

Tuning into Ethical Behavior

Story Discussion Guide for Parents, Teachers and Students



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Background

Story comprehension is difficult. Extracting the theme or moral from a story is not evident among most children until age 11 or 12. Even then, children may need help in learning how to extract the theme.

Narvaez and colleagues (Narvaez et al, 1998; Narvaez et al, 1999) found that 8 year olds understood the theme of a moral story only about 10% of the time and 10 year olds about 50% of the time. So they outlined several tasks that must be completed in order to successfully complete the theme comprehension tasks generally.

First, the child must be able to ‘pick up’ the message by integrating intention-action-outcome chains of events (what did the character want, what did the character do, how did it turn out)

Second, the child has to step back from the story details and think about the larger implications of the story, making a generalization.

Third, the child has to remember this generalization and put it into words

Here are some specific skills that a child needs to employ to extract a moral theme from a story:

(1) Awareness that some demands are in conflict with other (e.g., inner vs. outer) demands.

This may be developed by asking these questions: What was the problem? What was the worst thing(s) the character faced?

(2) Sensitivity to the configuration of the situation (moral sensitivity)

This may be developed with these questions: What was going on? Who was thinking about what was going on?

(3) Reasoning about possible actions (moral sensitivity and reasoning)

This may be developed with the following questions: What could be done? What would happen if...?

(4) Personal identity or motivation

This may be developed with a question like: What did the character think about when deciding/doing the deed?

(5) Awareness of sacrifice or sublimation of personal gratification for a greater good (moral motivation)

This may be developed by considering: How did the action affect the character and the others?

(6) Follow through

This can be parsed with a discussion of: How did the character carry out the action?

(7) The positive social outcome and the implicit or explicit positive judgment of action taken

This can be developed with questions such as: How did the story end—good or bad? Why?

How to Help Kids Identify the Theme of a Story

From Williams, 1993; Williams et al., 1994

After reading the story, discuss these questions to the best of the ability of the child.

1. Was what happened at the end good or bad?
2. Why was it good or bad?
3. The main character learned that in this situation he should_____.
4. In general the main character learned that in life he should_____.
5. Which lesson is more important for us?
6. What's the most important theme (message, lesson)?

On the next pages are more specific sets of questions that can be used in classrooms or home discussions. These are based on the Rating Ethical Content Scale (RECS; Narvaez, 2008).

For more resources, also see the Collaborative for Ethical Education, <http://cee.nd.edu/media/>

Discussion Questions to Extract the Moral Aspects of Stories

These are based on the Rating Ethical Content Scale (RECS; Gomberg et al., 2005; Narvaez et al. 1999; 2004)

ETHICAL SENSITIVITY

1. Did the character care about other people's feelings? How or how not?
2. Did the character notice what other people's needs were? How or how not?
3. Did the character notice things that were wrong or that hurt other people? How or how not?
4. Did the character show his or her feelings in a way that didn't hurt other people or things? How or how not?
5. Did the character listen and took to heart what other people said? How or how not?
6. Did the character try to understand how other people thought about things? How or how not?
7. Did the character try to understand people who were different or from different cultures? How or how not?
8. Did the character act like a good friend? How or how not?

Other Sensitivity Questions:

What was the conflict?

What was the worst thing(s) the character faced?

How did the character feel about...?

ETHICAL REASONING

1. Did the character try to understand all parts of the problem before deciding what to do? How or how not?
2. Did the character think about how others might be upset by his or her choices, actions or decisions? How or how not?
3. Did the character think about doing the right thing? How or how not?
4. Did the character think about his or her decision afterwards? How or how not?
5. Did the character try to follow the rules? How or how not?
6. Was the character positive or optimistic about solving the problem? How or how not?
7. Did the character try to pick goals and things to do that help the community and show how to do the right thing? How or how not?
8. Did the character want things to be fair for everyone? How or how not?

Other Judgment Questions:

What else could have been done?

What would happen if...?

ETHICAL FOCUS

1. Did the character show good self control over his or her own behaviors? How or how not?
2. Did the character care about what other people thought was right? How or how not?
3. Did the character try to be the best he or she could be? How or how not?
4. Did the character think he or she really could solve the conflict or problem? How or how not?
5. Did the character follow through on promises and agreements? How or how not?
6. Did the character choose to do the wrong thing even though it was easier to do than the right thing? How or how not?
7. Did the character try to take care of other people first, before taking care of himself or herself? How or how not?
8. Did the character follow high standards for his or her own behavior? How or how not?

Other Focus Questions:

What did the character think about when making decisions and taking actions?

Did the character show concern for the welfare of others?

What virtues or ethical skills did the character show?

ETHICAL ACTION

1. Did the character try to fix problems or conflicts without hurting other people, animals or things? How or how not?
2. Did the character speak up to help other people? How or how not?
3. Did the character try to help other people, animals, or things? How or how not?
4. Did the character try to change rules that were unfair? How or how not?
5. Did the character make a plan to solve a conflict or problem? How or how not?
6. Did the character when trying to solve a conflict or problem, overcome things that got in the way or changed the plan when it wasn't working? How or how not?
7. Did the character not give up on solving the conflict or problem when it was hard? How or how not?
8. Was the character brave when helping others or solving a problem or conflict? How or how not?

Other Action Questions:

How did the action affect the character and others in the story?

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Thinking about Stories (for kids)

NAME OF Story _____

Check the behaviors that you noticed by characters in the story. Then talk about your answers.

SENSITIVITY

- ___1. Cared about other people's feelings
- ___2. Expressed concern or sympathy for others
- ___3. Managed anger without being destructive
- ___4. Expressed emotions appropriately
- ___5. Tried to understand other people's points of view
- ___6. Tried to understand another culture
- ___7. Thought about what was fair for others
- ___8. Showed care for others in actions
- ___9. Acted as a good friend
- ___10. Worked well with people that were different
- ___11. Worked against prejudice
- ___12. Noticed a moral problem
- ___13. Thought about different ways to solve moral problems
- ___14. Communicated well so other people could understand
- ___15. Changed communication when it wasn't working
- ___16. Took to heart what others said

JUDGMENT

- ___1. Tried to understand a problem before deciding
- ___2. Gathered information before making a decision
- ___3. Weighed all the options and their consequences
- ___4. Considered rules when making a decision
- ___5. Planned how to carry out a decision
- ___6. Considered many possible options
- ___7. Considered the consequences of actions
- ___8. Considered how others would react or be affected
- ___9. Made good decisions
- ___10. Reflected on a decision afterward
- ___11. Was concerned about justice for all
- ___12. Followed the rules
- ___13. Tried to change unfair rules
- ___14. Chose good things to do and places to be
- ___15. Tried to pick good goals
- ___16. Was optimistic about solving a problem

FOCUS

- ___1. Showed respect for others
- ___2. Was courteous towards others
- ___3. Avoided violence
- ___4. Showed good self control
- ___5. Acted responsibly
- ___6. Followed through on promises
- ___7. Was careful with resources
- ___8. Acted like a good citizen
- ___9. Thought about how important it is to be moral
- ___10. Thought about other people's moral expectations
- ___11. Followed cultural traditions
- ___12. Cooperated with others
- ___13. Acted unselfishly
- ___14. Found meaning in life
- ___15. Resisted temptation
- ___16. Reached for his/her potential

ACTION

- ___1. Tried to resolve conflicts and problems
- ___2. Solved personal conflicts in a peaceful way
- ___3. Forgave others
- ___4. Noticed other people's needs
- ___5. Spoke up to help others
- ___6. Mentored others
- ___7. Planned for actions to help others
- ___8. Broke an action plan into steps
- ___9. Changed plan when it wasn't working
- ___10. Tried to help someone or keep them from harm
- ___11. Overcame fear to help others
- ___12. Showed bravery in helping others
- ___13. Stood up against peer pressure
- ___14. Was persistent even when there were obstacles
- ___15. Tried new ways to solve problems when old ways didn't work
- ___16. Worked hard

What are the themes in this story? What messages or lessons do you think the author wants the reader/viewer to remember? _____

OTHER TOOLS FOR Researchers, Educators and Parents

Most of these you can download from:

<http://www.nd.edu/~dnarvaez/> Or from <http://cee.nd.edu>

TOOLS FOR TEACHERS: ETHICAL SKILL INSTRUCTION

Free from cee.nd.edu/curriculum

Narvaez, D. with Endicott, L., Bock, T., & Mitchell, C. (2001). *Nurturing character in the middle school classroom: Ethical Action*. St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning.

Narvaez, D. & Bock, T., with Endicott, L., & Mitchell, C. (2001). *Nurturing character in the middle school classroom: Ethical Judgment*. St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning.

Narvaez, D., & Endicott, L., with Bock, T., & Mitchell, C. (2001). *Nurturing character in the middle school classroom: Ethical Sensitivity*. St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning.

Narvaez, D. & Lies, J. with Endicott, L., Bock, T., & Mitchell, C. (2001). *Nurturing character in the middle school classroom: Ethical Motivation*. St. Paul: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning.

Updated versions for purchase (each \$10 or all four for \$30):

Nurturing character in the classroom, EthEx Series, Book 4: Ethical Action. (Narvaez) Notre Dame, IN: ACE Press.

Nurturing character in the classroom, EthEx Series, Book 2: Ethical Judgment. (Narvaez & Bock) Notre Dame, IN: ACE Press.

Nurturing character in the classroom, EthEx Series, Book 1: Ethical Sensitivity. (Narvaez & Endicott) Notre Dame, IN: ACE Press.

Nurturing character in the classroom, EthEx Series, Book 3: Ethical Motivation. (Narvaez & Lies) Notre Dame, IN: ACE Press.

Integrative Ethical Education: Guide (Narvaez)

TOOLS FOR RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT

Citizenship Scale *For Elementary and Secondary School Students: Guide*. Laboratory for Ethical Development and Education, University of Notre Dame

Ethical Goodness Scale *For Elementary and Secondary School Students: Guide*. (Narvaez, Bock & Vaydich) Laboratory for Ethical Development and Education, University of Notre Dame

Community Bonding Scale: Guide. (Narvaez) University of Notre Dame: Center for Ethical Education.

Attitudes Towards Human Rights Inventory: Guide. (Narvaez, Thoma, Getz) University of Notre Dame: Center for Ethical Education.

Positivity Scale: Guide. (Narvaez) University of Notre Dame: Center for Ethical Education.

Moral Theme Inventory (MTI): Guide. (Narvaez & Bock) South Bend, IN: Notre Dame University.

Assessing Ethical Skills: Guide (Narvaez)

Checklist for an Ethical Classroom: Guide (Narvaez)

Checklist for an Achieving and Ethical Classroom: Guide (Narvaez)

Tuning into Ethical Behavior: Guide (Narvaez)

Multicultural Experiences Questionnaire (MEQ) (Narvaez, Endicott, & Hill)

Rating Ethical Content System (RECS) for children's media (Narvaez)

TOOLS FOR PARENTS

Tuning into Ethical Behavior: Guide (Narvaez)

Nurturing a Peaceable Child (Warren, Vaydich & Narvaez)