle all of our feelings, no matter how big.

RELEASE ACTIVITY: Tension and Release

Materials: post-it notes, pens, 2 contrasting music selections

Give the children the post-it notes and pens and have them write their responses on as many post it notes as they'd like, based on the following prompts:

- Are there certain things that often cause you to be angry?
- How do you release or move through your anger?

Invite the children to the movement area, and have them stick their anger prompts on the floor. Ask them to move with strong motions during the louder music, as they stomp out the anger prompts on the floor. In contrast, encourage the children to move with freedom or release as they dance to the lighter, peaceful music selection.

SECTION III: CONTROL

“I got me a wild animal a couple a days back. I got me a wild animal right here on this property. King of the jungle, and he’s all mine.” – Beauchamp

Beauchamp is a tough character to love. He has a lot of hard edges and has a lack of respect for the people in his life, which is evident by how poorly he treats them.

Ask:

- What do you think the tiger represents for Beauchamp?
- Why do you think Beauchamp didn’t give the tiger a name?
- Why does the tiger react differently to Beauchamp?

“He’s (Beauchamp) afraid, you know, he’s afraid of the tiger. That’s why he’s making you feed him.” - Sistine

Beauchamp tries to control everything and everyone in his world, including the tiger, which indicates that something is not right on the inside. While we don’t know the cause for Beauchamp’s unhealthy behavior, control is often a result of anger, sadness, fear or feeling unsafe.

Ask:

- Have you ever met anyone that struggles with control like Beauchamp?
- Was there ever a time in your life when you tried to control things around you because you were angry or sad about something?

“Name? He don’t have a name. You don’t need to name something you’re throwing a piece of meat to, dummy.” – Beauchamp

People who exert control tend to make their world very small, and often act out in various ways. Some common examples of unhealthy behavior as a result of control are:

- Use of command language
- Degrading other people
- Reminding others that they are in charge
- Lack of sensitivity
- Reckless behavior
- Bragging about possessions and power
- Holding too tightly to objects or people

“Mr. Stupid doesn’t realize that the tiger really owns him.” – Sistine Bailey

Ask:

- What do you think Sistine means by this?

Writing Activity: What Can I Control?

Materials: blank paper, various colored markers

In order to increase self-awareness regarding control, a helpful practice is to become clear on what we are able to control and what we are not. Give each child a piece of paper and ask them to choose 2 contrasting colored markers. Have children trace their hand on the paper. Choosing one color, invite the children to write down the things they can control inside the hand (their thoughts, their behaviors, their words, etc.). With the other color, ask them to write down the things they cannot control outside of the hand (the weather, parents’ divorce, other’s behavior, etc.). Encourage the children to share with the group when everyone is finished writing.

In order to maintain a healthy perspective regarding control, it is important for us to focus and meditate on God's abounding love for us. We are safe because He is always with us, even when it doesn't feel like it. God's presence and love is not based on our feelings. If we allow God to lead us, although it may not always be easy, we will experience life to the fullest and live beyond our wildest dreams!

Read Romans 8:38-39 and Jeremiah 29:11

Ask:

- What do these passages teach us about God's love?
- Has there ever been a time when you felt distant from God's love?
- When do you feel closest to God?
- What do we know from the passage in Jeremiah about God's intention for your life?
- Add "God's love" to your list of items outside of your hand as a reminder that there is nothing you can do to cause God not to love you. He is with you always and loves you no matter what. The more we root ourselves in this truth, the less we feel the need to hold on to things we can't control.

Tiger Tips:

- You are in charge of your own emotions, thoughts and words.
- The more you try to control everything, the smaller your world becomes.
- Control is often rooted in fear or feelings of being unsafe.
- There is nothing you can do to stop God from loving you.
- Stay close to God. He has big plans for your life and knows the desires of your heart.

RELEASE ACTIVITY: Mirror Dance

Materials: music of your choice (we recommend slower instrumental music without lyrics)

This activity provides the opportunity for children to move with intention and in control of their own bodies, while in partnership with another person. Invite children to choose a partner, and prompt them to determine which one of them will lead first and which one will follow. As the music plays, the leader chooses movements that match the music while their partner mirror's their movement at the same pace. When the song is done, prompt the children to switch roles.

Once the children have participated in both roles, gather them in a circle and lead a brief reflection time:

- What did you notice about yourself when you were leading?
- What did you notice about yourself when you were following?
- Which was easier for you - leading or following?
- Which was more difficult for you?
- Why do you think one was easier than the other for you?
- Continue to ask questions based on the responses from the children.

SECTION IV: CHAOS

“Now all we have to do is open the locks and let him go.” - Sistine

Emotions don't just go away once we've experienced them. They will stay in the body until we have effectively processed and released them. However once we've let them go, we may not feel free right away. In fact, it will likely feel very uncomfortable and chaotic when we release them. Our old wounds are familiar feelings because we've held on to them for a long time, just like old friends. Even though it's good for us to let them go, it will feel unpleasant and awkward. Learning to be comfortable in the unfamiliar is an important step in the process toward freedom.

Control doesn't like chaos, and vice versa. Assign a few children to read this interaction aloud between Miss Mills and Beauchamp, when she drives by and checks on Rob to make sure he's okay.

Miss Mills
Are you ok, Rob?

Beauchamp
Whatchu lookin at, missy?

Rob
She's the art teacher from school.

Miss Mills
Are you sure you're ok, Rob?

Beauchamp
He already done told you he's ok. Now why don't you just take your purple hair and head on down the street, missy.

Miss Mills
(to Rob) Make sure you come and see me when you're back.
(to Beauchamp) Your fly's open.

Beauchamp
Hey, I told you to get!

Ask:

- How did Beauchamp feel about Miss Mills checking in on Rob?
- Why do you think Beauchamp had such a strong reaction to Miss Mills?
- Have you ever had a time when it was difficult to let something go on the inside? Invite children to share their stories with the group.
- What made it difficult to let go?
- Were you ever able to get to a place where the thought, emotion or memory didn't bother you anymore?

“We gotta walk through the woods.” - Rob

Oftentimes it can feel like we are in the middle of a dense forest when we are trying to let go of things that don't serve us. It's an unfamiliar path and there's so much that we cannot see. Loneliness is a common feeling that surfaces, so it's important to find a trusted friend to walk

through it with us. The woods became a safe place for Rob and Sistine because they walked through it together.

“The wood had other ideas. You can never tell what’s gonna come out of the wood. It does what it wants and you just follow.” – Rob’s Mom

- Do you have a trusted grownup or friend in your life that you feel safe to talk to when you’re working through your emotions?

Movement Activity: Web of Connection

Materials: one ball of yarn

Invite children to sit in a circle on the floor. Hold on to the end of the yarn and share one thing that you are working on letting go of right now. While holding on to the string, toss the ball of yarn to someone else in the circle. Invite them to share something they want to let go of, are letting go of right now, or have let go of in the past. Holding firmly to the string, have each child continue to share and toss the string until everyone has had a chance to share at least once. Notice the tangled web that has been created as each child shares.

Ask:

- What has happened to the yarn as we have continued to share and let go of our stuff?
- How is this web similar to the process of letting go?
- Invite the children to let go of the yarn one by one and notice what happens to the web.
- What happened to the web of chaos as we all let go of the yarn?
- Continue to guide the children as they find connections between the yarn web and the process of letting go.

“No, it ain’t safe! It ain’t safe for him! My friend Willie Mae, she had a bird and she let it go and it just got ate up.” - Rob

Read Psalm 46:1-3

Ask:

- Is fear a choice?
- What does this passage tell us about moving through fear?
- What does God promise when we face times of trouble and uncertainty?

God doesn’t promise that bad things will never happen, but He does promise to always be with us. We move through together.

Read Isaiah 43:18-19

Ask:

- What do these verses tell us to do with things in our past?
- What does God promise to do for us as we let go of our past wounds?

In John 8:12 Jesus tells us that He is the light of the world. “The person who follows me will never live in darkness. He will have the light that gives life.” We never have to fear walking through the woods alone, for He will always be our guiding light and help us to see.

Tiger Tips:

- Letting go is difficult and oftentimes feels strange and chaotic, even though it's good for us.
- Releasing past wounds is a necessary step towards freedom.
- Learn to sit in the unfamiliar. It is necessary when forming new healthy pathways.
- We are meant for connection. Find a trusted friend or grownup to process with.
- Life is not always easy, but God always promises to be with us and light the way.

RELEASE ACTIVITY: Splatter Paint

Materials: Runny paint, large size paper (or posterboard, bedsheet, canvas), spoons or brushes, paint smocks/clothes

We recommend you set this up outside, but if you do this inside, layer with cardboard or drop cloths underneath the paper. Invite children to choose a brush and dip into the paint and go for it! Continue splattering as you encourage them to explore different movements with their bodies - wrist flicks, whole arm, whole body, etc. Encourage them to notice how different movements create different effects on the paper.

Once they are done painting, gather the children in a circle and lead a brief reflection time:

- What did you enjoy about painting like this?
- Was there anything you didn't enjoy about this activity?
- Did you notice any inner feelings shift as you were painting?
- Did any feelings emerge for you as you were painting?
- Anything else you noticed about yourself or this process?
- Continue to ask questions based on the responses from the children.

SECTION V: FREEDOM

“We were all freed from our cages that day. We learned that there are just some things that you can’t keep locked away forever. Like memories, and heartache, and tigers.” - Sistine

To be truly free means that we aren’t tied to the things that weigh us down. We aren’t stuck in old patterns and memories, and instead are open to newness and are evolving into the people God made us to be. God is always moving us to places of safety and freedom, which are described as wide open pastures in many verses in the Bible. Futures without walls or cages, so vast and exciting that we need a shepherd to lead the way.

- Give each child a piece of paper along with some paints, markers or crayons. Ask them the following questions and invite them to draw their responses on each side of the paper:
 - ***Side 1: Can you think of a time in your life when you felt truly free?***
 - ***Side 2: What does your future life look like?***
- Encourage the children to share their responses with the group when they are finished.
- Help the children make connections between their moment of past freedom and their future dreams.
- Continue to ask questions as the children share their drawings.

After Rob’s father shoots the tiger, Rob has an emotional reaction toward him. While everyone was sad about the loss of the tiger, there are additional emotional triggers occurring in this scene. The tiger’s death shifted everyone in a new way.

Ask:

- How did it make you feel when the tiger died?
- How did the tiger’s death affect everyone in that final scene?
- What emotional changes did you see in each of the characters?
- Why do you think Rob yelled “Say her name! Say it!” to his father?
- What emotion was Rob’s father finally experiencing when he said her name?

“So if the Son makes you free, then you will be truly free.” John 8:36

Jesus paid the price for us so that we could be free. His love for us knows no bounds. The problem is however, we are human and oftentimes we put ourselves in cages by the choices we make. Every time we make a choice that causes us to be less than our best selves, we sacrifice our ability to live in complete freedom. Unfortunately sometimes other people put us in cages with the choices they make for us which is unfair. Whatever the reason for the cage, we must continue to flow through this release process as we consistently talk with Jesus and share our hearts with Him. We are truly free with Jesus.

Rob
I’m gonna let him go.

Sistine
You won’t do it.

Rob
Yes, I will. I’m gonna do it, Sistine. I’m gonna do it for you.

Before Sistine and Rob free the tiger, Rob runs across the yard to let Sistine know. The beauty of this moment is that it was the love for someone else that caused Rob to release his own sadness. Rob's rescue effort towards Sistine ushered in the necessary freedom for everyone else to let go too. Rob's gesture is a beautiful analogy for the way in which God loves us.

Read Psalm 18:16-19

Ask:

- Where did God lead David once He rescued him from his enemies?
- According to verse 19, what was the reason that God rescued David?
- Have you ever had a time where you felt rescued by God or by someone in your life?

Sometimes we forget that God wants to be in our lives because He truly enjoys us! We were created for His pleasure. All the beautiful, funny, interesting, and amazing things about us were carefully crafted by Him with specific intention. He loves every single part of us, even the stuff we don't like or want to hide. He loves us without condition, and to be loved like that is true freedom. God is amazing!

"Tigers are an endangered species. It's up to us to save him." – Sistine Bailey

Tiger Tips:

- Freedom is a gift and is also a continual choice we have to make.
- Learn to recognize the cages you're in and keep the release process on repeat.
- The more you share your heart with God and stay in alignment with Him, the fewer cages you'll find yourself in.
- Jesus loves every single part of you unconditionally.
- Freedom produces a wild, adventurous life with God, so hang on tight!

RELEASE ACTIVITY: Freedom Rock

Materials: permanent markers of various colors, small to medium sized rocks with smooth surfaces for writing

Invite the children to choose a rock, one that preferably fits in their hand. Using a permanent marker, have the children recall things that they are grateful for or times when they knew God did something amazing in their life, and write them all over their rocks. Gratitude shifts their minds, postures them to receive, and opens their hearts to hear God's voice, in addition to being a good daily practice. Once the children have completed their thoughts, invite them to share their rocks with the group.

When the children are finished sharing, explain that their rock is a tool they can use as they process their emotions going forward. Whenever they feel strong emotions welling up inside of them, they can grab their rock and find a place of solitude to give their bodies space to reflect and release. Squeeze their rock as hard as they can, as we've learned that creating tension when we feel strongly helps to move it out of their bodies. They can also count to 10 as they squeeze their rock until they feel their emotions settle. Once they are in a space where they can think more clearly, remind them to focus on the words they wrote on their rock - God's goodness and the things they are grateful for. This will help shift them back to a space where they can dialogue more productively with God or a trusted friend. We are the owner of our emotions, and the more we continue this practice every day, the more freedom we will experience in life!