

BOXTALES THEATRE COMPANY

DIGITAL ASSEMBLY LEARNING GUIDE

The Stonecutter (Single Story)

Educator notes and prep are all in Blue

STORY SYNOPSES

The Stonecutter (*Chinese Folktale*)

A stonecutter is envious of rich people. An angel turns him into a rich man. But he keeps finding things he'd rather be. He'd rather be king, a farmer, the sun, a cloud, the wind, a mountain. While he's a mountain a stonecutter comes by and starts to chip away at him. The pain is too much for him to bear. He realizes that being a stonecutter was best after all. Be happy with who you are, you don't need to look around and be envious of others, or "Happiness is not always having what you want, but it's appreciating what you have."

The following questions or exercises are designed to help generate organic conversation within a group that can support core SEL competencies, (Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills and Responsible Decision-Making), in different age groups. They can however be modified by the instructor to fit their respective groups. Feel free to listen carefully to the students and adapt questions, responses and timing as needed. You may also, borrow suitable questions from other grades if you like.

K-2 Grade

What do you think this story was about?

What were you feeling during the story?

What's the role of the mountain spirit?

Do you ever want something that someone else has?

Are you good at sharing? Taking turns?

What's the best way to ask for something? What if you don't get what you asked for?

Should you always get what you want?

3-4 Grade

What do you think the story was about?

What were you feeling during the story?

What does the mountain spirit represent?

Do you ever feel like someone else is "better" than you?

If someone else is better than you at say soccer or math, does that make them "better" than you?

Can you think of a few positive things about yourself? (You don't need to say them out loud.)

- Have the students think about these things for one minute. Then ask:

How does it make you feel to just take a minute and think about these things?

If you had to guess, do you think anyone is really perfect?

Is that OK? Why?

5-6 Grade

What do you think the story was about?

What were you feeling during the story?

What does the mountain spirit represent?

Do you ever feel like someone else is “better” than you?

If someone else is better than you at say soccer or math, does that make them “better” than you?

Can you think of a few positive things about yourself? (You don’t need to say them out loud.)

- Have the students think about these things for one minute. Then ask:

How does it make you feel to just take a minute and think about these things?

If you had to guess, do you think anyone is really perfect?

Is that OK? Why?

Any of the questions above are good for 5-6 as well, but we find that directly addressing “negative self-talk” is very helpful at these stages of development.

Self-Talk: As we go about our daily lives we are constantly interpreting the situations in which we find ourselves. These interpretations are voiced inside our head with an internal voice that only we can hear. This voice influences how we feel about any given situation. Psychologists call this inner voice “self-talk,” and it includes our conscious thoughts as well as our unconscious assumptions or beliefs.

Sometimes our self-talk is helpful and reasonable, for example, “I’d better do some preparation for that exam,” or “I’m really looking forward to hanging out this weekend.” This kind of self-talk usually makes us feel better.

However, our self-talk can also be negative, unrealistic or self-defeating. For instance, “I’m going to fail for sure,” or “They hate me.” Negative, unrealistic, or self-defeating self-talk usually makes us feel worse.

Through our education programs, mentoring and parenting our own kids as well as collaborations with SEL oriented programs such as AHA! We have found that “negative self-talk is one of the most pervasive and crippling problems teens experience today, leading to increasing dropout rates, as well as self-abuse and even suicide. We have found that helping kids identify these “voices” and help them build tools to choose a healthier internal narrative earlier can make a difference.

The following description and exercises are designed to help develop awareness and skills for students to manage these issues for themselves.

In the Stonecutter story, we hear the main character talking to herself throughout the story, wishing she could be other than she was, and not fully appreciating what she was already. The truth is, we all have self-talk. This is the little voice inside each of us that is always there but we rarely are conscious of it. It can be affirming, “Hey, I’m pretty good at this”, or “I think they like me”, which can make us feel pretty good about ourselves, or it can even be helpful like “I better study for that test tomorrow”. But this voice can often be negative and unsupportive, like “nobody likes me”, or “I’m ugly”, or “I’m not good at anything”. When these voices are happening inside us, we generally feel much worse about ourselves. But with practice, we can learn to notice our own negative self-talk as it happens, and we can consciously change it. When we feel good, we tend to do good, which then makes us feel even better.

Teaching Kids to Choose Their Self-Talk (Exercise 1)

Here is a simple process to help students observe and choose their self-talk.

- First, share this definition of self-talk:
The act or practice of talking to oneself, either aloud or silently and mentally.
- Let everyone know that we all experience silent self-talk within our minds, unconsciously, during our everyday lives. Students might even have some silent self-talk going on right now. They might be thinking, “I’m hungry.” Or, “What is self-talk?” Or, “Will I do okay on the test next period?”
- Set a timer and tell students that for the next minute, we’ll sit in silent meditation, with eyes closed, and observe our silent self-talk.
- After the minute has passed, ask students to open their eyes and share the self-talk that they observed inside their own minds. Let them know that there are no right or wrong answers. Chart the students’ answers. *Note: Some educators opt to have them write this down rather than to share it with the class. This can work better, if you feel that it might be too socially challenging for your group to do it out loud, but when we share it together, we often experience the added benefit of students realizing that they are not alone and can bond with their peers and feel less “different”.*
- Let students know that some of our self-talk is positive, which usually makes us feel better, and some of it is negative, which usually makes feel worse. Or sometimes it’s neutral. See if you and the students can categorize the answers you charted into those that might make the person feel better and those that might the person feel worse.
- Sometimes our thoughts are focused on a real mistake or problem that needs to be addressed. Negative self-talk about this might include berating ourselves over and over. Positive self-talk could include thinking about how we can address the problem and reminding ourselves that making mistakes is part of life and doesn’t make us “bad.”
- Let students know that they have the power to change their self-talk if it is making them feel worse. One way to do this is to shift their interpretation of a situation from negative to neutral or positive.

Extensions:

Self-Talk Brainstorm (Exercise 2)

Present the following situations to the class and let students brainstorm possible neutral or positive self-talk responses.

Situation #1

You are looking for a spot to sit in the lunch room and approach a table. The students sitting there are unwelcoming and one of them says, “We don’t have any room for you” – even though there is an empty seat.

- Negative Self-Talk: “No one likes me. I’ll never make any good friends.”
- Positive Self-Talk:

Situation #2

You have an important question for the teacher, but the teacher tells you that he/she doesn't have time to answer it.

- Negative Self-Talk: "I can't figure this out by myself!"
- Positive Self-Talk:

Situation #3

You and your sister are fighting over the remote control. Your mom comes in and yells at you, even though it was your sister who started the fight.

- Negative Self-Talk: "My parents think my brother/sister is an angel! I get in trouble for everything!"
- Positive Self-Talk:

Situation #4

You've just received your grade for the final math test. You failed, even though you love math usually do well.

- Negative Self-Talk: "I'm terrible at math. I'll never go to college like I want to."
- Positive Self-Talk:

Closing

Close the session by asking students to share some positive self-talk that they might use to make themselves feel better when they are anxious, scared, or angry.

Homework / Community Service

Negative self-talk can be debilitating, and get in the way of a person truly knowing themselves and certainly hold one back from their potential in life. Sometimes it can change and lower our self-esteem the way we feel about ourselves in general.

There are many ways of dealing with this. You can try to notice when it happens, breathe, acknowledge it, consider the cause, stop expecting perfection, and remind yourself of things that make you feel good, things you're good at, things you like and people who like you. Building a routine around this helps. Start with making a conscious choice to silence those thoughts.

But the thing that I have always found the most helpful is service. To help people in need. To serve something larger than yourself. It can be a big cause like working at a soup kitchen feeding the hungry, or it can just be simply helping your younger sibling with their homework, or doing a chore around the house without being asked, but offer it as selflessly as possible, without any thought of getting anything in return.

It's called Seva, or Selfless Service for Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs. Christians and Jews have Charity, and Muslims have Zakat (Alms). Really all religions and spiritual practices have it in one form or another.

It's hard to feel bad about yourself when you're doing good for someone else. So, make a plan. Choose something that makes someone else feel good. It doesn't have to be big, but do something every day. This can be your secret, and just know that you did it.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Stonecutter (Crown Publishers) by Demi

OTHER STORIES AND RESOURCES

The Mouse Bride (Mayan Folktale) "Believe in yourself, no need to go any further than your own home."

Ugly Duckling by Hans Christian Andersen (Danish Tale) Different Publishers "Beauty is relative, beauty grows, beauty is knowing who you are."