

I've been watching "Light and Magic," a serial documentary about George Lucas's special effects company Industrial Light and Magic. The creativity, innovation, and drive of the people who created the special effects for movies like "Star Wars" is really inspiring. At one point in an early episode, Lucas says that he wanted perfection: the special effects in Star Wars had to match what he imagined exactly and he expected his team to keep working until they did. What I found really fascinating was the imperfect ways the special effects designers achieved this goal. One designer laughed about using an old sneaker and some potatoes in a shot where the audience only saw space and stars. Such is the magic of the movies, and the potential that sprouts from imperfection.

Imperfection and mistakes make life challenging and interesting, but it can be hard to tell that to a young child who only wants to do things the "right" way. Fortunately, there are some charming and funny children's books that take on the question "What can you do when things go wrong?" It's a worthwhile question for everyone to consider, and these picture books will inspire some great answers.

"Mistaco: A Tale of Tragedy y Tortillas" by Eliza Kinkz. Izzy is the president of mistakes. After one spectacularly bad mishap in the lunchroom at school, she comes home with the nickname "Chicken Lickin' Puddin' Pickin'". She has trouble moving past the embarrassment and shame she feels until her uncle has her make her mistakes into tortillas, which he will then eat for dinner. The "mistacos" they make inspire the rest of the family to share their mistakes, too, and Izzy feels better about her day.

"What Can a Mess Make?" by Bee Johnson. This picture book's warm, earth-toned illustrations show the ways that messes and mistakes are an important part of creating music, art, strong relationships, and resilience. Two sisters leave messes in their wake as they make a sweet treat to share, a fort for resting, and an artwork masterpiece. When a big beautiful bowl of spaghetti is dropped on the floor and makes the biggest mess of all, the result is simple: a change of plans and a pizza delivery!

"Snake's Big Mistake" by Sarah Kurpiel. In this title featuring a classroom of wild animals, Snake struggles with a lot of mistakes. First, the sculpture he made in art class breaks, and then he lies about which sculpture is his, taking Turtle's impressive vase instead. That night he can't stop thinking about what he did, and finally decides that in the morning he would tell the truth and apologize to Turtle. But Turtle isn't ready to forgive until Snake learns what it really takes to be a good friend.

"Patrick and the Not So Perfect Party" by Anne Wynter and Shirley Hottier. Patrick is a perfectionist who loves cooking "exquisite" and "absolutely perfect" meals for his family. He's planning the perfect birthday party, too, but when his brother makes a mistake on the invitations, Patrick's party takes a hilarious and unexpected turn. Will Patrick get stuck on the mistake, or go with the flow and enjoy the party anyway?

When things go wrong, as they inevitably will, I hope your family can find comfort and humor in a good book.