

CRITICAL DECISIONS

Literature-Based Life-Skill Lessons For Young Children



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Beth Neathamer-Mohon has been in the education field for 17 years. She taught lower elementary for nine years and has been a counselor for eight years. Beth enjoys writing stories, uses the stories she writes with the children in her guidance program at school, and has found the stories help make learning more fun. Beth lives in Kentucky with her husband, her daughter, Hope, and her cat and two dogs. Beth dedicates this manuscript to her husband, daughter, and extended family.

Critical Decisions: Literature-Based Life-Skill Lessons For Young Children

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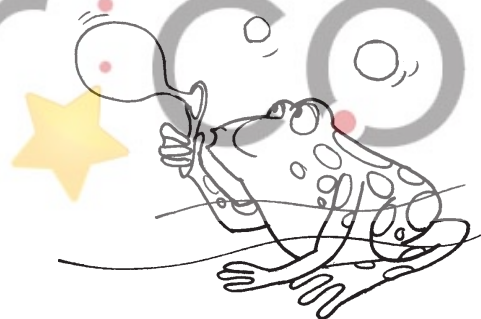
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INTRODUCTION

Every day children make many routine decisions. They must decide what to wear to school, what equipment to play on at recess, and even what to buy for lunch. But children must also make more serious decisions—critical ones—and need special daily guidance so they can become the best they can be.

I have heard a Native American parable in which a child told his father he felt like there were two wolves fighting in his mind—each one trying to control him. The boy told his father that an evil wolf was constantly instructing him to do bad things and a good wolf was constantly instructing him to do good things. The boy asked which wolf his father thought would win. The wise father answered, “The wolf that you feed the most will win.”

In other words, whichever instructions the child chose to follow most often ... good or evil ... would determine which wolf would be in control.

As a school counselor, I believe it is our responsibility to help children tune in to the “good wolf” so they will decide wisely when making critical decisions in life.

The lessons in this book will help children become more knowledgeable about the critical decisions in life and the importance of making wise choices. Some of the critical decisions addressed in this book involve deciding to treat others fairly, deciding to think positively, and deciding to be drug-free. I encourage you to use this book in guiding your children to make the critical decisions that will help them become the best they can be.

Sincerely,

Beth Neathamer-Mohon



THE CRITICAL DECISION TO **BE FAIR**

Lesson Plan Objectives:

1. Read the story to the children for the purpose of teaching them about the importance of making the critical decision to be fair.
2. Discuss the questions before or after reading the story to encourage thinking/talking about the results of choosing to be fair.
3. Select one or more follow-up activities to give children practical experiences in being fair.

LESSON

Introduction:

- ▶ Begin the lesson by saying:

If you hear me saying something that is fair, clap. If you hear me saying something that is unfair, say, "Boooo!"

- ▶ Read the following statements aloud to the children:

1. *You are playing a game of checkers with your friend. When your friend is not looking, you take some of his checkers off the board. (Boooo!)*
2. *You and your friend take turns playing a video game that you both like to play. (clap)*
3. *You borrowed money from a friend and you will pay her back as soon as you can. (clap)*
4. *You quit playing a game when you realize that you are not going to win. (Boooo!)*



GIRAFFE DECIDES TO BE FAIR

“Good morning, Giraffe,” said Zebra. “Are you going to play in the jungle park today? All our friends will be there.”

“Why, of course,” replied Giraffe. “I’m heading that way right now. Rabbit, Hippo, Possum, and Tiger are coming, too. I talked with them yesterday.”

“Great!” said Zebra. “Let’s get going!”

Zebra and Giraffe met their other friends at the park. They all gave each other *high fives* and started talking about what games they were going to play.

Giraffe stated, “It’s my turn to pick out the game, because I haven’t gotten to do this yet. Zebra, you picked hide-and-seek and jump rope the other day, and Rabbit and Tiger, you both picked *Simon Says* and *Mother, May I?* Possum picked a chase and Hippo picked playing with the water hose. I think it would be fair if I got to pick the games for today. I have a lot of fun games in mind to play. I have been thinking of them for a long time and have them written down on this paper. See?” said Giraffe, excitedly holding out his **game** list.

“Wow!” said Zebra as she glanced at the list. “You *have* been thinking a lot about this. It’s fine by me to let you pick. What do the rest of you say?”

“Fine with us,” the animals all replied. “That would be the fair thing to do.”

“Great!” said Giraffe. “I’ll get started with my list. First, I want to play *Who Can Reach The Highest?* I’ll start. I can reach to the top of the sliding board. How high can all of you reach?” asked Giraffe.

The other animals looked at each other in disbelief.

Zebra finally replied, “I don’t think we can beat you on that one, Giraffe. I think you won that game.”

“Yeah! I won!” shouted Giraffe, jumping up and down. “Yeah for me!” said Giraffe, trying to keep from smiling. “Now let’s go on to the next game. OK, the number two game is *Who Is The Tallest?* Everyone line up next to me to see who the winner of this game will be.”

The animals rolled their eyes at each other, but slowly lined up as Giraffe had requested.





THE CRITICAL DECISION TO MAKE GOOD CHOICES

Lesson Plan Objectives:

1. Read the story to the children for the purpose of teaching them that the decision to make good choices is a critical life-skill.
2. Discuss the questions before or after reading the story to encourage thinking/talking about the results of making good choices.
3. Select one or more follow-up activities to give the children practical experiences in making good choices.

LESSON

Introduction:

- ▶ Begin the lesson by presenting the following introductory activity:
 - Draw an imaginary line down the middle of the classroom.
 - Tell the children that one side of the room represents *good* choices.
 - Tell the children that the other side of the room represents *bad* choices.
 - Tell the children that the middle of the room (imaginary line) represents being *undecided* as to whether the decision is good or bad.
- ▶ Have the children stand on the imaginary line in the middle of the room. Then say:

I am going to give you some choices. When I say, "Move," you should move from where you are to the side of the room that represents how you feel about the choice. If you have no opinion or are not sure



LITTLE HIPPO LEARNS ABOUT CHOICES

“Little Hippo, I have your chore list for the day here on the kitchen table. Be sure and do these chores before you go outside. I have a big day planned for all of us,” said Mama Hippo, “and I want you to finish your chores as soon as you can.”

“Do you remember the little talk your dad and I had with you about your being old enough now to decide to make good choices? Well, I want you to decide to do what is right. For several weeks now, you have chosen not to do your chores,” complained Mama Hippo, “and your father and I are about talked out.”

“I know, Mama. I listened to your talks,” Little Hippo grumbled as he picked up the list and his mother went into the other room. “Hmmm, let’s see here ... OK, I can do this. The list doesn’t look too bad today. I am to fill the birdbath with fresh water. I am to make my bed and straighten my room. Lastly, I am to put my bike away in the shed. I left it outside yesterday.”

Little Hippo put the list down and looked out the window. It was Saturday morning and it was a beautiful day. The birds were singing and the sun was shining. He stared out the window some more and thought, “This would be a great day to play with my friends at the watering hole.”

With the beautiful day in mind, Little Hippo thought, “I think I will call my friends and play with them first, then do my chores later. This is what I am going to choose to do. Mama said she had a big day planned for us. I bet her big plan is for us all to clean out the garage. I heard her say the other day that it needed cleaning up. I sure don’t want to do that. It doesn’t sound like any fun.”



With that thought, Little Hippo called his friends to see if they could go swimming. All of them asked their parents and were allowed to go with him to the watering hole! Little Hippo was excited.

Reader: Pause. Ask the children the following questions, then continue reading the story.

*Was Little Hippo making a good critical decision at this time? (No.)
How do you know? (Little Hippo decided to go to the watering hole with his friends instead of doing his chores. This will get him into more trouble with his parents.)*

Little Hippo knew he should do his chores first, but he was not making good choices today. He even chose to sneak out the side door of their house before his mother could catch him. Off he ran to meet his friends.



THE CRITICAL DECISION TO DECIDE TO HAVE GOOD SELF-ESTEEM

Lesson Plan Objectives:

1. Read the story to the children for the purpose of teaching them about the importance of making the critical decision to have good self-esteem (thinking good, positive thoughts about yourself).
2. Discuss the questions before or after reading the story to encourage thinking/talking about the results of choosing or not choosing to have a good self-esteem.
3. Select one or more follow-up activities to give children practical experiences in developing good self-esteem.

◆◆◆◆ LESSON ◆◆◆◆

Introduction:

- ▶ Begin the lesson by telling the children what it means to have good self-esteem and why having good self-esteem is important. Say:

Having good self-esteem means you think good, positive thoughts about yourself.

It is important to have good self-esteem so you will be happy. If you think bad thoughts about yourself a lot of the time, it will be hard for you to be happy.

Another word for critical is important. It is critical to have good self-esteem. You develop good self-esteem when you decide to continually think or say good things about yourself. Always remember that having good self-esteem is a critical or important decision you must make for yourself.



A STAR IS BORN

A long time ago, a big lesson was learned from a little apple. Listen carefully and see if you can learn the lesson, too.



“Hoo, Hoo,” said Wise Old Owl as he landed on the branch of an apple tree.

“Hoo, Hoo, yourself,” Little Red Apple said gloomily.

Little Red Apple's tone of voice told Wise Old Owl that something was wrong. Wise Old Owl liked Little Red Apple and wanted to find out how to help her, so he said, "Little Red Apple, you don't sound very chipper today. What's wrong?"

"I don't feel very happy this evening. I guess you could say I'm kind of 'blue' instead of perky red," Little Red Apple said sadly.

"Well, doooooooo tell me. What is making you feel so blue?" asked Wise Old Owl.

"It all began a few evenings ago. I was just hanging around here in my tree, just like I'm doing now, and I began to notice how beautiful the stars were. Just look at them, Wise Old Owl! See how they shine through the darkness? Do you see how lovely they are? They look like thousands of flickering candles. I know that stars are not only beautiful to look at, they are very useful, too. They give light to the world at night and help travelers know which direction they are traveling. Oh, Wise Old Owl, I'm blue because I wish I were a star instead of a measly red apple. If I were a star, I'd be happy all the time. I would be pretty and useful," said Little Red Apple.

Wise Old Owl listened carefully to what Little Red Apple had to say. Then he tilted back his head and laughed!

"Why are you laughing at me?" cried Little Red Apple. "You aren't making me feel any better at all!"

"I'm sorry, Little Red Apple. I wasn't laughing because you are sad. I was laughing because I can't believe you don't know ... "

"Know what?" interrupted Little Red Apple. "What is worth knowing?"

"Why, Little Red Apple, you should know that every apple is a star. If you look deep enough, you will see that you are a wonderful star, too."



THE CRITICAL DECISION TO **SET GOALS**

Lesson Plan Objectives:

1. Read the story to the children for the purpose of teaching them about the importance of making the critical decision to set goals.
2. Discuss the questions before or after reading the story to encourage thinking/talking about the results of choosing to set goals.
3. Select one or more follow-up activities to give children practical experiences in setting goals.

LESSON

Introduction:

- ▶ Materials needed: Piece of art paper, piece of lined paper, a pencil, and crayons for each child.
- ▶ Distribute the art paper, a pencil, and crayons to each child. Ask the children to draw a picture of themselves doing the job they want to be doing when they are an adult. When everyone has finished, have the children share their pictures with the class.
- ▶ Then say:

Wanting a grown-up job is a long-term goal, because it will take a long time to finally reach that goal. However, there are short-term goals that you can be working on right now to help you get this job.

- ▶ Continue the lesson by asking:

Do you think doing well in school would help you get the job you want? (Yes.)

Discussion Questions:

- ▶ Present the following questions to the children. Remind them of the importance of the critical decision to set goals.
 1. *Why do you think people make goals or resolutions for themselves on New Year's day?* (Since the new year represents a new beginning, people think of this time as a chance to make a fresh start and do better with their lives.)
 2. *Can people make goals or resolutions any time of the year?* (Yes.)
 3. *How do goals help people do better?* (Goals motivate people to accomplish things because they help people focus and be determined about things they want to accomplish.)
 4. *What are short-term goals?* (Short-term goals are goals that take a short amount of time to accomplish. Examples of short-term goals are: getting a cake baked for your brother's birthday, making a good grade on your spelling test this Friday, or winning the ballgame this weekend.)
 5. *What are long-term goals?* (Long-term goals are goals that take a long amount of time to accomplish. Examples of long-term goals are: becoming an astronaut when you are grown, being undefeated in all baseball games season, or making a quilt with your grandmother.)
 6. *What could happen if a person does not set goals?* (A person who does not set specific goals for him/herself is likely to not accomplish very many things in his/her life.)
 7. *How does a person go about setting a goal?* (Accept any appropriate answers, then review the steps for setting goals.)
- ▶ Distribute a piece of lined paper to each child. Review the following steps for setting goals by saying:

Think of a few (3-5) important things that you would like to do or accomplish. These could be either long- or short-term goals.



HIPPITY HOP RABBIT LEARNS ABOUT GOALS

Ring, ring, ring went Jumpity Jump's phone.

"Hello," said Jumpity Jump Rabbit.

"Hope you had a happy New Year," Hippity Hop Rabbit said to his friend. "I was calling to see if you wanted to come over and watch TV with me today."

"I would love to later, if that is OK. I'm busy right now going over the goals I made for myself for this new year," answered Jumpity Jump.

"Goals?" questioned Hippity Hop Rabbit.

"Yes, goals," replied Jumpity. "I make resolutions or goals each new year so I can make sure I am accomplishing what I want to in my life. What are you doing?"

"Me? Oh, nothing is up with me. I'm lying on my couch. I plan to just relax and watch TV," said Hippity Hop. "I don't like to make plans or set goals for myself. I like to enjoy myself as much as possible and just let the days come and go as they may."

"I like to enjoy myself, too," responded Jumpity Jump. "But you know what? I've found that accomplishing goals is a very enjoyable thing to do. Each goal that I finally reach makes me feel proud of myself and that makes me happy."

"To each his own," replied Hippity Hop. "It doesn't sound like fun to me. But after you finish what you are doing, why don't you stop by and watch a TV program or two?"

“That sounds good to me. I’ll see you later,” said Jumpity Jump.

After hanging up the phone, Jumpity Jump continued going over the goals he had set for himself for the new year.

“OK,” he said to himself, “one of my short-term goals can be accomplished today. The goal I wrote states: My screen door works properly because I tightened the screws on the hinges to keep the door from dragging.”

