

12. Dear Diary

Walk a kilometre in my shoes ...

Themes	Discrimination, Health and welfare, Poverty and social exclusion
Level of complexity	Level 2
Age	8-13 years
Duration	60 minutes
Group size	6-20 children
Type of activity	Story telling, discussion.
Overview	Children read three different accounts of the same experience and discuss mistaken judgments about people
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To practise communication and observation skills • To enhance empathy • To become aware of judgmental attitudes • To understand the subjectivity of individual experience • To discuss the right to education, to play and to health care
Preparation	Adapt the stories 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 ask the children what their character was doing, thinking and feeling at each point. At this point, avoid getting the children to explain the reasons for the campers' different reactions and feelings.
3. Ask members of the group to describe the child whose story they read. Discuss how three children could have such different experience of the same events, asking questions such as:
 - a. Why did these children misunderstand each other?
 - b. Do you think the children would have behaved differently if they had know more about each other's lives? How?
 - c. What misunderstandings did they have about each other?
 - d. How did they make these mistakes?
 - e. Have you ever made mistakes in your opinion of someone else?
 - f. What happens when we misjudge other people?
 - g. What can we do to avoid making mistakes about other people?

Debriefing and Evaluation

1. Debrief the activity by asking question such as:
 - a. What do you think about the three stories?
 - b. Would you enjoy a day like that? Why or why not?
 - c. Are these stories realistic?
 - d. Can you identify with any of these children? Which? Why?



- e. Can you have friends, even when you are poor or unable to read? Why?
 - f. What does friendship mean?
 - g. Are there some people who are more disadvantaged than others in your community? Who are they?
 - h. What can we do to change this situation?
2. Relate the activity to human rights by asking questions such as these:
- a. What human rights were the children enjoying at camp?
 - b. What human rights do they enjoy at home?
 - c. Are the rights of any of these children violated?
 - d. How are they affected by having their rights violated? How will this affect their futures?
 - e. What can be done to prevent rights violations such as these?

Suggestions for follow-up

- Make drawings of the situations in the stories (e.g. the events of the ‘Great adventurous day’, each of children in their home environment, etc.)
- The activity ‘MOST IMPORTANT FOR WHOM?’, p. 118, and ‘SAILING TO A NEW LAND’, p. 152, focuses on the contrasting responses and priorities in the same situation.

Ideas for action

In order to avoid similar misunderstandings within your own group, develop with your children a Code of Conduct for being together.

Tips for the facilitator

- The stories can seem very unrealistic or unfamiliar to some children. Adapt them to reflect your children’s reality and concerns without isolating individual children or embarrassing them through stories too close to their personal realities.
- Especially when working with disadvantaged children, be sensitive to the attitudes children have about themselves and others in their community. Allow children to discuss the issues of disadvantaged children but balance this with building confidence in 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 these stories may provoke in some children, both in assumption 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 children to ask why others act as they do instead of 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.

Variations:

- Read the stories aloud to the children or ask the children to read them. Then discuss, as in Step 3. 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 need some visual materials to remember what happens during the day at camp. Too much information might cause a loss in 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 meet for the first time at the same summer camp. They are the same age and involved in the same activities. One day, the youth leaders organised ‘The Great Adventurous Day’. That evening all three children wrote the story of that day in their diaries.

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. We had exciting activities that were sometimes even dangerous. But I was never afraid. Unlike my friends who did not enjoy everything as I hoped they would. 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 together 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. That seems weird. We all play football after school. 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 we were. He said he was dizzy and his back hurt. I think that was just an excuse not to work. When we finished, our raft was the best ever – even the leader said this! Then the leader counted “1, 2 and 3” and then 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 at first. Luckily the leader helped me out and then we were all laughing. When I told my friends how cold the water really was, Ricardo said he didn't feel like going anymore. I think he was afraid of the cold water. I didn't know before that Ricardo was such a loser! First the wood and then the water! When I told him he should be braver, he ran away crying. I don't think I want to be in the same group with him anymore! Actually, 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. Tomorrow I'll give you more news.

Love, Margaret



HANDOUT: THE STORIES

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. Then I would read all the books in the whole world. 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". So I've never managed to learn how to play.

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 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

Ricardo has a big diary that he has been writing in for several years. This is what he wrote about 'The Great Adventurous Day'.

My dearest Diary,

Again I am writing to tell you how sad and disappointed I am. In the morning we did activities I liked. The secret code is easy for me as I do them all the time at home. And in football I played the goalie like always.

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. Not here! I can even go back for seconds. I like that! I think I am even putting on weight. When I go back home, I won't be the 'skin-and-bones boy' anymore!

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 would be ill for sure and I don't want that anymore. 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. Then I would get healthy again fast! I don't want to tell this to 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. I'll tell you more tomorrow. You are the only one who knows my secrets.

Ricardo

