

## 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 tells the story of a young bat struggling with depression—and how he learns to talk about his feelings.

## Artist

Isabelle Blair (2019)

## Caption

The quality of your mental health impacts how you live, work, and play. According to the 2017 Global Burden of Disease Study, depression and anxiety were among the top ten causes of disability in U.S. And for young people, particularly those between 10 and 34, suicide was the second leading cause of death—often the result of extreme depression. For the U.S., where 19 percent of the population is under 15, depression is a health problem that must be addressed at the earliest age possible.

## Artist Lens

I wanted to do something with both writing and illustrating because I'm really into design. Through the research and our class, I realized that kids specifically are at a really high risk of mental health issues and depression, which if not addressed, can lead to a lot of complications in the teenage years and later life. I wanted to make a book that gave children the language and understanding to identify what depression was and let them know there were positive relationships that could help them work through it.

Originally, I was going to have the main character be a bunny. Then I realized there is no stigma attached to bunnies. We like bunnies. They're cute, and they're happy. But bats are not. They're meant to be mysterious and dark and sad. I was thinking about what kids connect with, what they can recognize subconsciously through animals. So the story features a bat and a raccoon, because those are the animals that we don't necessarily want to connect with.

Because the illustrations are simple, I wanted color to help signal the emotions of the story. The backgrounds start out very colorful, but when Benny's in his depression, they become grays. The color disappears. Then, as he's going through his journey, the colors come back, with softer hues gradually becoming bolder. The colors have this give and take that I thought was essential to conveying the story beyond words.

[Watch Isabelle Blair Reflection](#)

## Media

Digital Illustration



[Watch Narration of Benny Bat & His Bad Mood](#)