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**CENTRO DE ARTES E COMUNICAÇÃO**  
**DEPARTAMENTO DE LETRAS**

**THAÍS CRISTINE SILVA DE BARROS**

**TEACHING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN AN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN  
LANGUAGE CLASSROOM THROUGH THE BOOK “*THE BOY, THE MOLE,  
THE FOX AND THE HORSE*” BY CHARLIE MACKESY**

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**EXAMINING BOARD**

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Profa. Dr. Simone de Campos Reis (Supervisor)

Federal University of Pernambuco

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Profa. Dr. Heri Ramos de Oliveira Pontes (Examiner)

Federal University of Pernambuco

RECIFE,  
2023

# TEACHING EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN AN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM THROUGH THE BOOK “*THE BOY, THE MOLE, THE FOX AND THE HORSE*” BY CHARLIE MACKESY

Thaís Cristine Silva de Barros<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

According to Brackett and Cipriano (2020), children tend to learn Emotional Intelligence in the first years of their lives due to their interactions with their caregivers and yet, today's students do not seem to have this ability. The purpose of this article is to acknowledge the importance of teaching Emotional Intelligence (EI) in an English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, and how the use of literature can promote this learning. The general understanding in previous research has been that teaching Emotional Intelligence in the classroom is beneficial for the students, and researchers such as Goleman (1995), Ghosn (2001) and McDonald (2021) corroborate that. To demonstrate that it is possible to teach EI in a classroom, we have made use of the book *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*, by Charlie Mackesy (2019), and a bibliographical and qualitative research through Daniel Goleman's EI aspects has been carried out. In addition, some suggestions of activities for teaching EI in an EFL classroom were presented. Ultimately, we propose that teaching Emotional Intelligence in the classroom should be added into school curriculums, once it can improve students' relationships, foster their empathy and create a safe atmosphere for language teaching and learning.

**KEYWORDS:** emotional intelligence; EFL classroom; literature.

## RESUMO

De acordo com Brackett and Cipriano (2020), crianças tendem a aprender Inteligência Emocional nos primeiros anos de vida devido à interação com seus cuidadores, mas os alunos de hoje parecem não ter essa habilidade. O objetivo deste artigo é reconhecer a importância do ensino de Inteligência Emocional (IE) em uma sala de aula de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira (EFL) e como o uso da literatura pode promover esse aprendizado. O consenso geral em pesquisas anteriores foi de que ensinar Inteligência Emocional em sala de aula é benéfico para os alunos, e pesquisadores como Goleman (1995), Ghosn (2001) e McDonald (2021) corroboram isso. Para demonstrar que é possível ensinar IE numa sala de aula, nós usamos o livro *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*, por Charlie Mackesy (2019), e foi feita uma pesquisa bibliográfica e qualitativa pensando nos aspectos da IE de Daniel Goleman. Além disso, foram apresentadas algumas sugestões de atividades para o ensino de IE em uma sala de aula de EFL. Por fim, propomos que ensinar Inteligência Emocional em sala de aula deveria ser adicionado aos currículos escolares, uma vez que pode melhorar os relacionamentos dos alunos, estimular sua empatia e criar uma atmosfera segura para o ensino e aprendizagem de línguas.

**KEYWORDS:** inteligência emocional; sala de aula de EFL; literatura.

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<sup>1</sup> Undergraduate student of English Language Teaching at UFPE. Email: [thais.cristine@ufpe.br](mailto:thais.cristine@ufpe.br)

## INTRODUCTION

After reading the title of this article a question comes to mind: Can we actually teach Emotional Intelligence? The answer to this question hinges on some other discussions such as the definition of Emotional Intelligence; the importance of learning Emotional intelligence, and the methods that can be used to achieve that in an English as foreign language classroom, specifically through the use of a literary book. Hence, we begin to wonder about the urgency of today's generation learning Emotional Intelligence, especially when considering the post-pandemic classrooms, where students came back feeling lost, victimized and most of the time not being able to control their emotions, sometimes even with a increase in their mental illness (Mattos, 2023).

Developing skills such as empathy, emotional control and self-awareness is essential for an individual's professional, academic and personal life. Created by Peter Salavoy and John Mayer in 1990, and later popularized by Dan Goleman in 1995, the term *Emotional Intelligence* refers to the capability of being aware of one's emotions' ability to drive oneself and influence other people, positively or not (Goleman, 1995).

Children tend to learn Emotional Intelligence (EI) in the early years of their lives through interactions with caregivers; something that is commonly accepted among psychologists and researchers who study emotional development in human beings, as acknowledged by Marc Brackett and Christina Cipriano (2020) in their article *Emotional Intelligence Comes of Age*.

In the education field, EI has been connected to academic achievement and has been related to the improvement in second or foreign language learning (Ghosn, 2001). Schools all over the world recognize the importance of learning EI in the classroom alongside the curriculum. Thus, learning emotional skills should be an essential part of the classroom experience, as confirmed by *The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning* (CASEL), a leading organization that promotes and advocates for social-emotional learning in schools.

One notable instrument to the development of this ability in students is literature. Reading can play a fundamental part in unlocking EI (Bowman, 2021). It provides a safe and controlled environment for students to explore complex emotions

and themes. By granting different contexts and experiences, literature can expose students to a wide range of human behavior, developing their sense of empathy for the experience of others while also cultivating language learning (Ghosn, 2001).

In the book *The boy, the mole, the fox and the horse* (2019), Charlie Mackesy is able to dialogue about life in a philosophical manner through the adventures of a boy and his friends, a mole, a fox and a horse, in search for the boy's home. It is a book with handwritten quotes and drawings, without even page numbers, that has an important social message capable of initiating a conversation about empathy, self-awareness and human connection; so, it may be a suitable device for teaching EI in an EFL classroom.

The so-called generation Z, born between 1997 and 2012, has been called the most depressed one with only 45% reporting that their mental health is very good or excellent, according to the *American Psychological Association* (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021). Despite, or maybe as a result of being the generation with more access to technology, information, free speech and even counseling, Gen Z has more anxiety, depression and violent outbursts, as exemplified by the number of suicides and school violence cases in the news nowadays.

COVID-19 has had a considerable impact on today's generation. As revealed by the *Lancet Magazine*, rates of depression and anxiety increased by more than 25% in 2020 across the world, especially among younger people (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2021). Consequently, students are coming back to the classroom environment feeling lonely, misplaced and anxious. Thus, teaching emotional skills in the classroom sounds more relevant than ever. To teach the students to respect themselves and each other, and to empathize with other people's situations and concerns while reading English literature may be a significant way to initiate some change.

For this particular paper, the concept of EI by Daniel Goleman (1995) will be considered, since problems such as bullying, anxiety, depression, school outburst and violence can be addressed and alleviated in schools which cultivate EI in their students, as stated by the author. Hence, the five components of EI defined by this psychologist and author will be acknowledged: Emotional Self-awareness, Self-regulation, Motivation, Empathy and Social skills (Goleman, 1995).

In light of these arguments, the objectives of this paper are to conduct a bibliographical and qualitative research on the issue mentioned before to verify that not everyone has EI, but everyone has the capability to develop it, while also to suggest different activities for each one of Daniel Goleman's essential elements of EI using the book *The Boy, the Mole, the Horse and the Fox* (2019) by Charlie Mackesy.

## 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the last few years there has been an expanded interest in the role of EI in both the academic and emotional success of students in schools. The theoretical knowledge required to understand this interest includes some definitions of EI; the five main elements of EI by Daniel Goleman (1995), and the examination of studies about the importance of learning EI in the classroom.

A considerable number of authors have defined the concept of EI. Among them, John Mayer and Peter Salovey (1990) became well-known with their article *Emotional Intelligence*, published in the journal *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*. In this paper, they provide one of the foundational definitions of EI, as "the ability to monitor one's own and others' emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use the information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990, p. 189).

A similar definition of EI is the one by Thavis Bradberry and Jean Greaves (2009) in their book *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*. Essentially, EI would be one's ability to recognize and understand emotions in oneself and others, and one's ability to use this awareness to manage one's behavior and relationships.

In this particular article, the concept of EI by Daniel Goleman (1995) will be taken into consideration, as the author provides five main elements for this ability. According to the psychologist, EI is the ability to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions. It includes the ability to understand emotions and emotional knowledge; to use these emotions to guide thought and behavior, and to manage emotions to adapt to environments or achieve one's goal.

For Goleman (1995), there are five key components of EI: Emotional Self-awareness, Self-regulation, Motivation, Empathy and Social skills. These

components are interrelated, and work together to help individuals handle social interactions, manage stress and emotions, and achieve their goals.

The first aspect of EI is Emotional Self-awareness. It refers to the ability to recognize and understand your own emotions, as well as the impact they have on your thoughts, behaviors, and interactions with others. Furthermore, it indicates the capacity to be able to know one's strengths and weaknesses, and be sure about one's self-worth, values and capabilities.

The following feature is Self-regulation. This involves the ability to manage and control your emotions and behaviors, especially in situations that are challenging and stressful. This includes the competence to delay gratification, resist temptation, and manage impulses, so thinking before acting.

Another element is Motivation. This means the drive and passion to achieve goals, persevere in the face of challenges, and pursue personal growth and development. This covers the ability to set and achieve goals and be committed, as well as the ability to learn from setbacks and failures.

Additionally, Empathy can be defined as the ability to understand and relate to the emotions and experiences of others. It entails the capacity to identify and respond accordingly to the emotional needs of others, and also the skill to communicate effectively and build strong relationships.

And finally, Social skill relates to the ability to interact effectively with others, including the ability to communicate clearly, resolve conflicts, collaborate with others, and build healthy bonds with other people. This involves the capacity to adapt to different social situations, cooperate and collaborate, and to understand and respect cultural differences.

Several researches about EI in the classroom have been conducted and, while the results might differ from one another, the common perception is that teaching EI in the classroom is not only possible, but also highly beneficial for students (Elias et al., 1997). Continually, educators and psychologists comprehend that children's emotional learning should be given serious consideration and promoted in schools (Elias et al., 1997). They agree that encouraging EI in a classroom can create a more positive and supportive learning environment that fosters academic success and mental well-being.



For the psychologists Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer, schools should promote EI through social and emotional learning programs, and incorporate the subject into the curriculum (Salovey & Mayer, 1997). The process of emotional learning would consist of developing aptitudes, skills, attitudes, and values that are necessary for the acquisition of EI. By using an assortment of instruments such as classroom instruction, supportive school climate, extracurricular activities and the involvement of students, teachers, and parents in the school activities, the school will be able to provide emotional education to the students. Thus, the school setting is arguably one of the most important contexts for learning emotional skills and competencies, according to the authors mentioned above.

In their book *Promoting social and emotional learning: Guidelines for educators* (1997), Maurice J. Elias, alongside CASEL, claim that EI is positively related to academic achievement and productive experience in the world. They provide guidelines and recommendations to educators on how to promote social and emotional learning in schools. For the authors, promoting this emotional ability in the classroom can have meaningful benefits for students, both in academic achievement and personal development. This is something that Sucaromana (2012, p. 56) recognizes in her article, *Contribution to Language Teaching and Learning: A Review of Emotional Intelligence*, when she mentions that “Emotional intelligence can be quite practical in the classroom. Where students are underperforming, teachers can find a way to promote emotionally intelligent practices”. Hence, students would become more resilient and more engaged in learning.

Similarly, knowledge about oneself and others, as well as the capacity to use this knowledge to solve problems in a constructive manner, provides an essential foundation for academic learning (Cohen, 1999; Goleman, 1995). Therefore, EI can lead to a better academic performance and emotional management. Hence, this ability can help students develop positive relationships, manage stress, and adapt to changing environments, all of which can have a positive impact on academic achievement.

A fine tool for teaching EI in the classroom is literature, because it presents diversified emotional experiences that shape the brain circuits for empathy, and help students understand human behavior (Ghosn, 2001). That can happen, for instance, when students learn from literature how characters convey and demonstrate their

emotions; what makes them feel as they do, and how they cope with their feelings. The more complex the scenarios, the more emotional learning is gained, promoting the development of social and emotional competences (Zeidner, Roberts & Matthews, 2002).

Moreover, literature encourages language learning by enriching the students' vocabulary and modeling new language structures. Likewise, literature can provide a motivating and low-anxiety context for language learning (Ghosn, 2001).

It is essential to mention the current global state of this subject. For instance, according to a survey done by researchers from Unicamp and Unesp, "Since August 2022, Brazil has suffered more than one attack in schools every month" (Mattos, 2023). With this alarming school violence context, relying on EI in the classrooms seems more appropriate than ever. Through the learning of EI, students can develop skills to help prevent and de-escalate anxiety and violent incidents. This is in accordance with a recent publication by *The National Association of Independent Schools* (NAIS), in which the educational therapist Anna T. McDonald (2021) states that "EI is not optional or supplemental but rather an integral facet of education".

Overall, while there may be some divergences about specific aspects of teaching EI in the classroom, the general consensus among researchers is that it is a critical life ability that can and should be taught in schools. To emphasize, teaching EI can help create a more positive and peaceful classroom environment, where students are better equipped to manage their emotions, communicate effectively, and resolve conflicts peacefully. And, as mentioned by Ghosn (2001), literature has the potential to nurture EI and develop language learning.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

To be able to achieve the goal of this research paper, considering the proposed objectives, this work conducted a bibliographical and qualitative research, exploring the concepts of EI ; the five elements of EI by Daniel Goleman (1995); how it can be applied in the EFL classroom and in what way the book *The boy, the mole, the fox and the horse* (2019) by Charlie Mackesy can help achieve that. A concise study on the subject was conducted, examining the various concepts and relevant theories on the matter with an expository bibliographical research.

### 3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

In an attempt to build and nurture Emotional Intelligence (EI) in the classroom, this paper proposes some activities and discussions for each of the five aspects of EI by Daniel Goleman (1995): Emotional Self-awareness, Self-regulation, Motivation, Empathy and Social skills. To this aim, the activities and reflections will be centered on the book *The boy, the mole, the fox and the horse* (2019) by Charlie Mackesy.

This book might be an effective tool for teaching EI as it explores themes of friendship, kindness and self-discovery, through the different characters' perspectives about life. Thus, the initial course for each suggested activity is to introduce the book, the author and have the students read the work together, in the classroom, or individually.

It is also important to consider the environment these activities would take place. Ideally, there should be a safe and respectful space for these reflections, with an open, accepting and supportive dynamic, so that the teacher and students can discuss sensitive topics.

The following are classroom activities using the book mentioned above that may help develop EI in the classroom.

#### 3.1 Emotional Self-awareness through Emotional Mapping

Teaching emotional self-awareness in the classroom helps students recognize and understand their own emotions while learning and dealing with their weaknesses and strengths. For this particular aspect of EI, the suggestion would be to work with Emotional Mapping, by creating a visual representation of different emotions on a large sheet of paper or board. As the students read the book, they can place sticky notes or highlight the emotions they believe correspond to a particular scene or interaction. After that, it is relevant to draw real life connections between the character's feelings and their own, by reflecting about how similar or not these emotions and experiences are to their real lives.

For instance, in the interaction between the boy and the mole when the boy declares "Sometimes I feel lost" and the mole responds with "Me too", the students would identify that the characters are feeling lost, and highlight this emotion on their

Emotional Mapping board. Then, the teacher would mediate a discussion between the students about some real life experience where they also felt lost, and what they did to overcome that feeling. In the book's case, the mole continues by saying "but we love you, and love brings you home", so that is how the boy could cope with the feeling of being lost.

Image 1 - Example 1



Source: The Boy, the Mole, the Horse and the Fox (2019)

Other emotions and respective coping mechanisms, present in the book, consist of: fear, as in "Everyone is a bit scared" and "But we are less scared together"; anxiety, in "Sometimes I worry you'll all realize I'm ordinary" and "love doesn't need you to be extraordinary"; and hurt, in "What do we do when our hearts hurt?" and "We wrap them with friendship, shared tears and time, till they wake hopeful and happy again".

### 3.2 Self-regulation through Quote Analysis and Mindful Exercises

"One of our greatest freedoms is how we react to things" (Mackesy, 2019). This quote demonstrates exactly what self-regulation is: the ability to manage one's emotions and responses by finding inner balance. For this reflection, the teacher can choose certain quotes from the book and analyze with the class. Later, they can create their own mindful exercises to deal with the many challenges they may face in their lives.

Using the excerpt “When the big things feel out of control...focus on what you love right under your nose”, the teacher may reflect upon the characters’ experiences while dealing with an adverse situation by focusing on what they love and appreciate right in front of them. When contemplating the characters' surroundings, the teacher should discuss with the students about the fact that most of the time they can not control what happens to them, so they should focus on what they can control, on what they can feel and see. That way, they would have a better perspective of the situation and be able to make smarter decisions.

Image 2 - Example 2



Source: The Boy, the Mole, the Horse and the Fox (2019)

Afterward, the teacher, along with the students, can come up with mindful exercises, ways in which they can be present in the moment, so that the students are able to self-regulate. Some suggestions of mindful exercises are breathing exercises, daily gratitude, body scan and others. It is significant for the teachers to acknowledge aspects such as including themselves on the exercise, to lead by example, and trying to create positive emotions by the end of the exercise while keeping in mind that they can always try again if they do not succeed initially.

One more possible quote for reflection reads “I’ve learned how to be in the present. [...] I find a quiet spot and shut my eyes and breathe. [...] Then I focus”, where the character was able to self-regulate and find a mindful exercise, breathing and trying to focus.

### 3.3 Motivation through a Vision Board

Finding out what motivates oneself to achieve goals, to persist regardless of the challenges, and to develop as a human being is the definition of motivation for Goleman (1995). A motivated student would be able to set and accomplish objectives, be dedicated, and learn from life's disappointments and failures.

This suggestion consists of the creation of a vision board using the book characters' motivations as a starting point. The teacher would provide the book's examples of motivation, and later ask the students to create their own vision board with elements that motivate them to achieve their goals. The students can start by reflecting upon their aspirations, and then think about their motivations. Next, they would gather images, photos, quotes and other materials that represent what motivates them, so they can arrange it into a paperboard. Finally, the teacher could remind the students to display their vision board somewhere they would see it often, so it can provide daily inspiration and motivation.

A few examples of motivations from the book can be found in the scene where the horse asks the three other characters what would be the reason that they keep going and the fox, the boy and the mole answer respectively, "you three", "getting home" and "cake". This extract shows how motivations can vary greatly from person to person, and even within a single individual over time. Consequently, it can be used to address the fact that motivations are diverse and influenced by a number of factors, so the students can and will have different inspirations and that is completely normal.

Image 3 - Example 3



Source: The Boy, the Mole, the Horse and the Fox (2019)

### 3.4 Empathy through Character Journals

Empathy allows students to experience the world through other people's perspectives while developing compassion for others, which helps them build strong relationships and resolve conflicts. To this purpose, teaching empathy would benefit the students beyond the classroom, in their personal lives. And as ideally put in the book when the mole asked the boy what he wanted to be when he grew up and he answered "kind", one of the greatest qualities in a human being would be kindness, something one can only achieve by experiencing other points of view through empathy.

Image 4 - Example 4



Source: The Boy, the Mole, the Horse and the Fox (2019)

For this reflection, the teacher would assign each student a character (the boy, the mole, the fox, or the horse) and have them write a journal entry from that character's perspective, reflecting on their emotions; the lessons they've learned along the way and moments when they felt empathy towards another character. This would encourage students to empathize with the characters and consider their feelings.

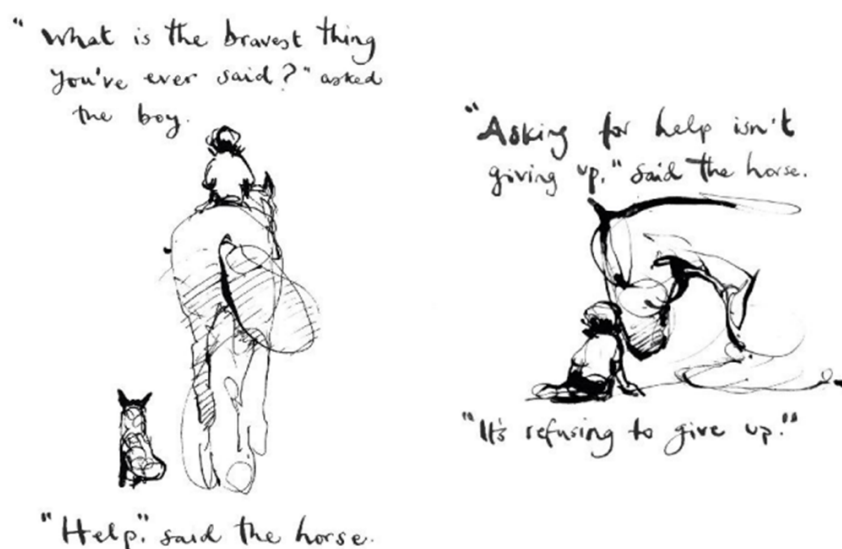
Also relevant, would be to try to encourage the students to talk, or write, about their personal experiences; when they felt empathy towards someone else and how it affected their actions and the outcome of those interactions.

### 3.5 Social Skills through Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a great way to develop social skills in students. By organizing them into small groups to work together on a shared task, the teacher can promote collaboration and cultivate the student's social skills. A few examples of cooperative learning activities are jigsaw, group projects, cooperative reading and problem-solving teams. As mentioned before, those social skills include the ability to interact and cooperate with their peers, communicate openly, collectively resolve problems and respect one another, as voiced by Goleman (1995).

Role play activities could be very effective in nurturing social skills for allowing students to practice and apply real life situations in a safe environment. The teacher may use the book's passage where the boy asks the horse "What's the bravest thing you ever said?" and the horse answers with "Help. Asking for help isn't giving up, it's refusing to give up" to create a role play scenario where a student needs to ask someone for help, being a fellow student, a teacher, their parents or another person in their life.

Image 5 - Example 5



Source: The Boy, the Mole, the Horse and the Fox (2019)

This activity may be a fine opportunity to demonstrate to the students the importance of asking for help, while also empowering them to seek that help. In the role play scenario, the students would need to communicate clearly with each other, take turns and refine their social skills.



## FINAL REMARKS

Teaching EI in an EFL classroom is an essential tool that should be emphasized better in the school syllabuses. Especially when it comes to today's classrooms, which are filled with anxious and impulsive students, who were probably not taught how to control their emotions. Considering that nowadays this is something that is missing in a lot of learners and even teachers, who do not seem to value this ability, having an emotionally intelligent classroom can cultivate students with a deeper understanding of emotions, empathy and meaningful relationships with others.

The suggested activities presented in this article may help promote EI while fostering students' language skills. We have mentioned only some of the possibilities; there are many others and all of them can be adapted to different grades and proficiency levels. These activities are not conjugated, so they may be taught separately.

Posterior to examining the importance of learning EI in the classroom, it is significant to continue the research in the field; to invest on teacher's qualification and to integrate EI in the schools curriculums. This ability has the potential to guide students and teachers through life's various situations and influence how they would respond to those, while being compassionate and understanding the reasons behind the other one's actions.

Ultimately, I find it important to reiterate one last time the significance of teaching EI in the classrooms. And I also look forward to this article raising the interest of researchers and educators alike, so that EI can become a necessary and beneficial tool in the education field.

After all, there are still a great deal of professionals willing to improve their crafts and learners ready to develop their emotional capabilities. For, as expressed by Mackesy (2019) at the end of his book, "Sometimes all you hear about is the hate, but there is more love in this world than you could possibly imagine".

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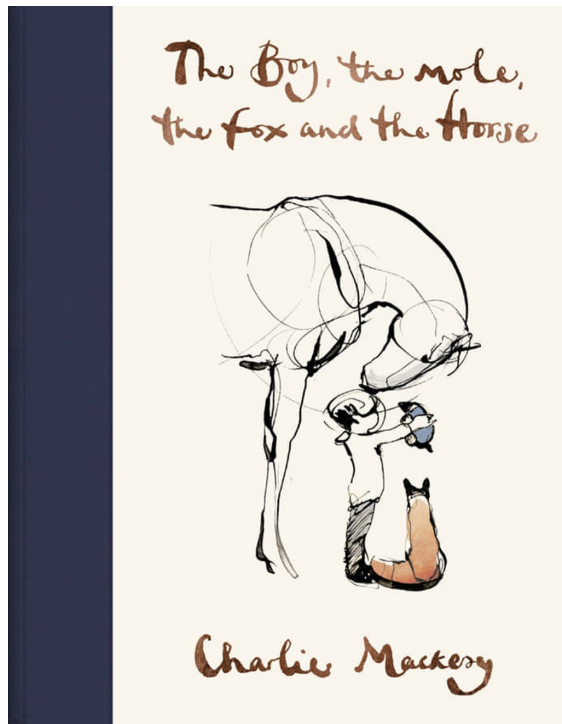
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**ANNEX**The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and The Horse - D-PDF

Image 1 - Book cover



Source: Google images