

Dear Diary

Walk a kilometre in my shoes



Complexity



8-13 years



60 minutes



6-30



Discrimination



Health



Poverty

Type of activity

Storytelling, discussion

Overview

Children read three different accounts of the same experience and discuss mistaken judgments about people.

Objectives

- To discuss the right to education, to play and to healthcare
- To practise communication and observation skills
- To develop empathy with other people
- To become aware of judgmental attitudes

Preparation

Adapt the stories in the handout to the reality of your children and/or your learning objectives.

Materials

- Copies of the three stories

Instructions

1. Explain that three children have permitted us to read their diaries from camp last summer. Divide the children into three groups and give each group one of the stories to read.
2. After they have read the stories, bring the children together and go through the events of the campers' day (e.g. solving puzzles, lunch, playing football, building a raft, crossing the river). Stop at each event and ask the children what their character was doing, thinking and feeling at this point. At this stage, avoid getting the children to explain the reasons for the campers' different reactions and feelings.
3. Ask members of each group to describe the child whose story they read. Discuss how three children could have such different experiences of the same events, asking questions such as these:
 - Why did the children misunderstand each other?
 - Do you think the children would have behaved differently if they had known more about each other's lives?
 - What specific misunderstandings did they have about each other?
 - Why did they make these mistakes?

Debriefing and Evaluation

1. Discuss the activity with questions such as these:
 - What do you think about the three stories?
 - Would you enjoy a day like that? Why or why not?
 - Are these stories realistic? Has anything like this ever happened to you?
 - Can you identify with any of these children? Which? Why?
 - Is it possible to have friends, even when you are poor and unable to read? Why, or why not?
 - What does 'friendship' mean?
 - Are there some people who are more disadvantaged than others in your community? How are they disadvantaged?
 - What can we do to help people who are disadvantaged?
2. Relate the activity to human rights by asking questions such as these:
 - Which human rights were the children enjoying at camp?
 - What human rights do they enjoy at home?
 - Are all these children's rights properly respected? Name any rights which are not fully respected.
 - What happens when we misjudge other people?
 - What can we do to avoid making mistakes about other people and their lives?

Suggestions for follow-up

Make drawings of the events described in the stories – either the events of the Great Adventure Day, or, for example, the children in their home environment. The activity 'Sailing to a New Land' addresses the contrasting responses and priorities in the same situation.

Ideas for action

In order to avoid similar misunderstandings within your own group, help your children to develop a Code of Conduct for being together. Check the example in the activity 'A Constitution for our Group'.

Tips for the facilitator

The stories may seem very unrealistic or unfamiliar to some children. Adapt them to reflect your children's reality and concerns and be careful not to embarrass individual children with stories that are too close to their own realities.

Especially when working with financially disadvantaged children, be sensitive to the attitudes children have about themselves and others in their community. Allow the children to discuss the issues of disadvantaged children, but balance this by building their confidence and reassuring them that all children should have opportunities to live the life they want and to have their rights respected.

Because some children may identify with the characters in the stories, the activity requires sensitive debriefing. Be aware of stereotypes and judgmental behaviour that these stories might provoke in some children, both in assumptions about privileged children (e.g. "They don't have any problems"; "They are snobs") and about disadvantaged children (e.g. "They don't have supportive families"; "They are lazy"). The importance of these stories is to encourage the children to ask why others act as

they do, rather than jumping to conclusions based on **False** assumptions.

Make a clear distinction in discussion between what the character was doing and what he or she was feeling and thinking.

This debriefing assumes that the children have been introduced to human rights previously. If they haven't, you may want to include a brief introduction to human rights before the start of the activity, or adapt the debriefing questions accordingly.

Variations

Start with Margaret's story and read the stories aloud to the children or ask the children to read them in a big group. Then discuss, as in Step 3 after each story. You may want to ask the debriefing questions after each story.

Get the children to act out what the three campers did at each phase of the day. Then ask them to explain how each was feeling at the time. Alternatively, ask two children to act the part of each child, one who performs the child's outward words and actions and the other who speaks for the child's inner thoughts and feelings.

Adaptation

Younger children may need some visual material to remember what happened during the day at camp. Too much information might cause a loss of attention and will make the debriefing very difficult. Make sure the children have understood one story before moving on to the next one.



Handout

The stories

During the summer months, many children go to summer camp. The following stories are taken from the diaries of three children who met for the first time at the same summer camp. They are the same age and are involved in the same activities. One day, the youth leaders organised 'The Great Adventure Day'. In the evening, all three children wrote about the day in their diaries.

STORY 1

Margaret wrote under her bedcovers by torchlight.

Dear Diary,

Oh, what a great day it was. We did many crazy things and I believe it could have been one of the best days in my life. But I was never afraid. It was a pity Elsa and Ricardo were so strange today.

But to start at the beginning... When we woke up, the leaders divided us into different groups. I was with Ricardo and Elsa. I like both of them because yesterday we were also in the same group and we laughed so much at all the jokes we were telling each other. The leader gave us 3 messages written in secret codes and we had to find the solutions. I was the first one to find my solution. After a while Ricardo also had his solution, but Elsa was very slow. When I asked her if she needed help, she said she didn't like the activity and that solving the secret code was a boring thing to do. Then I saw that she was holding the paper upside down and I laughed at her saying that she would never find it like this. She gave me an angry look and threw the paper away. "I want to play, not read stuff", she said. I don't think she is very clever. I wonder if she can read at all – strange, because all kids my age can read and write!

Well, we finally managed to discover the meaning of the 3 messages. Then we went down to the river where we played football against another group of children. That was fun. We almost won but it's all Elsa's fault that we lost. Every time the ball came close to her, she touched it with her hands, kicked the other children, and made a lot of mistakes. It was like she had never played football before. Next time I want to be in a different group from Elsa.

After lunch – the meals here are really disgusting – we had to build a raft to cross the river. And that was cool because we had to look for wood and then make all kinds of knots with ropes. Elsa and I were looking for good strong logs, but Ricardo was always bringing in these skinny sticks. I told him that since he was a boy he should work as hard as us. He said he was dizzy and his back hurt. When we finished, our raft was the best ever – even the leader said this! Then the leader counted "1, 2 and 3" and we had to jump on the raft and cross the river together. I jumped first, but I fell in the water. Brrr... the water was very, very cold and I screamed. Luckily the leader helped me out and then we all started laughing. When I told my friends how cold the water really was, Ricardo said he didn't feel like going in anymore. I think he was afraid of the cold water. I didn't know before that Ricardo was such a loser! When I told him he should be braver, he ran away crying. I will ask the leader to put me in another group next time because Elsa is stupid, and Ricardo is just a sissy.

I didn't speak to Elsa and Ricardo again after that and ...oops, I think the leaders are coming to our room. Sleep well, my dear diary.

Love, Margaret

STORY 2**The following diary was written for Elsa, with the help of a leader.**

Hello Diary,

You are my first own diary and I am Elsa. I hope you will stay with me for a long time. I asked the leader to write this page for me. He says when I get older, I can read about what I did at camp. I like the idea. We are sitting away from the other children because I don't want anybody to know that the leader is helping me.

Today was a full day of activities. In the morning I had to be in the same group as Margaret and Ricardo. I like Ricardo more than Margaret. She always thinks she knows better than anybody else!

It all started with the messages in secret code that we had to solve. I don't like those things because I still can't read very well, and Margaret was always shouting to hurry up. I wish I could read better. But since my daddy left, I have to stay home and take care of the little kids while Mum goes to work. I really want to go to school, but Mum always says that it's more important to be able to have food than to be able to read a book. I didn't want Ricardo and Margaret to know that I cannot read, so I tried to pretend that I was solving the secret code. But then Margaret laughed at me and I was sad and angry at the same time.

And then it was the same story with football. I really wanted our team to win, but everything I did seemed to be wrong. Everybody knows the game except me. I see the other children always play football when they come back from school. But my mother says, "If you have to time to play, you have time to work".

After the lunch we went to build a boat to cross the river. And here I think I was better than Margaret and Ricardo. I know how to make knots and knew what kind of wood we needed to make a strong boat. But Ricardo acted so strange. He was almost wetting his pants after Margaret told him how cold the water was.

I hope tomorrow we are again in the same group. I want to prove to them that I can do many things! And I really like the leaders at the camp!

Bye, Diary, till tomorrow.

Elsa

STORY 3

Ricardo has a big diary that he has been writing in for years. This is what he wrote.

My dearest Diary,

Again I am writing to tell you how sad and disappointed I am. In the morning we did activities that I liked. The secret code is easy for me as I do them all the time at home. But my friend Elsa seemed a bit stressed and I didn't know why. In football I played the goalie – like I always do.

The lunch was great, probably the best I have ever eaten. I eat a lot here, unlike at home where I always have to wait till my younger brothers and sisters have eaten.

But the afternoon was terrible. We had to get very heavy wood and then go in very cold water. I don't like that because I will get ill, for sure, and I don't want that anymore. A girl called Margaret made jokes about me because I didn't want to go in the water. I felt terrible. My father has told me that the day he finds a new job, he will take me to the hospital and make me healthy again. He says that then I will be able to do all the activities I want and not have to stay in bed all the time. I wish my father could have a new job tomorrow: I don't want to tell the other children at camp because then they will know we don't have any money at home and they will tease me about it.

Dear Diary, when will I be healthy again? I want to be like the other children. I want to play and run and jump. I hope it happens soon, but I'm afraid it may never happen.

Sleep well, my dearest Diary.

Ricardo