



6th Grade

Stories to Supplement Lessons

Stories are reproduced with permission from the Joseph & Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics from *The Best Is Yet to Come* by Michael Josephson and *You Don't Have to Be Sick to Get Better* by Michael Josephson.

Table of Contents

Sample questions 2

 Admitting Errors..... 3

 Even Frogs Need Encouragement..... 4

 Run, Shaya, Run! 5

 Little League Cheats Don’t Win the Day 6

 “I’m Better Than That” 7

 Gratitude and the Gift of Water 8

 The Gas Can Scam 9

Sample questions

Below are general questions that can be used with the stories.

- What did this story teach us?
- What did this story mean to you?
- What pillar could be tied to this story?
- After hearing this story, is there anything you may do differently from now on?
- Can you relate to the story? In what way?
- Will this story cause you to change your current way of thinking?

Some other thought provoking questions that may apply to the stories are listed below.

- What can happen when we can't control our anger? To other people? To ourselves? How can it affect our life? Our relationships?
- Have you ever been rewarded for a kindness? What did you do?
- Have you ever thanked someone for something kind they did for you?
- Would you help out someone in need? Why? Why not?
- What do you think it means to be a "good person"?
- Was there a time when you made a choice to "do the right thing" instead of something you knew was wrong?
- Describe someone you know who is about getting. Describe someone you know who is about giving. How are they different?
- What can we do to shape our own character/destiny?

Admitting Errors

As several listeners pointed out, I once made a broadcast mistake when I attributed the Army's slogan: "Be all that you can be," to the Marine Corps. I apologized to all concerned. It was a foolish error.

It's a lot easier now for me to admit when I'm wrong than it was earlier in my career. A turning point occurred during my third year of teaching law while I was still the youngest professor at my law school. During one of my classes, after I explained a particular statute, a student suggested that I had misinterpreted the law. In fact, he said, it meant the opposite of what I said. I read the provision again and it was immediately apparent that he was right. More crucially, I was wrong.

My immediate reaction was to confuse the issue and bluff my way through. But I realized that if I failed to fess up, I'd be sending more than 100 soon-to-be lawyers into the world with dangerous information. I remember the sinking feeling that my academic career was about to be nipped in the bud. Though I thought the earth would open up and swallow me, I was surprised that my disclosure simply produced some murmurs and frantic note-taking.

Still, I was mortified and as soon as the class ended I darted for the exit. To my horror, the student who corrected me cut off my escape. I was ready for the worst when he said, "Professor Josephson, I want to thank you. This was the first time I ever saw a teacher admit he was wrong. It was great." Thanks to this gracious student, I not only survived my first public error (there were many more to follow), but I learned that admitting a mistake can actually build credibility. I think of this every time I see someone squirming shamefully to cover up rather than confess an error.

Even Frogs Need Encouragement

A group of frogs was traveling through the woods and two of them fell into a deep pit. All the other frogs gathered around the pit and watched as the imprisoned frogs tried to jump out. The frogs on top could see there was no way out and they started yelling at the frogs to give up. "The pit is too deep. You're as good as dead," the chorus said.

When the trapped frogs kept trying, the crowd yelled louder, "Give up! You're as good as dead!"

After awhile one of the exhausted frogs heeded what the others were saying, and he fell down and died.

But the second frog kept jumping as hard as she could despite the hopelessness conveyed by those who kept yelling at her to accept the inevitable and just die. Finally, with one valiant jump, she made it out of the pit.

You see, this frog was deaf and unable to hear what the others were saying. She thought they were encouraging her the entire time. And that made all the difference.

A woman named Patty, who was homeless for a long time before she became a resident of a Santa Monica transitional housing program, gave a copy of this story to my wife. Patty understood the moral of this parable all too well and she wanted my wife to understand how powerful words can be to people who are down. While negative words can kill the spirit and the will to fight, encouraging words can help the down-and-out become the up-and-out. Patty said she got out of her own deep pit because caring people at this housing program gave her the faith and confidence she needed to jump a little harder.

Run, Shaya, Run!

Speaking at a dinner for a school for learning-disabled children, a father revealed pain and anguish when he wondered aloud about God's purpose in creating children who lack normal mental and physical capabilities. Then, he told this story:

While walking past a park where some boys were playing baseball, his son Shaya asked if he could play. One of the boys who knew that Shaya was not much of an athlete consented. His team was losing by six runs in the eighth inning and he saw no harm. Unexpectedly, however, his team scored, and when it was Shaya's turn to bat, the bases were loaded with two outs in the ninth inning.

Though they were within striking distance of victory, Shaya was allowed to come to the plate. He held the bat awkwardly so the pitcher stepped closed and lobbed the ball softly. Shaya swung clumsily and missed. A teammate helped him hold the bat and together they swung at the next pitch hitting a slow ground ball. After fielding it, the pitcher deliberately threw the ball over the first baseman's head.

Everyone started yelling, "Shaya, run to first. Run to first." Never in his life had Shaya run to first. Quickly, a silent pact of caring was forged among the boys and the right fielder followed the pitcher's lead by throwing the ball over the third baseman's head. Everyone yelled, "Keep running!" The shortstop turned the wide-eyed Shaya in the direction of third base and shouted, "Run to third." Then the boys from both teams screamed, "Run home." Shaya stepped on home plate with a glorious look of triumph and the boys lifted the game's hero on their shoulders. "That day," the speaker said, "I witnessed 18 boys reach their level of God's perfection."

You Don't Have to Be Sick to Get Better by Michael Josephson
Reproduced with permission from the Joseph & Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics

Little League Cheats Don't Win the Day

Danny Almonte was the 14-year-old pitcher who tore his way through the 12-and-under Little League in 2001, winning all 17 games he played. This disgraceful episode of cheating was perpetrated by Danny's father, who forged a birth certificate, and Rolando Paulino, a man with a long history of cheating who founded a league he named after himself.

Little League president Stephen Keener put it plainly and accurately: "Clearly, adults have used Danny Almonte and his teammates in a most contemptible and despicable way. Their actions are reprehensible."

It added fuel to the fire to learn that Almonte and Paulino had done the same thing with Danny's older brother. The scary thing is that the scam almost worked. The team placed third in the World Series, losing only because Danny could not pitch every game, and Danny received the kind of fame that legends and very large signing bonuses are made of.

Diligent efforts of suspicious opponents to prove Danny was a ringer had consistently failed. Only the persistence of a Sports Illustrated reporter uncovered the truth. To those who minimize the two-year difference, keep in mind that by pretending to be a 12-year-old Danny could throw his 70-mile-per-hour fastball from a mound 40 feet away. If he played kids his own age it would have been 60 feet.

Paulino and the Almontes stole opportunity from every team they played, but to the credit of the Little League organization that has fought mightily to assure that fair play and sportsmanship prevail, and some really classy parents and kids from College Park, Pennsylvania, and Oceanside California (teams that suffered elimination in the regional and national finals), the virus of cheating failed to destroy the gratitude and good memories of the boys who played it straight.

You Don't Have to Be Sick to Get Better by Michael Josephson
Reproduced with permission from the Joseph & Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics

“I’m Better Than That”

Ron, a nine-year-old boy, was being raised by his mother who didn’t know how to cope with his uncontrollable temper. She knew he was angry that his father abandoned him, and she tried professional counseling, but nothing seemed to work. So she sent Ron to spend the summer on his grandparent’s farm. When he came home he was a changed boy. His mom asked him what had happened.

Ron told her that every time he got mad or said anything unkind, Grandpa Hal made him go outside and hammer a big two-inch nail into a two-by-four. It was really hard and he wasn’t allowed back until the nail was all the way in. After about 20 trips to the shed, he decided it was easier to control his temper than hammer those nails.

“So,” his mom said, “you hated the consequence so much you just changed?”

“Well,” he answered, “that was part of it. After I had hit all these nails and was behaving pretty well, Grandma Grace took me outside and made me pull out all the nails. That was just as hard. But when I was done she gave me this note that I’ve been carrying around.”

The note said: “Pulling out nails is like saying you’re sorry. But remember the holes you left in the board. You can’t fix it by being sorry, but you can stop making new holes. Remember, every time you do something mean and nasty you are making a hole somewhere, in someone. That’s what your Dad did to you. Please don’t do that to anyone else. You are better than that.”

“You know what, Mom,” Ron said, “Grandma’s right. I’m better than that.”

Gratitude and the Gift of Water

Long ago a young man crossing a desert came upon a spring of cool, crystal-clear water. The water was so delightful that he thought how much his grandfather

Saul would love it, so he filled his leather canteen. After a two-day journey he presented the water to Saul, who immediately tasted it with an expression of great pleasure. He lavishly thanked his grandson, who went away with a happy heart.

Another grandson tasted the water and found it awful. The water had become stale because of the old leather container. Puzzled, the boy said, "Grandfather the water was foul. Why did you pretend to like it?" Saul replied, "I wasn't pretending. It wasn't the water I tasted. I tasted the kindness of the heart that labored two days to bring it to me."

Saul's gracious reaction was itself a generous gift rewarding his grandson's thoughtfulness. And the lesson he taught the second grandson was still another gift: gratitude uplifts both the giver and receiver.

We have to learn, by words and example, that the thing given is simply the container for the love it embodies. It's as if each gift has a heart, a piece of the heart of the person who gave it. Gratitude is about appreciating the heart.

The Gas Can Scam

Jim and Sheryl were newly married and on a limited budget, living in Chicago. A tall red-headed man approached them with an empty gas can. "I'm stranded. Could you spare \$5 so I could get gas?" he asked. "If you'll give me your address I'll send it back to you."

"Of course," Sheryl said. "You may need a few more dollars. Here's a ten. Good luck!"

Jim rolled his eyes but Sheryl shrugged, "He needed help."

A week later, Jim was reading the paper for breakfast when he burst out laughing. Apparently a tall red-headed man has been arrested for approaching people with an empty gas can and asking for \$5. It was a scam. The police found 28 five dollar bills in his pocket—and one ten dollar bill. Jim laughed, "The ten might as well have had your name on it," he told Sheryl. "That's what you get for giving money to everyone with a sob story."

Was Sheryl a fool? I don't think so. Sure, she was victimized by a clever crook. But what's the alternative? Should we let conscienceless creeps harden our hearts to pleas for help?

The downside risk of being suckered occasionally is vastly outweighed by the risk that, in our cynicism, we will turn our backs on someone who is truly in need. I'd rather be wrong than heartless.

The day we stop helping one another in order to guarantee not being taken advantage of is the day evil wins. Of course our kindness will keep cons and cheats in business, but we can live with that. When our motives are pure, we should be able to live with embarrassment of being played for a fool. What we can't accept is a society where caring and compassion shrivel under our suspicions.