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'Monster' helps calm fears

By [Laura Hancock](#)

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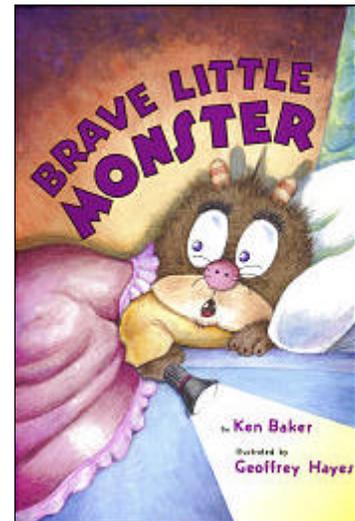
PROVO – What are the monsters in your life? Other people? Failure? Change?

Provo clinical psychologist Paul Jenkins uses a locally written children's book when shedding light on the fears of his adult clients.

Truth be told, he says, such fears, much like the monsters in a child's closet, are often imaginary.

Dixon Middle School teacher Leann Moody also uses "Brave Little Monster" as the starting point for a creative-writing exercise in which students write about the scary experience of beginning middle school.

The book by Orem resident Ken Baker is reminiscent of classic children's stories about nighttime fears – such as Mercer Mayer's "There's a Nightmare in My Closet" and James Howe's "There's a Monster under My Bed" – except the monster, Albert, is afraid of human children hiding under his bed and inside his closet.



The book was published in 2001 by HarperCollins after Baker, a freelance business writer, helped his daughter through her bad dreams and nighttime fears.

"That kind of got me thinking about being afraid of night fears, (and) when I was younger, kind of being afraid of monsters," he said. "I thought it would be fun to kind of turn the table on monsters, have the monsters be afraid of me."

Baker has found the book can be helpful to older children and adults, too. They think the book is funny and its themes universal.

"For example, at the end of the story, the monster thinks he sees these two children, their silhouettes, doing the 'hungry dance' until they are good and hungry and then eat him up," Baker said. "He has to get courage up, get out of bed and yell at them. When he opens the curtain, he sees there never were any children."

Jenkins said he believes the book helps his adult clients realize they sometimes take themselves too seriously. Many fears and perceptions are imaginary, he said.

"I have a basic model – if you avoid your fears, they increase," Jenkins said. "If you face them,

they diminish."



Ken Baker

Moody first used "Brave Little Monster" last fall when Provo School District reduced its number of middle schools from three to two.

"Our student population changed from 600 to 900 students," she said. "I was really concerned, especially with the seventh-graders, that they feel safe."

They read the book, which opened a conversation about fears. Moody asked them to write a colorful, perhaps humorous story about their own fears of entering the strange, new middle-school world.

They wrote about managing seven different teachers and homework, lockers and friends who suddenly turn mean, which is common in that age group, she said.

She discovered it was a good first-week activity and she'll use it in future years.

"The first couple of weeks, I'm trying to find out who they are (as people) as well as readers and writers," she said.

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