

Overview

[The Global Health Education and Learning Incubator at Harvard University](#) (GHELI) supports interdisciplinary education about world health through the production, curation, and dissemination of educational public goods. This exemplar work was a final project for “World Health: Challenges and Opportunities,” a General Education course at Harvard College taught by GHELI Faculty Director Sue J. Goldie. For this creative assessment designed with support from GHELI, students systematically analyze a societal health challenge they care about and create a “real world” product intended to influence policy or motivate change.

Abstract

A children’s book on communicating food allergies, through the story of a bear cub who is allergic to salmon.

Artist

Alexandra Fogel (2020)

Caption

Food allergies affect about 8% of children in the United States as of 2020. That is roughly 1 in 13 children, or about 5.6 million children under age 18. Not only do food allergies affect a child’s quality of life, but they also pose financial costs to families. Caring for children with food allergies costs American families almost \$25 billion annually. The EpiPen brand of epinephrine—the treatment for anaphylactic allergic reactions—costs about \$650 for a pack of two auto-injectors, and the generic version is about half the price. Without insurance, many people in need cannot afford this life-saving medication. Children with food allergies also face emotional challenges. One in three children with food allergies reports being bullied as a result. Social situations often revolve around food, which poses unique and stressful challenges to allergic children.

Artist Lens

I chose to write a children’s book based on my own experiences. I was born severely allergic to peanuts, tree nuts, and dairy, and was diagnosed with a shellfish allergy at age nine. I often felt different and left out as a kid. I had to bring my own food to birthday parties and classroom events, and in elementary school, some kids teased me about my allergies. One boy even once purposely spilled milk on me at lunch. In third grade, I also suffered from anxiety due to my allergies: I refused to go into grocery stores, didn’t want to sit with other kids at lunchtime in school, and wouldn’t let my mom kiss me goodnight if she had eaten anything with milk that day. When I was growing up, there were not many books featuring allergic kids. In creating my book, I aim to remedy that problem for young children. I tried to create a character who faces the social exclusion and anxiety that often comes with food allergies and manages to overcome both of these issues in an understandable way for younger elementary school kids. I chose to use animals as the characters because animals transcend boundaries like gender, race, religion, nationality, and socioeconomic status. I want any child to be able to relate to the characters, regardless of what they look like or where they come from.

I chose to write about a bear cub allergic to salmon because everyone associates bears with salmon, similarly to how everyone associates kids with pizza and ice cream. When a child says she's allergic to peanuts, other kids don't express too much of a reaction. When a child says that she's allergic to ice cream, most other kids will express shock and bewilderment. I wanted to convey that same situation with my main character and chose the name Sal to heighten that tension. Ultimately, the goal of this book is to help allergic children feel less alone, give them the language to describe how they feel and why, help de-stigmatize anxiety, and facilitate discussion between allergic children and non-allergic parents, who may not always immediately understand the viewpoint of their child. I also wanted to help children with food allergies feel empowered. My parents believed that I needed to learn to take care of myself with respect to my allergies and thus used allergies to foster both independence and confidence. Finally, food allergies provided a window into other people's characters. I was often struck by the kindness and thoughtfulness of kids and parents that I barely even knew. I hope *No Salmon for Sal* can impart these positive messages upon young children.

Media

Illustration



[Watch Narration of No Salmon for Sal](#)