

A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

PARENTING WITH A STORY

.....
REAL-LIFE LESSONS IN CHARACTER
FOR PARENTS AND CHILDREN
TO SHARE
.....

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How to Use This Discussion Guide

Congratulations! The fact that you've taken the time to download this discussion guide shows that you take seriously this opportunity to help your child grow and develop his or her character. Use it and you'll both be glad you did.

What follows are sets of four or five questions for each of the 101 stories in the book *Parenting with a Story: Real-Life Lessons in Character for Parents and Children to Share*. As outlined in the Introduction, each story is not intended to be the final word on the subject, but only the beginning. After each telling, have a conversation with your young person. Much of the wisdom you impart will come from the discussion, not just from the story. Talk about the events in the story and how well or poorly you think the people in the story behaved. Would you have done the same thing if you'd been in their situation? Or something entirely different? Recall that these stories are experiences in the lives of ordinary people as they confronted life's most important crossroads. You and your child can draw wisdom from them by following the path of the person in the story. Or you may recommend the opposite. That's up to you. Most importantly, have your young person brainstorm ways he or she could apply the wisdom in the story (or from your discussion) to their life.

These questions, then, are intended to help start that discussion with

your young person after each story. Most help you consider the key lesson in the story. But the final question in each set is designed to help you consider when that lesson might *not* be true. Life has few absolutes. Every character strength should be exercised within reasonable limits. This final question will challenge you to decide where those boundaries should lie.

And as important as this discussion is to your child to extract the wisdom and meaning from each story, this discussion does something even more important for the two of you. It's an all-too-rare opportunity for you to get to know your child better and strengthen your relationship. The discussion will give you a surprising insight into what your children think and feel, what their hopes and dreams are, their fears and worries, who the friends are they hold most dear, and who they consider their rivals or adversaries. If you learn as much as you teach, it's a sign you're doing it right.

But in order for that to happen, you'll have to resist the natural adult tendency to immediately "teach" the lesson in the story. In fact, the first thing you should do after sharing any story is not to say anything at all; it's to listen. Give your child the opportunity to digest the story and provide an unbiased response. Their reaction will often be an even more productive place to start than the questions below. And how you respond will determine how much you're both able to learn.

For example, imagine you've just shared the story from the Introduction about my father eating the quiche, and your child says, "Well, that's a nice story, but I would have ordered the club sandwich." It might be tempting to respond, "Really? Then I don't think you understood the point of the story. Let me explain . . ." There will be a time to make your interpretation of the story clear. But it's not now. Wait until after you've explored your child's reaction first.

A better response, therefore, would be, "Interesting. Why do you think ordering the club sandwich would be the right choice?"

With a response like that, you allow the conversation to progress along the lines of your child's thinking, which would be shut down if you immediately interject the "correct" interpretation. The discussion might go something like this:

CHILD: I would have ordered the club sandwich because, well, there's a kid in my class and he's always doing things just to be different. If everyone wants to go to the movies, he'll say he wants to play football. If we all want to play football, he says he wants to go to the movies. It gets on my nerves.

PARENT: So, you like when everybody agrees?

CHILD: Yeah, I like a good team spirit.

Now you've learned some interesting things about your child: what bothers him or her, interactions at school, a fellow classmate, and how he or she thinks about the value of social harmony. You may choose to pursue that line of discussion for a while before returning to the intended lesson of the story and the questions in this guide. But if you start with the lesson, you're less likely to get around to the other benefits. Your child will naturally follow your lead and will have seen the main point of the discussion come to an end.

Lastly, after using these questions for several stories, you might find yourself not needing them for the remaining stories in the book. You and your child may develop a more spontaneous and curiosity-inspired pattern of debate after each story. The more comfort you develop sharing these stories and the more comfortable your child gets with hearing them and talking about them, the less need you'll have for this guide. If that happens, I'd consider it success for all of us.

Good luck. And enjoy your conversations.

Introduction

1. Eating the quiche

- What would you have ordered for lunch that day? Why?
- Has anyone ever teased you for something you did? What was it, and how did you react?
- What ideas does this story give you for how to react next time someone teases you for something?
- When do you think it might be a good idea to avoid conflict and just do whatever the crowd wants you to do?

PART I: WHO YOU ARE

Chapter 1. Ambition

2. On becoming an astronaut

- Do you agree with the idea that it's better to set high goals and fall short than set low goals and achieve them? Why or why not?
- Would Bob have been better off trying to become a dentist or an engineer and being successful at it?

- What's one dream or goal that you have for your life right now?
- What kind of things might you do on the road to achieving that goal?
- When would you consider not achieving one of your goals to be a failure so painful you would regret having ever tried?

3. National Merit scholar picks local college

- What do you think it would feel like to regret something for thirty years?
- Do you think you're more likely in life to regret things you did and wish you hadn't? Or things you didn't do and wish you had?
- How do you think Kelly would have felt if she had applied and been accepted to an Ivy League school but decided to attend Hendrix anyway?
- What regrets do you have so far in your life? Is it too late to do something about them?
- When would be a situation in which you might be glad you didn't pursue higher goals?

4. Better to be the head of a dog than the tail of a lion

- Do you agree or disagree with the advice that it's better to be the head of a dog than the tail of a lion? Why or why not?
- Would you rather be the best player on the worst team in your soccer league or the worst player on the team that wins first place?
- Do you think Junichi did the right thing by switching from baseball to tennis?
- What opportunities do you have to be the head of a dog right now in your life?
- What opportunities do you have to be the tail of a lion?

5. *Best Crash in the Pinewood Derby*

- What do you think about Ben's decision to design his car for Best Crash instead of Fastest Car or Best in Show like the other Cub Scouts?
- Are there things you do that you don't think you'll ever be very successful at?
- How can you redefine your own definition of success in those circumstances, like Ben did?
- What things would you *not* want to define your own standard of success for?

6. *Letting go of the status and the suit*

- Is working for a big, prestigious company with a fancy office important to you? If not, what kind of environment do you want to work in?
- What would you be willing to do to get a job at a place like that? What would you not be willing to do?
- Have you ever worked somewhere, gone to school somewhere, or had a set of friends that you wanted to be part of so badly that you did things you might not be proud of?
- Can you think of any goals or dreams you've had that might be good to let go of?

Chapter 2. Open-Mindedness

7. *Women's voices in the men's room*

- When you disagree with other people about things, what percent of the time do you think you're right and they're wrong?
- When during the story did you realize Jim was actually in the women's bathroom?

- How does it feel when you're in an argument about something and you realize you were wrong? Do you feel smarter because you learned something? Or embarrassed or angry that you were wrong?
- What are some things you could do to make it easier to be open to having your mind changed when new information presents itself?
- Are there some situations where it's not good to be open-minded? Are there things you want to maintain your opinion about despite any new evidence or anyone else's opinion?

8. *Solving the matrix . . . horizontally*

- How do you think the professor felt when he realized Luigi was doing the problem right after all?
- What's another way the professor could have told Luigi he might be doing the problem wrong without sounding so sure of himself?
- How might the story have ended if the professor had insisted his way of solving the problem was the only correct way?
- Think of the last argument you had with someone, especially their side of the argument. Is it possible you were both right?
- What's an example of a situation where there really is only one right way to do something?

9. *The Japanese maple tree*

- How do you think Thaler's friend felt when she found out the tree was a tribute to someone's daughter who died of cancer?
- Instead of saying, "That's stupid!" what might have been better for Thaler's friend to say when she saw the fence around the tree that she thought was odd?
- Recall the last thing that made you say, "That's dumb" or "That's stupid!" Now think of two good reasons it could be the way it was, even if those reasons aren't true.
- What's an example of a situation where it's okay to conclude that something you see is wrong or silly or foolish?

10. *Wrestling coach out of her seat?*

- What might have happened if I had reacted to what I first thought was unfair treatment by the referee?
- Have you ever heard someone say something like, “The world is full of idiots,” or “Most people can’t think their way out of a cardboard box”? Do you think that’s true?
- Describe a situation in which you were the one that was thought silly because someone didn’t understand the truth of the situation.
- Most of the time, we’re too quick to judge situations like this. But what are situations where it’s important to make very quick judgments and decisions?

Chapter 3. Creativity

11. *“Michael, what do you see?”*

- Do you think you’re a creative person? Why or why not?
- Would you rather have a toy that comes in pieces with specific instructions on how to build it, or toy pieces that can be made into anything you can think up, but with no instructions?
- Next time you’re about to throw something away because it doesn’t work anymore, look at it closely and ask yourself, “What do you see?”
- Can you think of times it’s important to not be creative? Times to see things objectively or do things only as they are usually done?

12. *No toys with batteries*

- What do you think about the “no batteries” rule at Emma’s house?
- If your parents had the same rule, what kinds of things would you have to give up?
- And what do you think you would start spending your time doing?
- What are some things that use electricity that allow you to be highly creative?

13. *James and the tea kettle*

- What do you think would have happened if James Watt's aunt had kept him from ever playing with the tea kettle?
- Have you ever created anything interesting after just playing around with something?
- When do you think you're most creative? In the morning? At night? When you're bored? When you're super busy?
- When are some times when it's important to be serious and not play?

Chapter 4. Curiosity and Learning

14. *Boy Scouts finding the dry wood*

- What kinds of things are you the most curious about? What kinds of things do you have a passion to learn about?
- How would the story have gone if Paul had just told the scouts where to find dry wood in the first place?
- What's the last thing you remember being proud and excited to discover?
- What's an example of a question you'd want someone to answer directly without letting you try to discover the answer for yourself?

15. *"Don't hit the flagpole!"*

- Do you think Louise-Audrey would have hit the flagpole if her dad had never told her, "Don't hit the flagpole"?
- What kind of negative things do you spend time focusing on?
- What would be the positive alternative to those things to focus on instead?
- Can you think of an example where focusing on a negative will actually help you?

16. *Scouting vs. theater, and valedictorian vs. choir*

- If you were Austin, would you have made the same decisions? Why or why not?
- Have you ever had to choose between two important activities? How did you make the decision?
- Have you ever taken a class or dropped a class just because of the impact it would have on your GPA?
- When do you think it might be better to go along with what someone else is suggesting you do instead of what you think?

17. *Leaving Negroes for college: Fifty years later*

- If Marvin's father hadn't gone off to college in Manila, what do you think Marvin's life would be like today?
- What are your education plans? Why?
- If you go through with those plans, what impact might that have on your kids and their kids someday?
- What if you did the opposite of those plans? What impact might that have on your kids and their kids someday?

18. *"I started as a geneticist. Now I'm an artist."*

- Have you felt any anxiety or stress over choosing your education or career path? Tell me about that.
- What would happen if you decided you didn't like your first job out of college? What else could you do with the degrees you'll have? Or what else might you want to go back and study?
- How many jobs or careers have your parents had so far?
- What kinds of decisions do you think are made for a lifetime?

Chapter 5. Courage

Not joining the softball team

- Can you recall two or three things you tried but gave up on soon after? What were they? Is it too late to try again?
- Name something you'd like to do now but have been afraid to try.
- How long do you think it takes for people to get really good at something new, like learning to play the guitar or throw a baseball or write poetry?
- Can you think of something some people are just naturally good at without having to learn and practice?

20. *Passing on the basket of oranges*

- Why do you think Glenda's mother told her to not take an orange until the second time around? What was she trying to teach her daughters?
- When is it okay to take something offered to you?
- Have you ever heard the saying, "Ask for what you want. The worst thing that could happen is that the answer will be 'no.'" Do you agree or disagree?
- What's a situation where you should say, "No thank you" even if you want what's being offered?

21. *Going to Les Mis all by myself*

- Have you ever gone off to do something exciting all by yourself? What was it?
- Have you ever wanted to go do something, like Kelly, but nobody would go with you? What did you do?
- What's something you missed out on because you were too afraid to go alone?
- What's something you should never go off to do by yourself?

22. *Staying in Austria*

- What would you have done if you lived in Austria before World War II? Would you have stayed or left?
- What do you think of the saying, “All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to remain silent”? When has that ever happened before? When could it happen again?
- When do you think it’s appropriate to stay and fight for what you believe in?
- In what kind of situation would it be appropriate to leave instead?

23. *Beating Matt Cooper*

- Would you have taken Coach Wilson up on his offer to switch places with Matt Cooper? Why or why not?
- What’s the most competitive situation you’ve ever been in, where you felt the most highly motivated to succeed?
- Can you think of a situation where you could use the “burn your ships” strategy to better motivate yourself to achieve something important to you?
- In what kind of situation would you *not* want to employ that kind of high-risk strategy?

24. *Standing up without getting your nose broken*

- Has anyone ever picked on you or tried to start a fight with you? What did you do?
- What do you think about Jim’s strategies to avoid getting in fights with bigger kids or his commanding officer or his boss at work?
- Do you know anyone that uses these or similar strategies effectively? How do they do it?
- What kind of situation would warrant standing up and fighting instead?

Chapter 6. Integrity25. *“She put the peanut in my nose!”*

- What do you think would have happened to Natalia if she’d just told her parents the truth to begin with, that she put the peanut in her own nose?
- How do you think Natalia’s friend next door felt when she heard that Natalia had accused her of putting the peanut in her nose? How do you think her parents felt?
- Have you ever been tempted to blame something you did on someone else?
- Can you think of a situation where it might be appropriate to say something that isn’t true?

26. *Taking the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle*

- How would you feel if your best friend stole something of yours?
- How do you think you would feel if you got caught stealing something from a friend, like Andrew did?
- How would you feel even if you didn’t get caught?
- Have you ever heard the saying, “Tell the truth and you won’t have to remember all the lies you told”? What does that mean to you?
- Can you think of a situation where it might be appropriate to take something that doesn’t belong to you?

27. *The long division contract*

- Do you think it was fair for Holly’s mother to make her stay up till 3 a.m. to finish her math?
- Have you ever signed a contract? What was it for? And did you complete your part of the arrangement?
- Has someone ever made you a promise they didn’t keep? How did that make you feel?
- What’s a situation that might make it okay to break your word?

28. *How Larry Bird picked his agent*

- Why do you think Larry didn't want anyone to know how much money Tommy John made?
- How difficult do you think it was for Bob to treat Larry Bird like all his other clients when it meant that he might not get the biggest job of his life?
- Most people like to do business with people they trust. Do you think you could trust Bob Woolf? Why or why not?
- Can you think of a situation when not sticking to your convictions would be a good idea?

Chapter 7. Self-Reliance

29. *The Steve Blair sidewalk*

- What do you think would have happened if Steve had never written that letter to the mayor?
- Have you ever been called to the principal's office?
- What's something you think needs to be done but nobody has done anything about it yet? What could you do to make it happen?
- In what kind of situation would it be best to let someone else fix the problem instead of you?

30. *Free Wheelchair Mission*

- What would Lotus Blossom be doing now if it weren't for Don's mission?
- Have you ever seen something that bothered you and wondered, "Why doesn't somebody do something about that?"
- What could *you* do about it?

31. Paying for Ritvik's leukemia

- Do you think it was fair of the insurance company to deny paying for Ritvik's care?
- What do you think about Mohit's employer's decision to pay his medical bills anyway?
- Have you ever had someone refuse to do something for you, and then you ended up getting it done by yourself? What did you learn from that?
- What's a situation where being told "no" should be the end of the story?

32. The only applicant getting the internship

- What difference do you think Emily's passionate essay would have made if there had been other candidates for the job?
- How do you think Emily would have felt if she hadn't applied for the job and then found out it was canceled because nobody applied for it?
- Have you ever entered a race or competition and gotten a prize because you were the only one that entered?
- How do you know when it's a good idea to follow your instincts and when it's a good time to follow the advice of the people around you?

Chapter 8. Grit*33. Persistence to be president*

- What's the last thing you failed at doing?
- How many times did you try before you gave up?
- What do you think would have happened if you'd tried three more times?

- What do you think this country would be like if Abraham Lincoln had given up after several failures?
- How do you know when it's time to really give up?

34. Learning the kip

- Have you ever done anything a thousand times? What was it?
- What skill or sport are you the best at? About how many times have you done it?
- What skill are you the worst at? About how many times have you tried it?
- How good do you think you would be at it if you did it as many times as the thing you're really good at?

35. Losing the wrestling tournament

- If Kirk hadn't been so sure he would win the wrestling match, what might he have done differently to prepare?
- What are you in the middle of right now that might look like failure but could be well worth it looking back in a few years?
- How can you tell when someone is being too confident about winning?
- When is a good time to think about the future versus thinking about today?

36. Quitting the team before tryouts end

- Which is worse, having your mother or father disappointed in you for quitting or knowing you got cut from a team?
- What are you afraid of failing at?
- What have you not tried in the past just because you were afraid to fail?
- How do you know when it's time to give up?

Chapter 9. Hard Work and Struggles in Life*37. Ahmad the caddie*

- What are examples of things people do to show pride in their work?
- Why do you think Ahmad went out of his way so much to teach Vikram how to do his job?
- What do you think Ahmad meant when he said, “If I do my job well, it reflects well on who I am and where I come from”?
- What kinds of things do people do that show a *lack* of pride in their work?
- If you’re not proud of your job, what should you do?

38. “Why are you sitting on your ass?”

- Do you agree with Shawn’s conclusion that it’s better to work hard until the job is done than to work halfheartedly, even if you get the job done in either case? Why or why not?
- What are some other things Shawn could have done instead of sitting down to finish the job?
- When you see someone working along the side of a road, leaning against their shovel doing nothing, what do you think about them? And is that a fair thing to conclude?
- How do you know when it’s time to relax and not work so hard?

39. Paying for the psychiatrist

- What does the saying “That which we obtain too easily, we esteem too lightly” mean to you?
- Do you have any toys or clothes or a car that you had to work hard to earn the money to buy? How well do you take care of that item compared to things your parents gave you for free?
- Do you think the psychiatrist was justified in refusing to take John’s friend as a patient?

- Can you think of some things that you don't have to work for that are extremely valuable to you?

40. Staying in Germany after a lost love

- Have you ever been through a breakup like Dorinda's? If so, what good do you think the struggle will produce for you?
- Have you ever wished you could be more assertive at home, school, or work? What do you think you could do to learn that?
- If you could wave a magic wand and change anything about yourself, what would it be? What do you think you could do to make that happen?
- What kind of feelings or behavior is an indication that some struggle you're going through is not healthy and that you should get some professional help?

41. Junior Achievement Teacher of the Year

- Why do you think Cindy accepted the job of teaching economics when she knew she didn't like economics?
- How would Cindy's life be different if she never took the initiative to make all those changes to the economics class?
- Do you have a job or chore that you dread doing? What changes could you make to it so that it would be more fun and rewarding for you?
- What kind of job should you leave the same and never make changes to?

Chapter 10. Self-Confidence

42. Killing the rabbit

- How do you think Sarah felt when she saw the dead rabbit? Why wasn't she concerned about the dead rabbit? What did bother her?

- Is there someone you would do just about anything to get to like you?
- Have you ever done anything you didn't feel good about just because you wanted someone else to like you? If you could go back and do it all over, would you?
- If Sarah had realized what her brother was going to do, what could she have said to back out of it nicely?
- Who do you think it's important to have like you?

43. *Physicist grills a steak*

- Do you ever worry about what other people think of you?
- Has that ever stopped you from doing something you wanted to do?
- What's the worst thing that could happen if you did it anyway?
- What are some situations where it does really matter what other people think of you?

44. *The international soccer match*

- Why do you think the foreign students weren't as confident as the American students?
- Do you think it was fair for Dr. Shriberg to pick soccer as the game for all the incoming students to play, instead of baseball or American football?
- If someone were new to your school, how could you build their confidence in a similar way?
- Next time you're in a new school, grade, job, etc., what kind of thing could you arrange to participate in that you're already good at to build your confidence?
- What's an example of a situation where you'd want to completely immerse yourself in something new and not do anything old and familiar?

Chapter 11. Self-Discipline: Money and Delayed Gratification*45. The magic of compound interest*

- Are you surprised at how much money the pennies added up to after a month, or how high the folded paper would stack? Try to calculate those numbers yourself and see what you come up with.
- What age do you want to be when you retire?
- What are some other things Jack could choose to do without in order to save as much money as Kate?
- Will you be a Jack? Or will you be a Kate?
- What kinds of things does it make sense to go into debt to buy?

46. Summers in Bombay

- How does your home compare to the one Ami's family rented in Bombay?
- If having a fancy home isn't what they needed to be happy, what do you think made them happy?
- How would you feel if you found out that your friends and family thought what you needed to be happy was a constant supply of gifts and other material possessions? Would you agree or disagree with that assessment? Would you be proud of it?
- What makes you happy?
- What are the few basic material possessions you think you would absolutely need to be happy?

47. Wrecking the Mazda Miata

- Are you interested in having a fancy sports car someday? If not, what other expensive thing would you like to have that could take years to save up and pay for?
- What would you need to do to take care of that thing so that you don't lose it quickly like Jun-seo did?

- Why do you think his obsession with the car and the money to get it cost Jun-seo so many friendships?
- What kinds of things do you think it's important to buy of the finest quality? And for what kinds of things are cheaper options okay?

48. *Looking for presents before Christmas*

- Have you ever looked for presents before you were supposed to get them? Did you find them? And how did that make you feel?
- What do you think Richard did when he opened up that present on Christmas morning? What do you think he should have done?
- Has anyone ever spoiled a surprise for you, like telling you the end of a movie before you'd seen it? How did it make you feel?
- Can you think of a surprise that you would not want to wait to find out, one that you'd want to know about as soon as possible?

49. *"I want some f'ing candy!"*

- If you always got everything you wanted, exactly when you wanted it, what kind of person would you grow up to be?
- What kinds of things do you see your parents do that you think might not be setting a good example for you?
- When you hear other people your age use bad language, what do you think about them?
- Have you ever been embarrassed in front of a group of people? What was it like?
- What kinds of things do you do or say that might embarrass your parents if their friends saw you doing them?

Chapter 12. Health

50. *Know the symptoms*

- Do you know anyone who's had a heart attack?

- How did it happen? Did they know they were having a heart attack? Ask them to tell you their story.
- Describe the symptoms of a heart attack in your own words. What would someone look like if it were happening to them? What would it feel like if it were happening to you?
- What kinds of things do you need to do to avoid having a heart attack? How good are you and your parents at doing those things?

51. Battling obesity and anorexia

- How would you describe your weight? Too heavy? Too slim? Just fine?
- What do you think the ideal weight is for you at this age? How much do you weigh now?
- Have you ever tried to gain weight or lose weight? How did you do it? Did it work?
- How do you think it made Fadia's mother feel to watch her child get sicker and sicker and not know what was wrong with her?
- If you wanted to lose weight, what do you think is a healthy way to do that?

Chapter 13. Positive Mental Attitude

52. Hurricane at the hardware store

- Have you ever done anything that was important and helpful for other people? What was it? And how did it make you feel to be able to help them?
- Have you ever been in a bad situation and really needed help yourself? Did someone help you?
- What do you call someone who helps other people in an emergency? What kinds of jobs do those people have? Do you look up to them?
- What's an example of a situation where you shouldn't try to be a hero but should just focus on saving yourself?

53. *“Because the sky is blue”*

- Are you happy? Why or why not?
- When are you not happy? What makes you unhappy?
- What do you think would make you happier?
- What if everything in your life was going to be exactly like it is during those times when you’re unhappy, and you couldn’t change it? What would you do?

54. *The happiest place in the hospital*

- You may have heard that having a life-threatening illness can give you a different perspective on life. What do you think that means?
- If today was your very last day to live, what kinds of things would you stop worrying about? What kinds of things would you start worrying about?
- If you were locked away all alone in an empty room and you wanted to be happy for one hour, what would you think about?
- Do you think there are times where it’s good to be unhappy? What about angry? Sad?

55. *“One thing I didn’t know” at the stat course*

- Think about the last time you attended a class or read a book you thought was awful. Now try to think of at least one positive thing you learned from it.
- Who do you think learns more in a class? The people looking for things they don’t know? Or the people looking for things they already know or things they don’t like about the class?
- Who do you think enjoyed the class better, Dorinda or the man sitting next to her?
- When would it make sense to focus on finding things wrong with the class you’re in instead of looking for what you can learn?

56. *“Happy birthday, John Ray!”*

- What do you worry about the most?
- Think of the last time you spent a lot of time worrying about something. How did it turn out?
- Did all of your worrying help?
- Can you think of a situation where worrying would be a good thing to do?

57. *Climbing Kilimanjaro*

- Have you ever been having a really bad day, and then someone cheered you up? What did they say or do that helped?
- Do you know anyone who seems to always be happy? How does it make you feel to spend time with them?
- Do you know someone who seems to always be sad? How do you think it makes them feel to spend time with you?
- If a good attitude is contagious, do you think a bad attitude is also contagious? What should you do if you have a bad attitude to make sure you don't infect other people with it?

Chapter 14. Dealing with Loss

58. *The great Berkeley fire*

- Have you ever lost anything that was very important to you? What was it? Were you able to get another one?
- Has anyone you loved ever died? How did you deal with that?
- What do you think Debbie meant by “Life is the combination of things that happen to us, and how we choose to respond to them”?
- Other questions, if age-appropriate: What does “unprotected sex” mean, and why did that lead to Debbie having a baby? What does it mean to have an “abortion,” and what do you think about Debbie's decision to not have one?

59. *“One Dark Branch”*

- Do you know anyone who’s lost a family member? What are their family relationships like now? Do you think they might benefit from hearing this poem?
- How do you think it is that other senses can improve in someone after they lose their sight, for example?
- If one of your parents died, how do you think they would want you to behave as a family after they were gone?

60. *The passing of my Japanese father*

- Do you think Andrew’s host mother would have asked him to stay another three months if her husband hadn’t died?
- And if she did, do you think Andrew would have agreed to stay? Why or why not?
- If someone in your family died, what kinds of things would the remaining family members do that would show you were growing stronger and closer as a family?
- Can you think of a time in life when it might be good to sever your relationships with other people?

PART II: HOW YOU TREAT OTHER PEOPLE**Chapter 15. Kindness**61. *Free hugs*

- How do you feel when someone gives you a tight, honest, loving hug?
- When’s the last time someone gave you something that was free, something really free, not as a trick to get you to give them something back? How did you feel afterwards?
- Have you ever heard the phrase, “Pay it forward?” What do you think that means?

- What do you think you could do that would bring more joy into the world? What's keeping you from doing it?
- How do you know when it's time to stop being nice to someone?

62. *Walk of shame to the nerd table*

- If you were a student at Scott's high school, at which of those tables would you likely sit?
- Do you think Scott regretted teasing those other kids after he ended up turning to them for friendship?
- Who are some of the people at your school that get teased and made fun of? How do you feel when you see that happen?
- What should you do when you see other people making fun of someone?

63. *Basketball team has lunch with Jenny*

- Are there any kids at your school in a wheelchair? What are their names? What else do you know about them? Who is their best friend? What are their dreams?
- When Chad's father showed up at school, do you think Chad wished his dad had just stayed at work? What about now? Do you think he's changed his mind?
- Is there anyone at your school that eats lunch alone every day? How do you think they'd feel if you joined them tomorrow?
- Are there any good reasons to not be friends with someone? What might those reasons be?

64. *Ants on their way home from work*

- Do you think it was okay for Anand to knock the ants off the log like he was? Why or why not?
- Do you ever play with smaller animals in a way that Anand's grandfather would disapprove? What would your mother or father think about that? What do you think about it?

- Have you ever thought about the food you eat and where it comes from?
- What are some situations when it's okay to harm or kill another living creature?

65. *A street corner in Caracas*

- Do you think it was a good idea for Bryan to give that 800 bolivars to the boy on the street? Why or why not?
- The median household income worldwide is about \$10,000 (U.S. dollars) a year. That means about half of all families in the world live on more than that and half live on less than that. How much money does your family live on per year?
- How much of your allowance or income do you think is appropriate to give to charities?
- What charities do you support?
- What should you do if a stranger approaches you on the street and asks you for money? What kind of things should you consider when deciding what to do?
- What are some reasons why you should not give money to someone who appears to need it more than you?

66. *Gleaning rice fields for hungry kids*

- Do you know anyone who doesn't get enough food to eat every day?
- Can you imagine how difficult it must be to concentrate and study if you're hungry?
- Have you ever volunteered your time to a charitable organization? What was it? And how did you feel when you finished?
- What's the difference between giving people food to eat and giving them money to buy their own food? What are some of the pros and cons to doing each one?
- What are you doing after school today?

Chapter 16. Patience*67. Canoeing the rapids*

- How many times do you generally have to try something before you get the hang of it? Whatever your answer is, that's probably how many times someone else needs to try something before they get the hang of it too.
- How do you think his partner would have felt if Dave had said, "How about you just get out of the canoe and let me take it through the rapids by myself"?
- Has anyone ever given up waiting for you to do something and said, "Here, just let me do it"? How did that make you feel?
- What's an example of a situation where it's a better idea to be impatient?

68. Quitting Notre Dame

- How is listening a form of showing patience?
- Michael's uncle barely said anything on the phone. So why do you think that call helped Michael so much?
- When you're having a conversation with your friends, how much of the time do you spend talking versus listening?
- When is it a bad idea to just listen without saying anything?

69. A probing question at the pub

- How is asking questions more like listening than like talking?
- Have you ever told someone really important to you that you wanted to talk about something, but they just turned the conversation to themselves or another subject and never asked you any questions? How did that make you feel?
- How does it make you feel when someone asks you questions about your life and what's important to you?

- How can you tell when someone doesn't want to talk about something and maybe it's a good idea to just move on to another topic?

Chapter 17. Fairness and Justice

70. *No fireworks on July 4th*

- What does the justice of the law say about fireworks in your neighborhood?
- What about public opinion? Do you think the people in your neighborhood would agree with Bradley? Or Mr. Pease?
- And what does your conscience tell you the right thing to do is in this situation?
- If you were Bradley, what would you do?
- If you were Mr. Pease, what would you do?

71. *The Christmas Triangle*

- What did Aquiles and Carmen have to stop doing in order to start looking for a compromise?
- Do you think compromising means losing an argument? Or winning? Or something else?
- Think about the last time you disagreed with someone over how something should be done. What would have been a good compromise?
- What's an example of a situation where you would never want to compromise?

72. *The shared blanket*

- What do you think of the father's decision to send the grandfather out when he could no longer earn his keep?
- Do you think he was surprised when his son explained why he only brought back half the blanket? Do you think he might reconsider his decision?

- Think about the people you spent time around today. Did you treat each of them the way you would want to be treated?
- When do you think it's appropriate to treat someone differently than you would want them to treat you?

Chapter 18. Humility

73. Carving the Thanksgiving turkey

- In what ways is pride the opposite of humility?
- How was letting her grandfather micromanage her an act of humility on Val's part?
- Have you ever been in a situation where a friend of yours spent most of his or her time bragging about something you accomplished instead of talking about him- or herself? How is that an act of humility?
- When is a time you might not want to be humble?

74. Nailing the solo and blowing the one-liner

- How do you think Jayson felt getting the standing ovation after his solo? How do you think he felt after blowing the one-liner?
- If Jayson hadn't been so proud of his solo song, do you think he would have done better with his one-liner?
- When would have been a better time for Jayson to be proud of and relive the moment of his standing ovation?
- What are some times when it's appropriate to be proud?

75. Sixty seconds at the dinner party

- Which of the four types of people in the story would you want to talk to the most?
- When you hear people shamelessly bragging about themselves, what do you think of them?
- What do you think they think of you when you do the same thing?

- If you had sixty seconds to introduce yourself to someone, what would you say?

76. *Learning to “play the game”*

- What do you think the assistant principal meant by learning to “play the game”?
- How does talking too much when you shouldn’t be talking show a lack of humility?
- How do you think Brooke’s family and friends reacted to her new-found humility?
- As a parent, when would using this strategy of learning to play the game not be as effective with your child?

Chapter 19. Respect for Others

77. *“It’s five o’clock! Time to play basketball!”*

- Why do you think the HOA leader didn’t want Torlick to play basketball between five and six o’clock?
- What is “civil disobedience”?
- What do you know about Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Gandhi?
- How was Mr. Tanguay’s behavior similar to and different than a civil rights leader?
- How do you know when it’s a good idea to break the rules when you think the rules are unfair, and when it’s a bad idea and you should just follow them?

78. *Suicide bomber in class*

- Were you more surprised when you read that Saeed walked into the class with a bomb strapped to his chest, or more surprised when you realized it was just a dream?
- Have you ever gotten to know someone and they turned out to be nothing like you thought they would? Who was it?

- How could Karen’s conscious or unconscious biases toward Saeed have affected her behavior and role as his professor?
- What might be a legitimate use of statistical profiling or stereotyping?

79. *More crayons, please*

- Are there any kids like Kenny in your school? What do you know about them?
- Do you talk to that person? How do you talk to them?
- Why do you think Kenny only had a small box of four crayons?
- When Kenny’s teacher told him he would never be able to do anything other than maybe sweep the floors, how do you think that made him feel?
- In what ways might it be appropriate to treat someone with disabilities differently than you treat other people?

80. *Walk curbside of that pretty lady!*

- What does “chivalry” mean?
- What are some examples of showing chivalry?
- How does bragging about something nice you did detract from it?
- What are examples of chivalry that some people might not appreciate?

81. *“Silence please. My king is coming.”*

- Explain in your own words the difference between respect and reverence.
- How does one show reverence? What are some examples?
- What is it that makes someone worthy of being shown reverence?
- Who do you revere?
- What are some examples of things some people revere that you think are not worthy of reverence?

Chapter 20. Friendship*82. Deciding to be friends with Marvin*

- Why didn't Becky like Marvin? Do you think those were fair reasons?
- Is there someone you go to school with or work with that you don't like? How does it make you feel to spend that much time with someone you don't like?
- What do you think would happen if you decided to like that person the way Becky decided to like Marvin?
- What are some legitimate reasons to not like someone?

83. One bad mango

- Why do you think Bala liked the new boy from Bombay?
- Why do you think the other boys started acting badly when they became friends with the new boy?
- What qualities do you think your parents would want in the friends you choose?
- What qualities do you want in the friends you choose?
- Can you think of a situation where you might want to make friends with someone you don't like?

84. Betraying a friend at Woodstock

- How do you think Jackson felt when he saw Marvin at the concert?
- How do you think Marvin felt when he saw Jackson?
- What would you have done if you were Marvin? Would you have gone to the concert with Jackson or with your new friends? How would you have handled the whole situation differently?
- Can you think of a situation where it might be better to lie than to tell the truth to a friend?

85. *Friends or enemies? You decide.*

- Have you ever had someone pick on you at school?
- What did you do about it? And did that solve the problem?
- Why do you think asking John if we were friends or enemies worked?
- Do you think it was important that the conversation happened away from his other friends? Why or why not?
- What would have been another way to handle the situation?

86. *Carson and his bullies*

- What were the similarities in Carson's two bullying incidents? What were the differences?
- What's the difference between what Carson said and a "threat"?
- How might the result have been different if Carson had said the same things in front of not just the bully, but in front of the bully's friends?
- How do you know if a bullying situation is too dangerous to deal with this way and it might be better to handle another way? What might you do in that case?

87. *"I think you need better friends."*

- Why do you think Mandy's friend told her what that woman said about her?
- Before you heard this story, would you have told her if you were her friend?
- Now that you've heard this story, would you change your mind? Why or why not?
- How would knowing someone called her "fat and lazy" help Mandy?
- How would you decide if it was a good idea to share something unpleasant like that with a friend? What kinds of things would you want to consider?

88. *“Do I really need to hear this?”*

- What does it mean to “burden” someone with knowing something?
- What if someone didn’t like you because of something you couldn’t change about yourself? Would you want to know what it was?
- What if you could change it? Would you answer differently?
- What are some good reasons to know something about you that someone else doesn’t like?

89. *“That woman is my wife.”*

- Have you ever heard someone say something mean about someone in your family? How did that make you feel?
- Have you ever said something mean about someone else, and then realized that a friend or family member of theirs overheard you? How did that make you feel? And what did you do about it?
- If you imagined everything you said about someone was being said in front of their mother, do you think you would say different things?
- What might be a situation where you would need to talk about someone without their knowing what you said?

Chapter 21. Social Intelligence

90. *Avoiding the prom?*

- If you haven’t already been, do you think you’ll go to the prom someday? Why or why not?
- What do you think about the solution to drop out of school to avoid embarrassment over prom?
- Have you ever been in a situation where you didn’t know how to act or what to say or what to do? How did that feel?
- What could you do to prepare for one of those situations if it was coming up soon?

91. Breaking my date with Dave

- What would have been a better way for Renée to break her date with Dave?
- Why do you think Renée’s mother told her she should treat everyone with the same dignity and respect even if she didn’t like them? Do you agree with that advice?
- Have you ever changed your mind about plans that you already made with people? What did you do about it?
- What’s an example of a situation or reasons why you would want someone to know that you don’t like them?

92. Dorinda’s interruptions

- What would have happened if Dorinda had followed through with her original plan of telling her employee that she was being rude and disrespectful?
- Do you think Dorinda would have been embarrassed if she’d done that?
- What other examples can you think of where the same words or behavior mean something completely different in two different cultures?
- When do you think it’s safe to assume that everyone understands the same words or behaviors in the same way?

93. Hana’s silence

- Name three reasons someone might be silent after you tell them something.
- How might Hana’s boss have handled that situation better? What could she have said to Hana?
- How do you think Hana responded to her boss’s question?
- How would you respond?

Chapter 22. Forgiveness and Gratitude94. *“Toby, turn up the radio!”*

- Why do you think the bus driver was insulted by being called “Toby”?
- How would the story have ended if I had simply apologized to the bus driver?
- Would I have slithered off the bus or needed to call my mom for a ride home?
- Can you think of a situation where it would be better to not apologize for something you did wrong?

95. *“Sally Strobe was as fat as a globe”*

- How do you think Sally Strobe felt when Steve read his poem in class?
- If Steve had given her a real apology, do you think he would still be thinking about that moment as often?
- If Steve wanted to apologize to Sally today, what words might he use to do it in a way that wouldn’t seem self-serving?
- Do you think it’s ever too late to offer an apology? How late is too late?

96. *The twenty-five-year-late apology*

- How do you think Doug felt coming to school every day not knowing why his best friend wouldn’t talk to him?
- What would have been a better way for Phil to let Doug know that he didn’t want to be friends anymore?
- Do you think Doug was glad Phil contacted him after twenty-five years?

97. *“But I didn’t know I was needy.”*

- Do you agree that it’s better to give than to receive? Why or why not?
- How does learning to be a more gracious receiver help make you a more humble giver?
- How should Don have responded when Jim gave him the car full of food and clothing?
- In what circumstances should you refuse to accept a gift someone gives you?

Chapter 23. Appreciation of Beauty

98. *Forgetting my camera at Bear Lake*

- Why is it that many people spend more time taking pictures of what they’re doing than actually doing what they’re doing? Are you one of them?
- Do you have memories of any one scene as vivid as Paul’s memory of Bear Lake? What is it? And why do you think you remember it so well?
- Can you think of a situation where it’s better to just glance around to see a lot of things poorly instead of seeing a few things really well?

99. *Violinist in the subway*

- What does it mean to “appreciate” something?
- How do you appreciate beautiful art or music?
- How do you show your appreciation for the artist or musician?
- When is it not appropriate to appreciate beautiful things?

100. "Look, a hawk!"

- Has anyone ever interrupted you because something interesting was happening they didn't want to miss? Were you upset by that? Or glad they did it?
- What's the last beautiful thing you missed because you didn't want to be distracted?
- How do you know when it's appropriate to interrupt someone and when it would be better to wait until they're finished talking?

Chapter 24. Getting Started*101. Dad's seventy-five-year-old dream*

- What do you want to do when you grow up?
- What are some of your other dreams for your life?
- Who else knows about those dreams? How happy do you think they would be to see you achieve them? How disappointed would they be if you never tried?
- More importantly, how disappointed would you be?
- How do you know when it's time to give up on a dream?

Other questions? If you think of other questions that would be good to add to this list, please send them to me at paul@leadwithastory.com. I might update this discussion guide a couple of times a year.