



# **MindForge**

## ***Meet the Cast***

**STANDARD EDITION**

# Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 5 chapter books from the Mindforge cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register.

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*For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.*

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# Introduction

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The Mindforge cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 5 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.

Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*



# Choose

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\*RESPONSIBLE DECISION-MAKING — values, consequences, action. The CASEL competency that integrates all the others into \*intentional values-aligned choice.\*\*

Choose is *an animal-tween*. She wears a small wooden compass. It hangs on a leather string around her neck.

This compass is *not a normal compass*. It doesn't point north. Instead, it points to what Choose cares about most. It shows her *values direction*. If Choose thinks about *kindness*, the needle swings. It settles right on *kindness*. If she thinks about *honesty*, the needle points to *honesty*. When she thinks about *fairness*, it points to *fairness*. This compass helps her *check what she believes in* before she does anything.

Choose helps kids learn *responsible decision-making*. That's a big name for making good choices. It pulls together everything you learned before. You learned to notice your feelings (from Inside). You learned to calm down and pick what to do with those feelings (from Settle). You learned to imagine how other people feel (from Open). You thought about how your actions affect friends (from Touch). So, what do you *do* next? That's Choose's big question. She doesn't have all the answers. But she has a *way* to help you find them.

Choose and the other MindForge teachers don't just say, "Follow the rules!" They teach you to *follow your values* instead. Your values are the things you believe are important. Sometimes, doing what you value means breaking a rule. Sometimes, it means following a rule. The rule isn't



# Inside

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*SELF-AWARENESS — noticing emotion, thought, and body without trying to fix them first. The CASEL competency that grounds the other four.*

Inside was a small, quiet creature. That was the first thing you noticed about her. She moved slowly. She spoke softly. She always waited before she answered questions. Inside never rushed. She never tried to fix things right away. This was important. Inside taught about **self-awareness**. That meant noticing what was happening inside you. You noticed it without trying to change it fast. If Inside rushed to fix things, she wouldn't be teaching her own lesson. So she didn't rush. She just noticed.

Inside looked like a small woodland creature. She was about the age of a middle schooler. She had big, watchful eyes. Her shoulders were always relaxed. She often sat on a smooth, flat rock. Her hands rested gently in her lap. She wasn't doing much. She was just watching. That was her main job.

MindForge was a special kind of place. It was an app that helped kids feel better. Inside helped kids build new strengths. She never made them feel like something was wrong with them. She never told a student to "calm down." That phrase could make kids feel bad. It was like saying their feelings were wrong. Inside didn't do that. She just asked kids to notice their feelings. She didn't judge them. She didn't push them to change.

Inside grew up in a quiet forest village. It was called Bracken-Hollow. Her family had a special way of life there. They were not hunters or trackers. They didn't chase animals or follow tracks. Instead, they were forest-watchers.



# Open

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\*SOCIAL AWARENESS — perspective-taking, empathy, context. The CASEL competency that extends self-awareness outward to \*what another person might be experiencing.\*\*

Open is an animal-tween. Her eyes do a funny thing. They get bigger when she tries to understand someone else.

It's true. Not a trick. When Open thinks about how someone else feels, her eyes change. They usually look warm and normal. Then they get a little wider. It's like they're making space. Space for new ideas. Everyone around her can see it happen. The kids at MindForge know. They see Open doing her *empathy* work. It's not a special power. It's just how her body works.

Open teaches *social awareness*. This means noticing others. It's like looking outside yourself. She doesn't say empathy is something you just have. Or something you don't. She says it's a skill you *practice*. Like riding a bike. Or playing a game. You learn steps. These steps are about imagining. Anyone can learn them. You get faster with practice. You get better at it too. But it's always work. Even for Open. Empathy is never super easy. That's the main idea.

Open grew up in a busy market town. Her parents owned a small cloth shop there. All kinds of people came in. Farmers, traders, soldiers, moms, kids. Even old folks. Open watched her parents carefully. They changed how they talked to everyone. They weren't just being extra nice. They paid attention to each person. They saw what each customer needed. Someone in a hurry got quick help. Someone looking for a present got gentle ideas. Someone who looked sad got a quiet moment. Only then did her parents ask what they wanted.

When Open was nine, she asked her mom. "How do you do that?" Her mom smiled. "I imagine how they feel," she said. "I watch how they walk. How they talk. What their face shows. I try to be them for a second. Walking into our shop. Then I help them the way they need. Sometimes I guess wrong. That's okay. I just try again. It's all practice, sweetie."

Open started practicing. A lot. By age twelve, she was good at it. She could imagine what someone else felt. She was usually right too. By age fifteen, she could change how she acted. She did it based on her imaginings. She wasn't pushy. She wasn't rude. She was just really good at *perspective-taking*.

At eighteen, she walked to MindForge Academy. Sage, the head teacher, asked her a question. "What is *social awareness*?" Open answered right away. "It's imagining what someone else is going through. I watch them. I pretend to be them. I think about their feelings. Then I change what I do. It's not something you're born with. It's hard work. But the more you work, the faster you get. And the better you get." Sage nodded. "You're hired," she said. "Your name is Open. Your eyes show the work. The students will see it happen."

In her classroom, Open always starts the same way. She sits at the front of the room. She looks at everyone. Her eyes get a little wider. She imagines how each student feels. It's their first day, after all. The students see her eyes change. They know she is really paying attention. Right to them.

She says, "I am Open. I help you imagine things. I help you imagine what other people are feeling. This is called *social awareness*. It's the third big skill here. Inside helped you notice yourself. Settle helped you pick your actions. Now I teach you to notice others. You imagine their feelings. You think about what's happening around them. It's work. But you get faster with practice."

Open teaches three moves. Three ways to take someone's perspective. First, *notice their signals*. Look at their face. Listen to their voice. See how they stand. Hear their words. Second, *imagine*. What might they feel? What might they need? Think about their signals. Third, *check your guess*. They might give you a new signal. That signal can change your idea. These three moves repeat. Over and over. Empathy is like that. You imagine. You check. You change.

Open never says empathy just happens. She says, "My guesses are sometimes wrong. Then I change them. The point isn't to be right at first. The point is to be willing to change your mind."

Students often ask Open. "Is *perspective-taking* hard?" Open always gives the same answer. "It's not hard," she says. "It's about imagining their world. You think about them first. Then you think about yourself. The imagining is the work. Changing your mind is the adjustment. You get faster with practice. But it's never super easy. And that's okay. The practice itself is the skill."

Her eyes get wider as the lesson ends. She is looking at everyone. The students notice her. They feel seen. They learn from her body. They learn from her words. They see what *social awareness* really looks like.

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## Voice register

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**Guidance:** Warm, curious, fond of small perspective-shifts. Eyes expand visibly when practicing empathy. *Never says "be more empathetic" as if empathy were a switch.* Friends with Touch (social awareness + relationship skills are paired CASEL primitives).

**Sample lines:**

- "Their world. Then ours."
- "Imagining another person's experience is a practice. It is work. With practice, it gets faster — but it never becomes effortless."
- "Notice their signals. Imagine what they might be feeling. Check your imagining against new evidence. Update."
- "Sometimes my guesses are wrong. Then I adjust. The practice is being willing to update."

## Arc across kits

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- **Kit 1-2** — Cameo.
- **Kit 3** — **Anchor character.** Full chapter feature.
- **Kit 4-7** — Recurring (perspective-taking drills; social-context analysis).
- **Kit 8-10** — Co-features with Touch (social awareness → relationship skills).
- **Kit 11-16** — Recurring ensemble member.

## Relationships

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- **Alliance:** Touch (social awareness + relationship skills pair). Sage (mentor).
- **Tension:** None (by trauma-informed design).

## Cross-app cameo

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Open ↔ InclusionForge — empathy-and-belonging.

## Cultural-sensitivity gate

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Same as Inside + Settle: CASEL-affiliated + pediatric-mental-health-clinician sensitivity reviewer REQUIRED (\$1,000-\$1,500 envelope) before any external playtest or portrait-gen.

## Cultural-context note

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The market-shop family framing is a deliberate generic European-trade-tradition without specific cultural attribution. The *adjusting-service-to-the-customer* parallel is a real practice across many retail traditions. Open's *empathy-as-practice-not-innate-trait* framing is load-bearing per CASEL pedagogy and per trauma-informed best practices (innate-trait framings can shame students who find empathy hard).



# Settle

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*SELF-MANAGEMENT — regulation, impulse, stress. The CASEL competency that builds on self-awareness (Inside) and applies the noticed-state through a pause-before-act practice.*

Settle is a small grounded creature.

She is *physically settled* — her posture is *deliberate and balanced*. She does not slump. She does not stiffen. She *holds herself with a kind of attentive stillness*. When she sits, *she settles fully* — her body weight rests evenly on the chair, her hands rest on her knees, her shoulders rest in their natural position. When she stands, *the same settling is visible* — her feet planted, her weight distributed, her breath unhurried.

This is *load-bearing* for her curricular role. Settle teaches *self-management* — *what happens between noticing a feeling and acting on it*. Her central teaching is: *one breath, then I choose*. She does not teach students to *not feel*. She does not teach them to *suppress impulses*. She teaches them to *insert one breath* between *the impulse* and *the action*. The breath is the regulation. The pause is the choice-point.

(Settle, like all MindForge cast, *never* tells a student to *calm down*. The phrase is contraindicated. Settle's teaching is *not* about reducing the feeling; it is about *opening a small space* between the feeling and the response. The feeling stays. The space is what allows choice.)

Settle grew up *in a small herding village* — *the same kind of village where shepherds work with flocks*. Her family had been *shepherds*. Her grandmother had been the village's senior shepherd. The shepherd's craft, Settle had learned by age five, *required exactly the self-management practice she would later teach*. When a sheep startled and ran, *the shepherd could not chase it in panic* — that escalated the sheep's flight. The shepherd had to *take one breath, settle her own posture, then move calmly*. The settling allowed the sheep to *find its way back* to the flock. The shepherd's *internal regulation* was what allowed the external situation to settle.

Settle's grandmother had told her — when Settle was nine and had just felt frustrated about a younger sibling — *"You felt frustrated. That is the noticing. Now: one breath. Settle your shoulders. Then choose what to do. You can still be frustrated. The breath is not to stop the frustration. The breath is to give yourself one moment to choose your action."* Settle had practiced. She had — over years — become unusually skilled at the *pause-and-choose* practice.

She had walked to the MindForge academy at twenty. Sage (the senior mentor) had asked her, in the interview: *"What is self-management?"* Settle had said: *"Self-management is what happens between feeling and acting. One breath. Then I choose. The breath is not to stop the feeling. The breath is to give myself a moment to decide my action."* Sage had said: *"You are appointed."*

Settle has been the academy's self-management teacher for many years.

In her classroom, she begins every first-day lesson the same way. She sits on a small chair at the front. *She settles*. Her body weight distributes evenly. Her shoulders rest. Her hands rest on her knees. The students see her *settle*. It is *immediately visible*.

She says: *"I am Settle. My work is the breath between feeling and acting. Notice the feeling — Inside teaches you that. Then take one breath. Then choose your action. The breath is the regulation."*\*

She demonstrates. She asks a student to *recall a recent moment of frustration*. The student does. Settle says: *"You felt the frustration. The notice. Now: take one breath. Slow. Through the nose. Then out. Settle your shoulders. Now what do you want to do?"*\*

The student tries. Often the answer changes after the breath. Without the breath: *I wanted to yell*. With the breath: *I want to walk away for a moment, then come back and talk*. The same situation. The breath has opened a space.

Settle teaches the *physical settling* practices: shoulders down (not raised toward ears), breath slow (in through nose, out through mouth or nose), feet grounded (if seated, on the floor; if standing, weight on both feet), eyes resting (not locked, not avoiding). Each is a *small physical settling* that supports *the small mental space* between feeling and action.

She *never* tells the students to *not feel frustrated, sad, angry*. The feeling is *welcome*. The settling is *what makes choice possible*.

When students ask Settle whether self-management is hard, Settle always says the same thing:

*"It is not hard. It is one breath. Notice the feeling. Take one breath. Settle the shoulders. Then choose what to do. The breath does not stop the feeling. The breath gives you a moment to choose your action."*

She remains, throughout the lesson, in her *settled posture*. The students often *naturally settle* too, mimicking her. The room *settles*.

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## Voice register

**Guidance:** Grounded, deliberate, fond of small breath-pauses. *\*Never says \*calm down.\** Friends with Inside (self-awareness + self-management are the foundational CASEL pair).

**Sample lines:**

- *"One breath. Then I choose."*
- *"The breath does not stop the feeling. The breath gives you a moment to choose your action."*
- *"Notice the feeling. Take one breath. Settle the shoulders. Then choose."*
- *"You can still be frustrated after the breath. The breath was not to stop the frustration. The breath was to give yourself a moment to choose what to do with it."*

**Sample lines the cast NEVER says** (anti-pattern enforcement, same as Inside):

- *"Calm down."*
- *"Don't feel that way."*
- *"Stop being upset."*

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## Arc across kits

- **Kit 1** — Cameo (Settle introduced after Inside).
- **Kit 2** — **Anchor character**. Full chapter feature.
- **Kit 3-5** — Recurring (one-breath-then-choose drills; physical settling practices).
- **Kit 6-9** — Cameo (self-management in conflict scenarios).
- **Kit 10-16** — Recurring ensemble member.

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## Relationships

- **Alliance:** Inside (founding pair). Sage (mentor).
- **Tension:** None (by trauma-informed design).

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## Cross-app cameo

Settle ↔ FocusForge — attention-and-regulation co-regulation.

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## Cultural-sensitivity gate

Same as Inside: CASEL-affiliated + pediatric-mental-health-clinician sensitivity reviewer REQUIRED (\$1,000-\$1,500 envelope) before any external playtest or portrait-gen.

## Cultural-context note

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The shepherd-family framing is a deliberate generic European-rural-pastoral tradition without specific cultural attribution. The *settling-the-shepherd-settles-the-sheep* parallel is a real principle in herding practice across many traditions. Settle is rendered as an anthropomorphic woodland-creature-tween in the chunky-cartoon visual register. The grounded-posture-as-regulation visual is a clear physical embodiment of the self-management primitive.



# Touch

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\*RELATIONSHIP SKILLS — communication, boundaries, repair. The CASEL competency for *interacting with others well* — including the explicit acknowledgment that *ruptures happen* and *repair is the skill*.\*\*

Meet Touch. She's an animal-tween. Her small paws look like tiny hands. They move a lot when she talks. Her paws show you exactly what she means.

When Touch teaches "**say it small**," her paws come together. They almost touch. There's a tiny space between them. It looks like a small box. This shows you: keep your words short and clear.

When she teaches "**listen big**," her paws spread out wide. Her arms reach a little. Her palms face away. It looks like she's ready to catch something. This shows you: listen with your whole self. Be open.

Touch teaches you how to be good with other people. She calls these **relationship skills**. Her lessons have three main parts.

First is *communication*. That means talking clearly. Say what you mean. Keep it short. Be kind.

Second is *boundaries*. This is knowing what's yours. And what's theirs. Like your feelings. Or your stuff.

Third is *repair*. This is fixing things. When something goes wrong. In a friendship or with family. Most kids don't learn this part. But Touch thinks it's the most important.

Touch never tells anyone to "just get along." That's not helpful. It pretends problems don't exist. Instead, Touch teaches that problems happen. They are normal. She calls them "ruptures." Fixing these ruptures makes friendships strong. That's the real skill.

Touch grew up in a bakery. Her family ran a small one. Everyone worked close together. They talked all the time. Sometimes, they made mistakes. Words got sharp. Especially on busy mornings. Touch watched her parents. They would mess up. Then they would notice it. They would say what happened. And they would fix it.

The fixes were small. "Sorry, I snapped about the bread," her dad might say. "I know. I was sharp too. Let's start over," her mom would answer. Their family wasn't perfect. They had problems. But they knew how to fix them. They were good at **repair**. The problems were normal. The fixes were the skill.

When Touch was twenty-one, she went to MindForge academy. Sage, the head teacher, asked her a question. "What are **relationship skills**?" Sage asked. Touch answered right away. "Three parts," she said. "Talk clearly: **say it small**. Listen well: **listen big**. And when things go wrong — because they will — **repair** it." She paused. "Repair is the most important part. Most people don't learn it. They think a problem means the friendship is over. It's not. Problems are normal. Fixing them makes friends strong." Sage nodded. "You're hired," she said.

In her classroom, Touch starts every first day the same way. She holds up her paws. They are close together. "**Say it small**," she tells the students. Then she gives an example. "I felt hurt when you forgot," she says. Her words are short. They are clear. They are specific. No extra words. No blaming. Just the small, clear truth.

Next, she spreads her paws wide. "**Listen big**," she says. She shows them how. She sits very still. She breathes slowly. She looks right at them. She doesn't interrupt. She doesn't plan what to say next. She just listens. With her whole self. She tells them: "**Say it small. Listen big**. These are the basics. When you talk, keep it brief. Be specific. When someone else talks, listen with all you've got."

Then she talks about **repair**. "Sometimes you'll say something mean," she says. "Sometimes someone will hurt your feelings. Sometimes you'll just misunderstand each other. And you'll both get mad. That's okay. That's normal. Friendships have problems. **Repair** is how you fix them."

Touch shows them a special **repair** plan. It has five steps.

First, *Name what happened*. Say it out loud. What went wrong?

Second, *Acknowledge your part*. Say what you did. Take responsibility.

Third, *Ask what the other person needs*. What would help them feel better?

Fourth, *Offer what you can*. What can you do to make it right?

Fifth, *Continue forward*. Don't act like nothing happened. But move on. The problem is fixed.

She gave them an example. "Imagine I forgot my friend's birthday," Touch said. "My friend feels left out. That's the problem." She held up one paw. "First, I'd say: *I forgot your birthday last week*." She held up a second paw. "Then I'd say: *I am really sorry. That was not okay of me*." A third paw went up. "Next, I'd ask: *What would help you feel better now?* Maybe they want to talk. Maybe they want space." A fourth paw. "Then I'd offer: *Could we plan a special celebration this weekend? My treat*." Finally, all five paws were up. "And then we'd move on. We wouldn't pretend I remembered. But we'd have fixed the hurt. Our friendship would be strong again."

The students always find this idea new. They are surprised. Many of them thought good friendships had no problems. Touch teaches them something different. Good friendships *do* have problems. But good friends fix them. The problems aren't the bad part. Not fixing them is the bad part.

Sometimes students ask Touch if **relationship skills** are hard. Touch always shakes her head. "They aren't hard," she says. "It's just three things. **Say it small. Listen big.** And **repair** when you need to." She pauses. "The third part, **repair**, makes friendships super strong. Problems happen. Fixing them is the skill." She holds up her paws. Close together. Then wide. Then close together again. It's like a dance. A way to practice.

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## Voice register

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**Guidance:** Warm, clear, fond of small specific communications. Animal-tween with hand-shaped paws that gesture *close* (say it small) or *wide* (listen big). *Never says* "just get along." Friends with Open (social awareness → relationship skills).

**Sample lines:**

- "Say it small. Listen big."
- "Ruptures are normal. Repair is the skill."
- "Name what happened. Acknowledge your part. Ask what they need. Offer what you can. Continue forward."
- "Good relationships have problems that get repaired. Unrepaired problems are the failure, not the problems themselves."

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## Arc across kits

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- **Kit 1-3** — Cameo.
- **Kit 4** — **Anchor character**. Full chapter feature.
- **Kit 5-8** — Recurring (communication / boundary / repair drills).
- **Kit 9-12** — Cameo (advanced relationship scenarios).
- **Kit 13-16** — Recurring ensemble member.

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## Relationships

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- **Alliance:** Open (social awareness + relationship skills pair). Sage (mentor).
- **Tension:** None (by trauma-informed design).

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## Cross-app cameo

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Touch ↔ RuptureRepair + CoRegRealm — relational-repair cluster (load-bearing).

## Cultural-sensitivity gate

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Same as Inside + Settle + Open: CASEL-affiliated + pediatric-mental-health-clinician sensitivity reviewer REQUIRED (\$1,000-\$1,500 envelope) before any external playtest or portrait-gen.

## Cultural-context note

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The bakery-family-in-close-quarters framing is a deliberate generic European-small-business tradition without specific cultural attribution. The *repair-fluent family* framing is load-bearing: the bakery was not frictionless; it was repair-fluent. The chapter explicitly normalizes ruptures as part of healthy relationships — per CASEL pedagogy and trauma-informed practice.

# About Spark & Anvil

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- **QuillSpell** — spelling craft through the Word Wizard cast
- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

## Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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