

THE BIG SWIM

Adopting helpful thoughts

Target competency	Manage one’s emotions and stress effectively
Cross-curricular competency (QEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solve problems
General objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge negative thoughts • Adopt more helpful thoughts



REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS WORKSHOP

Remember, in the last workshop, we talked about the influence of your thoughts on your emotions, sensations and reactions. Do you remember the challenge I gave you? Tell me how you did it.

* The challenge was, when faced with a stressful situation, to use the handout (The influence of your thoughts) to understand their thoughts, feelings, emotions and reactions.

THE ADVENTURES OF LEO AND CHARLIE

Back at camp after an early-morning walk, Charlie and Leo are chatting on the swing.

Charlie wonders: “Hey, Leo! Your eyes are still half-shut even after a wonderful walk. Did you sleep well?”

Leo answers her: “No, not very well...”

“What’s happening, Leo?” asks Charlie.

Leo replies: “Come and see...”

Our two adventurers go look at the poster explaining the challenge of the annual Collins Lake crossing.

Leo explains: “Look. This poster explains the week’s schedule. Today’s the day we have to swim across Collins Lake to Dead Birch Island.”

Charlie reads the poster: “Special challenge for 5th graders. It’s a tradition! Everyone has to swim to Dead Birch Island, about 400 meters from the camp shore. Students are accompanied by counsellors in kayaks or canoes throughout the crossing. Wearing a lifejacket is compulsory for everyone; it’s an important safety issue.”

That’s all it takes for Leo to start worrying: “I’m a lousy swimmer! I’ll never make it across the lake. Or I’ll be the last to arrive. It’s embarrassing. Arrrrgh! It’s stressing me out! I thought about it all night and couldn’t sleep. It was going round and round in my head... I won’t be able to get there. I swim like a rock... I should be called ‘Leo the Rock’.”

DID YOU KNOW?

Anxious students tend to let their thoughts overwhelm them. This prevents them from functioning properly.

Here are some basic concepts to pass on to students to help them manage their thoughts:

- Our minds are full of thoughts, some positive, some negative. That's normal.
- Thoughts stay in our minds for a while, but eventually they go away again. They're not permanent. There's no need to give them too much importance.
- Thoughts don't always represent reality. That's why we shouldn't always believe them or listen to them.
- Thoughts aren't always useful. To find out whether our thinking is helpful or harmful, we can ask ourselves the following question: Does this thought help me with the activity I have to do?

(Leroux, 2016)

INSTRUCTIONS¹

1. Ask the students whether they think Leo's thoughts about the challenge of crossing Collins Lake are helping or hurting him. Ask the students:
 - What helpful thoughts could Leo adopt to approach the challenge in a more positive way? (You can use the table on slide 9.)
2. Inform the students that, thanks to their help, Leo was able to feed his head with more helpful thoughts and take on the challenge of crossing the lake at his own pace. He was proud of his accomplishment.
3. Next, invite the students to carry out a small experiment to illustrate the principle. Give out the *Which would you like to eat?* handout and ask them to look closely at the picture. Ask them the following questions:
 - Which of the fruits shown on the handout would you like to eat?
 - Why did you choose the banana? Why not an orange, apple or pear?
4. Explain that every day, they make choices to nourish their bodies with healthy foods that boost their health and energy. The same choices need to be made to feed their minds and thoughts. Adopting only negative or harmful thoughts (ugly, rotten fruit) can affect their self-confidence, mood and actions. Conversely, adopting more positive and helpful thoughts (nice banana) increases their chances of feeling confident about the challenges they face.
5. In the large group, ask students to name different situations in their lives where they've tended to feed their thoughts on ugly, rotten fruit. Ask them to explain what they were thinking. Write these situations on the board. You can also add more difficult situations that students have recently experienced (conflict, exam, field trip, etc.).
6. Ask the students to form teams of 3 or 4 and give each group a *Feed... my thoughts!* handout. Ask them to work together to find helpful thoughts about three situations of their choice from those written on the board. Then go back into the class group to highlight the helpful thoughts they've found.
7. Explain to the students that it's impossible to completely eliminate negative thoughts. When faced with a more difficult situation, they may wonder whether their thoughts are helping them to take action or, on the contrary, preventing them from facing up to the situation. If their thoughts are holding them back or harming them, they can try to change them into more helpful thoughts.

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¹ Activity inspired Danie Beaulieu, Ph. D., *Académie Impact*.

CHALLENGE

Suggest the following challenge:

- Between now and the next OFF-TRAIL workshop, when you're faced with a difficult situation, try to adopt a more helpful way of thinking about it.



ENABLING REINVESTMENT

Post the illustration of healthy and ugly fruits in the classroom and refer to it when a student brings up a negative or harmful thought, by asking: “Caution! What fruit are you choosing to nourish your thoughts?” Then help them find more nourishing and helpful thoughts.

You can also do this little activity:

- Ask your students to make an inventory of the negative or harmful thoughts they tend to use; a kind of brainstorming on negative phrases they use on occasion or would have heard before. All these sentences could be entered into the computer and printed out.
- Then, in small groups, ask students to take each harmful thought and change it into a helpful one.
- You could create a poster with these helpful phrases and hang it on a classroom wall.
- Whenever a student adopts a negative or harmful thought, you could refer them to this poster and help them transform their thought into a helpful one.

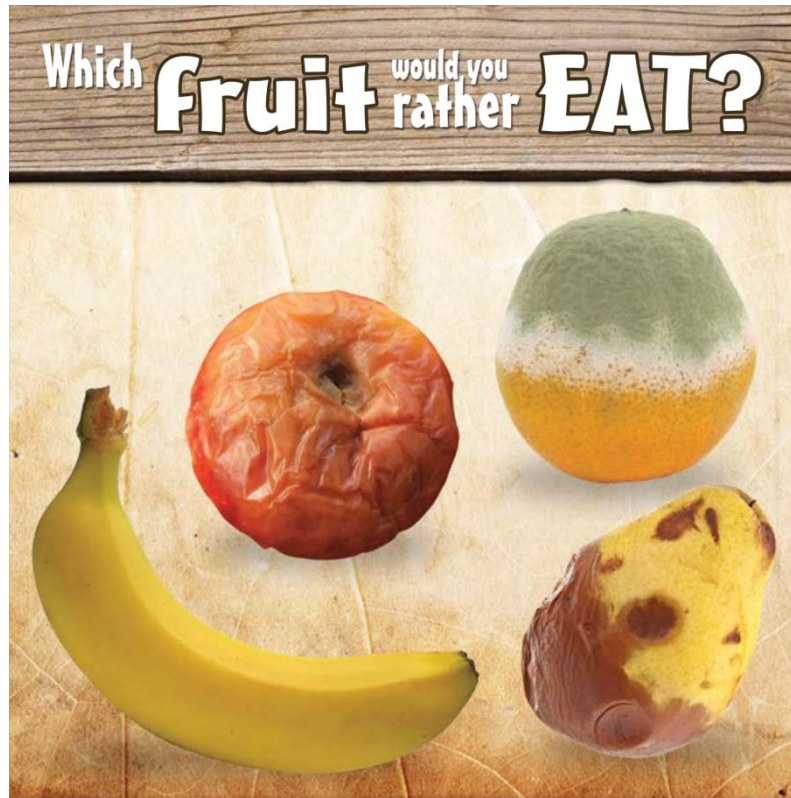
READING SUGGESTIONS

- Kilgore, E. (2020). *The Whatifs*. Little Bee Books.



HANDOUT TO PRINT

Which would you like to eat?



Every day, we make choices when it comes to eating: these have consequences on how we feel and how strong we are through the day. What is at least equally important if not more, are the choices we make on how we treat ourselves in the privacy of our mind. If we pick well the words we tell ourselves, we will feel good. If however we tell ourselves we're terrible and not worthwhile, chances are, we won't feel very strong in the end. The same about how we treat others: if we call them names and judge them for the smallest mistake, like the bad orange or apple, our relations will rot!

How do you feed your mind? How do you feed your relations? Maybe it's worth taking a minute to think about it.

A wonderful metaphor to share with children!

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HANDOUT TO PRINT

Feed... my thoughts!

What's the situation?

In this situation, what helpful thoughts could I adopt?

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