



Foreword to Lesson Plans and Activities by Michelle Garcia Winner

What Is a Thought? is a charming children's book with a two-fold purpose. First, it is an engaging story that introduces to the audience the concept of thought and the amazing power our thoughts have on our lives. As a read-aloud book it is perfect for parents to read with their children at home, and is a valuable and important book for all early elementary school teachers to share in their general education classes.

Second, the Lesson Plans and Activities section of the book transforms a simple children's story into a teaching tool that explores perspective taking, abstract/inferential language, and introduces abstract visual images to its readers. Many of today's students, especially those with autism spectrum disorders and other social learning challenges, struggle with interpreting language and communication that is abstract in nature. In varying degrees, these students lag behind their neurotypical peers for whom this type of social learning develops intuitively, without direct teaching.

Whether we are parents or teachers, of typical or atypical children, we strive to guide our children as they grow and develop. Before we can fully support different types of learners and social communicators, it is important to understand where communication originates: from our own creative power of thought! This guide contains numerous lesson plans and activities to stimulate discussion within the classroom or at home about thought and its extraordinary influence in our lives. These lessons will help *all* children or students – whether or not they have a learning disability – understand the authors' key points, that:

- ❖ thoughts are amazingly powerful; we have the creative power to think anything
- ❖ our thinking creates our feelings and our behavior, not the other way around
- ❖ when our minds are calm we have access to natural wisdom and healthy feelings
- ❖ when we are riled up, angry, anxious, in a bad mood or sensory overloaded, it is unwise to believe, trust or follow our thinking
- ❖ the extent to which we rely on wise thinking will determine how much we are guided by it

- ❖ our thinking has the power to change, and therefore our experience of things can change.

After reading through the book with children once or twice, teachers or parents may want to go back through it more slowly, using these proposed lessons to be sure readers grasp the various concepts. Each lesson has several components: the main point(s) to convey (located beneath each picture); a suggested lesson plan, with ideas to share with students as well as direct questions to ask, discussion points, and helpful notes to teachers/parents, including pointers when working with children with social learning challenges. Adults are encouraged to create their own lessons to supplement or replace any here if doing so will better illustrate a particular point or make the activity more appealing to a particular reader.

The authors offer the following six questions as starting points for both adults and children to consider before and after reading this book.

- ❖ Where do thoughts come from?
- ❖ Do thoughts have power? If so, how?
- ❖ Can thoughts change? If so, how?
- ❖ Does everyone have the same thoughts? What about when the same event happens?
- ❖ Which comes first: thoughts or feelings?

- ❖ Do the thoughts we have in our heads have an effect on other people? If so, how?

What is a Thought? is relevant for all learners alike, and can be understood and appreciated on different levels. In working with children, we always begin with the thought that they are more capable than we adults often assume. That said, discussion about thought may be difficult for some students and easier for others. Our goal is to then teach to their individual needs.

Neurotypical children are born with an intact social brain that learns and evolves as they grow. Children with social learning challenges can struggle in understanding that people can and do have different thoughts about the same thing and about each other. These children may also struggle with perspective taking and identifying emotions in themselves or others.

For students such as these, it is helpful to provide direct teaching of social learning concepts such as joint attention, social referencing, initiation of communication, abstract thinking, indirect language, as well as learning to see the world “through someone else’s eyes.” These and other Social Thinking® concepts are explained in detail, and helpful lesson plans provided, in the many books and workbooks published by Social Thinking Publishing.

Helpful information can also be found at www.socialthinking.com.

Thought is not something concrete children can hold in their hands, like a cup or a ball or an ice cream cone. Many of the activities in this guide ask children to use their imaginations to understand what is being described. Again, some children who process language in very literal ways and come into this world with brains that think in concrete, rather than abstract ways, may find it difficult to work through these activities, and may need some pre-teaching or expanded teaching before being able to make sense of the exercise. I’ve contributed a few sidebars directed to teachers of children with social learning challenges with additional helpful information.

For these reasons, when using the book in a therapeutic setting, we suggest that these lessons and activities are best suited for children who are on the higher functioning end of the social learning spectrum. Their functioning profile includes verbal communication, the ability to pretend and imagine, and at least a basic understanding that people have different thoughts from one another.

10 Lesson Plans follow.

✿ Lesson 1. Page 2.

The Power of Thought



Thought is so powerful we can create anything in our minds.

Anything we create comes from the power of thought.

What is a thought? The big question mark in the sky in the illustration on page 2 suggests this little guy has a big question about *thought* and wants to understand what thought is, where it comes from, and why it is so important. Sometimes we have little questions about things, and other times we have BIG questions.

Some questions to discuss with students:

- ✿ Can we see thoughts?
- ✿ Can we touch thoughts?
- ✿ Can we smell thoughts?
- ✿ Can we taste thoughts?
- ✿ Can we hear thoughts with our ears?

Note: This last question is a little tricky and is meant to provoke discussion. We can hear our own thoughts in our minds, but not with our ears. We cannot hear other people's thoughts, unless they speak them.

Instruct students to close their eyes and think about a star. Then imagine holding a star. Ask:

- ✿ Can you do it?
- ✿ What did it feel like when you were thinking about it?

Have students draw a picture of themselves holding a star.

Discussion

We can think anything! Just by thinking about something, like holding a star, you were able to create a picture, even though you didn't really hold a star in your hands. Thought helps us imagine things in our mind. Isn't it amazing that you were able to use your power of thought to make a beautiful picture? Thought is the most powerful gift we have.

✿ Lesson 2. Pages 4, 6.

Thought Creates Feelings



Thoughts are so powerful they can give us good, bad, happy, sad, or mad feelings.

Our thoughts create our feelings!

The illustrations on these two pages show the power of thought and how it is lightning fast! Thoughts are what make us move or jump or run around (or stay still), but we don't realize we're thinking these thoughts. They happen so fast our bodies just follow our thoughts. Our thoughts create the way we feel, too, and sometimes it feels like the feelings come out of our heart, rather than from the thoughts in our brain. They too go by so fast we aren't even aware we're thinking them. Why do we feel the way we do, such as happy or sad or scared or mad? The reason is because we have happy or sad or scared or mad thoughts.

Activity. The Feeling Parachute (appropriate for ages 5-7)

Materials:

Large parachute or large sheet/blanket

Instructions:

- ✿ Children and the teacher sit in a large circle with the parachute spread out in the center.
- ✿ Explain that all of the children sitting around the parachute are thoughts and the parachute is a feeling. "So we're all going to be the thinkers and we're going to move the parachute in a way that shows how different kinds of thinking makes us feel, okay?"
- ✿ The teacher chooses a child and asks the child to think about something that makes him or her feel a certain way. For example: "Josh, how does thinking about candy make you feel?" Josh may respond, "Excited!"
- ✿ Using the parachute, all the children and the teacher together move it up and down quickly to represent the feeling of being excited.
- ✿ Continue the activity a few more times, exploring different thoughts: calm, a lost toy, a birthday party, etc. Move the parachute according to feelings: be creative, and emphasize that our thoughts come before our feelings.
- ✿ Continue to reinforce the idea that our thinking is responsible for how we feel and act, just like it is responsible for the parachute moving the way it does.



Sidebar to the Teacher

Someone might bring up that pain happens independent of thought. We like this type of comment, it means kids are thinking! But how do we know we're in pain if we first do not have the thought of it? Almost everyone has had the experience of being deeply engaged in action and getting cut or bruised and not even noticing it until later. Then it hurts!

Children who struggle with social learning may not yet understand that people can have different thoughts about the same thing. They assume everyone has all the same thoughts! To better describe the various levels of thinking and perspective taking that children with social learning challenges exhibit, Michelle Garcia Winner and her team developed the Social Thinking-Social Communication Profile™, a six category assessment tool which can be helpful for teachers. Some children, who function at the lower levels of perspective taking may find concepts introduced in this book too difficult to understand. Learn more about the ST-STC at www.socialthinking.com.

Activity. Thought Creates Feelings (appropriate for ages 8-11)

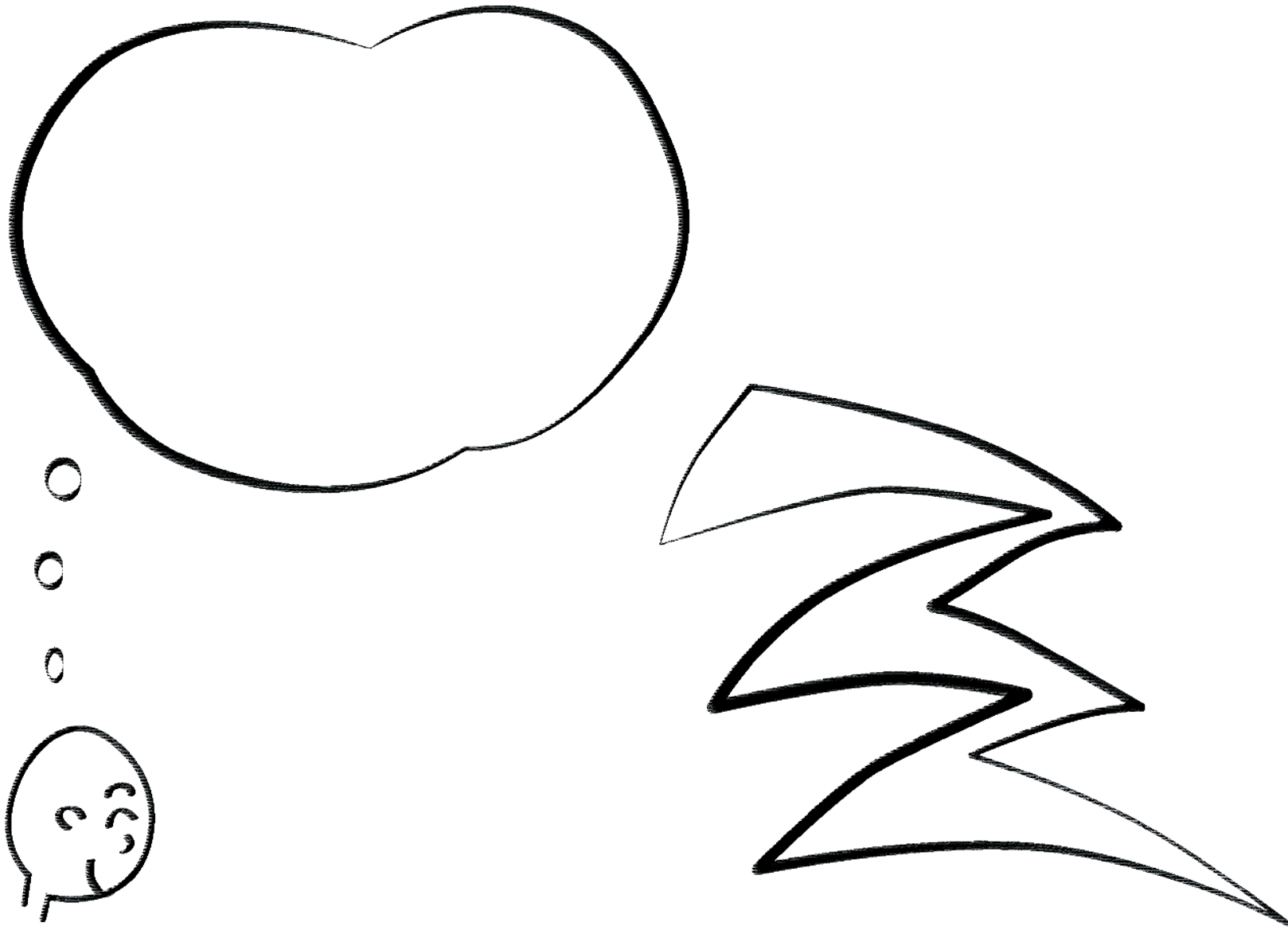
Materials (optional): Downloadable handout, "Thought Creates Feelings." Children write or draw their answers instead of using verbal language during the activity.

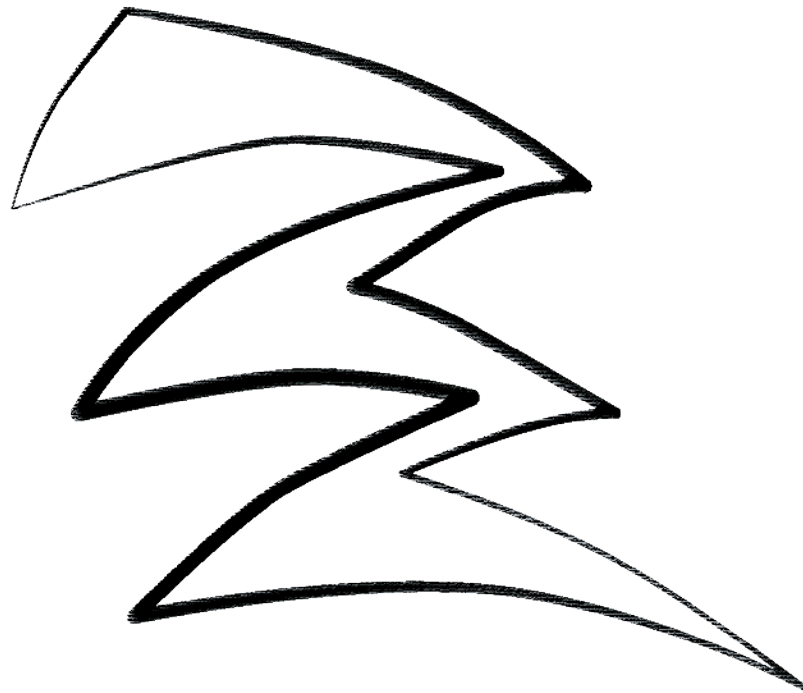
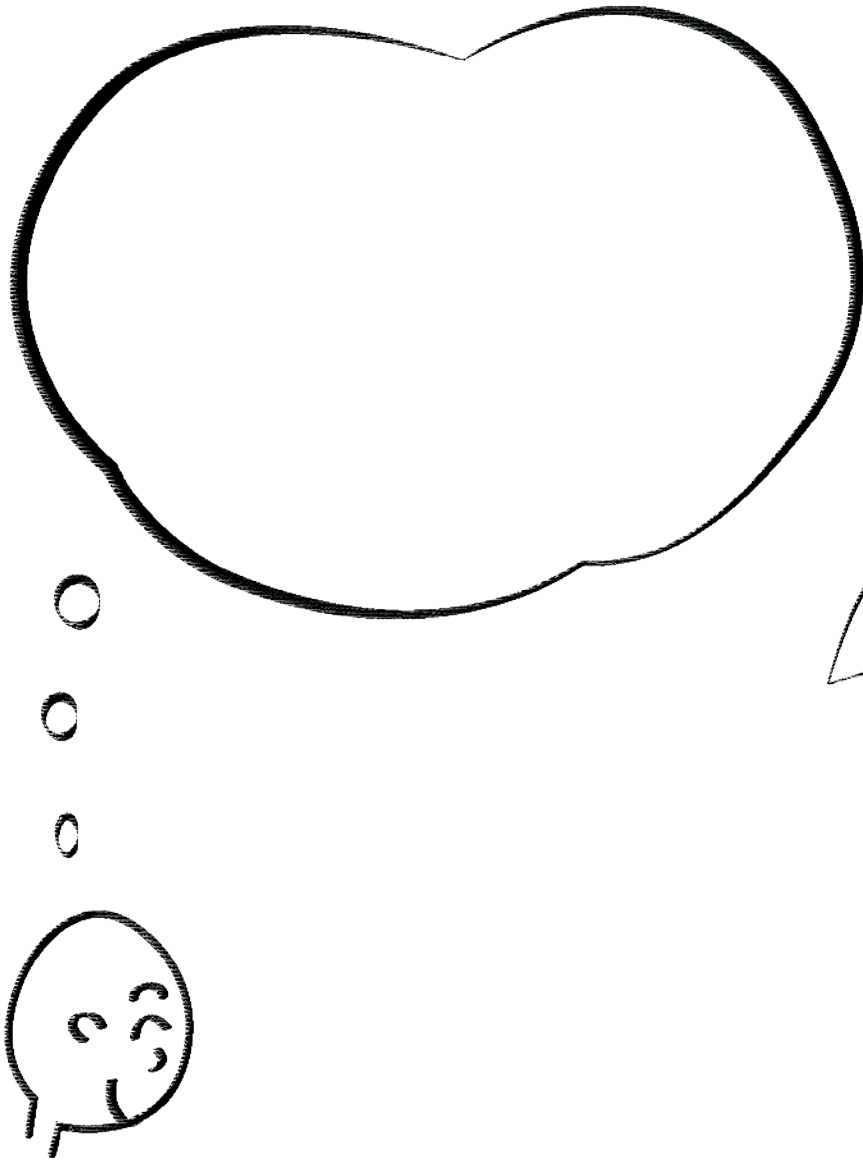
Instructions:

- ❖ Divide students into pairs
- ❖ Ask the pairs of students a series of questions, such as:
 - *Think of something that makes you feel really happy.*
 - *Think of something that makes you feel sad.*
 - *Think of something that makes you feel angry.*
 - *Think of something that makes you feel scared.*
 - *Think of something that makes you feel excited.*
- ❖ Instruct students to tell their partner what they were thinking.
- ❖ When all questions have been asked, engage students in discussing the following questions:
 - *Did you say the same things as your partner about what makes you happy, sad, angry, scared or excited? Or were your responses different from your partner's?*
 - *Do people always have the same thoughts as you do?*
 - *Think of what your partner said that would make him/her happy, sad, mad, scared or excited. Would **all** of those same things make you just as happy, sad, mad, scared or excited? What if they're not the same as your partner's – what do you think that means about how powerful thought is?*

Discussion

Remember, our thoughts are so quick and go by so fast—faster than lightning—that sometimes we don't even know we're thinking them. Often, we just feel the feeling of them. That's how powerful thoughts are! Our thoughts create our feelings and our thoughts are what make us feel happy or sad or scared or excited at any given moment. In fact, our own thoughts are the only things that can make us feel anything. Nothing else can! We might think that what happens to us out in the world, like doing really well on a test (we feel good!) or a kid pushing us in line (we get angry), makes us have the feelings we do. But it's really the other way around. Our own thinking about it, how we see it in our minds, produces our feelings. For instance: when a kid pushes us in line, we might think, "Hey, he's being mean to me and now I'm angry!" or we could have a different thought, "He did that by accident, no big deal." Each of those two thoughts would produce a different feeling.





Love

✿ Lesson 3. Pages 6, 8.

Thought = Imagination



We can use our power of thought to imagine anything.

These illustrations show how thoughts also have another kind of power: the power to imagine anything. Everyone has thoughts. Most of the time our thoughts are different from everyone else's thoughts. Where do our thoughts come from? They come from us! Even though we don't realize we're making them up, they can't come from anyone else or anything else. Nobody knows why certain thoughts pop into our minds. Sometimes our thoughts are about what we see around us. But not always! Sometimes, we make up our thoughts, sort of like painting pictures in our minds about different things. That's our imagination! It comes from our own thoughts and we can use it to think up the most amazing things.

Some questions to ask and discuss with students:

- ❖ What do you think the little guy is holding in his hand? (Point to illustration on page 6.)
- ❖ Did you notice that not everyone had the same thought about what he is holding? (A toy surfboard.) Why do you think that is?
- ❖ What do you think the little boy may be thinking about while playing with this toy surfboard? What do you think he might be imagining? (Turn to next page to find out.)
- ❖ Does the boy look like he's having fun, even though he's just pretending he's at the beach riding the waves? Look at how calm and cool he looks!

Instruct students to imagine something they would like to be doing to have fun. After a few moments, invite students to describe what they imagined. As they take turns doing this, ask the group:

- ❖ Can you imagine what the student is describing?
- ❖ How do you feel when you imagine yourself having fun?

Discussion

See how powerful thoughts are? They can help you feel good even when you're not actually doing something fun. When you use your thought to imagine, you are doing the same thing the little guy in the picture is doing, except your own thoughts are giving you the feeling of happiness or excitement (or whatever they came up with). Whenever we want, we can imagine ourselves surfing or lying on a beach or (mention what they came up with), and those thoughts can make us feel nice. Thought can be used to make us feel good! It can also be used to make us feel bad. Which one is up to us if we learn to understand our thoughts.

✿ Lesson 4. Pages 10, 12.

Calm Mind Thinking vs. Upset Mind Thinking



These illustrations suggest we can engage in two kinds of thinking. The page 12 illustration shows that sometimes our thinking is calm and feels good, like riding a wave or soaking up the sun. Our best decisions and ideas come from that kind of thinking. The page 10 illustration shows that sometimes we have the opposite kind of thinking: anger or confusion. Some of the children here appear to be pushing and grabbing. The little guy up top is watching all this and does not know what to think about the whole situation – but he knows it doesn't feel good.

The focus here is on perspective taking. There are many ways to think about any situation, like the many colors in a prism. The boy could get angry because some of the kids aren't doing what they're supposed to be doing. He could get scared because they might start pushing and grabbing him next. Or, he could stay calm and ignore these feelings, which come from his thinking, and instead keep feeling good himself. He could want to do something to help. All are examples of different possibilities of thought, within the same situation. Most of these children waiting for ice cream do not appear to have a calm mind. Whether the little guy watching stays calm or gets riled up is up to him. His own thinking about the situation will determine how he feels and acts.

We are always in charge of how we choose to act, and it all comes from our own thinking. What do we do with the thoughts that come into our mind? We are in the position to believe them or not. When we're calm, we usually can trust our thinking. Calm thoughts make us feel good. But, if we trust and follow our thinking when we're upset, it usually will make things worse. The page 12 illustration shows what can happen in the same scene when everyone acts out of a calm place.

Listening to thoughts from a calm mind makes us feel and act better than listening to thoughts from an upset mind.

Activity. **The Glitter Jar** (appropriate for ages 5-7)

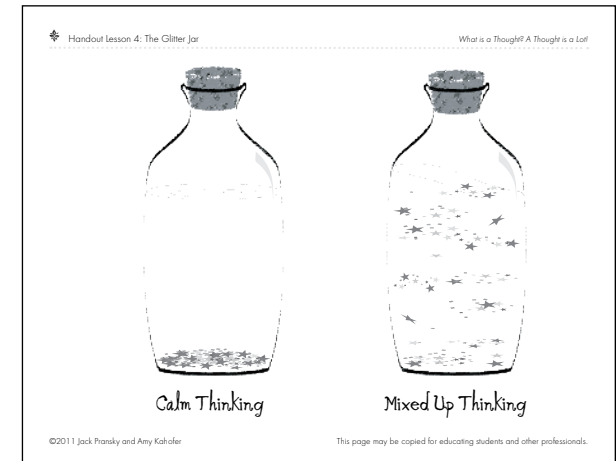
Materials:

- One clear container or jar with secure lid
- Water
- A few shakes of glitter (dark colors work best)*
- 1 Tbsp. corn syrup (to thicken water)
- Tape
- Handout: "The Glitter Jar"

* Note: As an alternative you could use mud in the water, but mud takes a long time to settle, while the glitter takes only a short time.

Instructions:

- ❖ Teacher makes a Glitter Jar (similar to a snow globe) ahead of time by filling the container with water, corn syrup and glitter. Secure lid on container with tape, as jar will be shaken repeatedly!
- ❖ Introduce the Glitter Jar to the class. Pass around for children to explore.
- ❖ Explain that the Glitter Jar represents our thinking. Ask children to think of a time they felt really calm or peaceful. As children describe their calm thoughts and feelings, hold the glitter jar very still, to let the glitter settle to the bottom.
- ❖ Ask children to describe a time they were really upset or mad. This time, vigorously shake the Glitter Jar to represent "mixed-up thinking." Ask children if they think it is a good time to act when they have mixed-up thinking.**
- ❖ Point out to the children that when the Glitter Jar is still, the mixed up stuff inside settles and clears on its own. Model a few deep breaths as you set the jar down to represent how we can help calm our bodies when we feel riled up. Discuss that our mind and our bodies eventually settle on their own, just like the glitter in the Glitter Jar settles, calms, and the water clears when it is not disturbed. Ask children if they think it would be a good time to act when their minds are calm and clear, compared with when they have mixed-up [or mud mind] thinking.
- ❖ Keep the Glitter Jar readily available for children to go to and shake as needed when they are feeling mixed up inside. The handout may be used as a visual reminder.



** Note: If you do use mud, it is very illustrative to call this type of thinking "mud mind" as opposed to having a clear mind. You could still use that term if you tell the kids to imagine the glitter is mud.

Activity. Exploring Calm versus Mixed Up Thought/Mind (appropriate for ages 8-11)



Instructions:

- ❖ Point to the bottom of the page 10 illustration.
- ❖ Ask students what they think is happening with these kids waiting to buy ice cream; entertain ideas from students. When they are done, explain that your thinking tells you it looks like a couple of the kids are trying to push their way into the line, and one may be ready to fight.
- ❖ Probe students' thoughts about the situation:
 - How would you feel if someone pushed you in line?
 - If you felt angry, what would you do? How would you act?
 - If you felt afraid, what would you do? How would you act?
 - If you felt (whatever else they said), what would you do? How would you act? Isn't it interesting that people would do different things just because they had different feelings?
 - Do you remember where feelings come from? (From our own thinking.)
- ❖ Direct attention to the little guy at the top of the page. Explain that he might be wondering about all this and that the prism represents the many different thoughts he may be having. He is stepping back with a calm mind, looking at the situation, and wondering, "What would I



do if I was pushed in line?"

- ❖ Ask students questions about their thoughts and feelings (ie, their perspectives):
 - How would his feeling be different if his mind was calm, compared with if his mind was in the same state as the kids in line?
 - What do you think he would do if his mind stayed calm?
 - What do you think he would do if his mind was all mixed up?
 - What do you think is the state of mind of the kids who are pushing and fighting?
- ❖ Turn to page 12 and discuss this illustration, which is a similar situation:
 - What do you think is the kids' state of mind now?
 - How do you think they're feeling?
 - What do you think is the relationship between a calm mind and how those kids are feeling?
 - Do you think it's possible for kids to get into trouble when they're calm?
 - What do you think you might do when your mind isn't calm?
 - What type of strategies could you use to regain calm or does your mind eventually calm on its own?

Discussion

When we're feeling calm, we can trust what we're thinking. Those are the thoughts we can rely on. That's also when we're at our best and our best ideas come to us. When we're upset or angry or worried, our thoughts get all mixed up. When we feel this way it is wise to wait and regain calm before we act so we won't cause any harm and won't get into trouble. Strategies to regain calm include waiting a few minutes before saying or doing anything to let yourself calm down or taking a few deep breaths.



Sidebar to the Teacher of Children with Social Learning Challenges

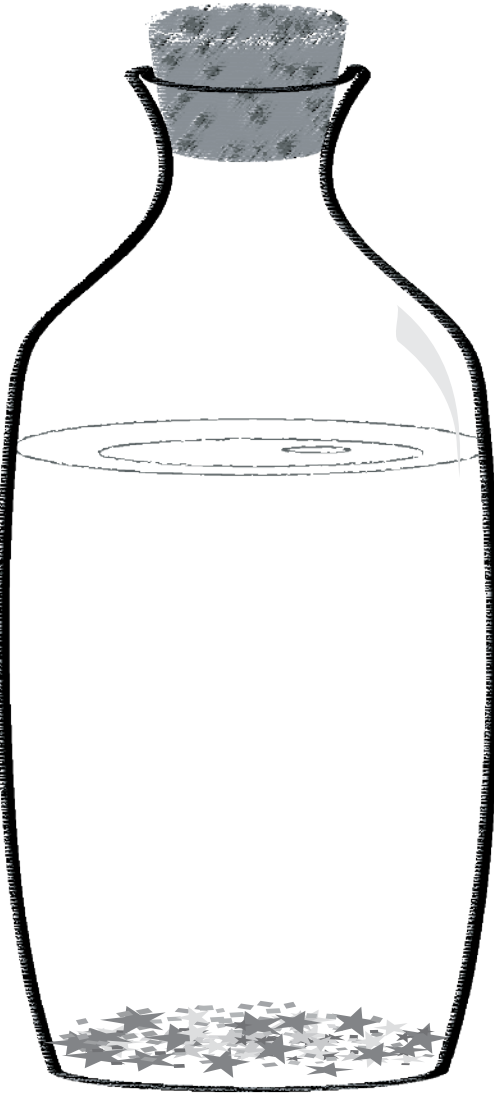
Typical children come into this world with a social brain that evolves along a developmental path, from more concrete to more nuanced understanding. This includes early social referencing skills such as joint attention ("Look, there's a rabbit in the front yard!") where children understand that others can point out helpful, important, or interesting information to us, to more sophisticated social skills such as being able to read nonverbal body language or pick up sarcasm or innuendo from others.

However, children with autism spectrum disorders and other social learning challenges may not have the same social "hard wiring" in their brain. These

children will miss some, many, or sometimes all of the social cues that as adults, we take for granted they understand. Being able to take the perspective of another person is one such skill. Hand in hand with perspective taking is the ability to empathize with the emotions of others. Often these children struggle to understand what people really mean by what they say and/or read body language and facial expressions, and at a more basic level, understand that people's thoughts differ from one another.

With younger children, our goal is to introduce perspective taking as it applies to the individual child. We encourage children to explore their

own thoughts and feelings in relation to the world around them. With older children, we expand that awareness to include the thoughts and feelings of others. If students in your classroom exhibit difficulty understanding any of the preceding questions that require "putting yourself in someone else's shoes", we encourage you to learn more about perspective taking, including different levels of this skill within individuals, as described in detail in Michelle Garcia Winner's book, *Thinking About YOU Thinking About ME*. Also find helpful articles on her website, www.socialthinking.com.



Calm Thinking



Mixed Up Thinking

✿ Lesson 5. Page 14.

The Thought Train



When we think about something that happens, we get a feeling. We can think anything we want because we make up our own thoughts. We have the power to keep thoughts we want and let go of thoughts we don't want.

The little guy is returning home thinking about his day. A lot has happened. He is remembering different parts of his day – some were good and others not so good. If we happen to think nice thoughts about what happened, we feel nice. If we think worried or angry or scared thoughts, we feel worried or angry or fearful. It is not what happens to us that makes us feel one way or the other, it is *the way we think about what happens* that makes us feel the way we do. Such power! We can teach children that they have the power to let go of thoughts that don't make them feel good. When people can let go of thoughts that make them feel bad, automatically thoughts that make them feel better rush in to take their place. It happens naturally and there is no work involved.

Point to page 14 and describe the scene to students: The little guy is going home thinking about all the different things that happened to him today. Engage students in a discussion about the little boy by asking these questions:

- ❖ When he's thinking about holding a star in his hands, how do you think he feels?
- ❖ When he's thinking about the kids pushing each other in line, how do you think he feels?
- ❖ When he's thinking about eating ice cream, how do you think he feels?
- ❖ When he's imagining somebody yelling at him, how do you think he feels?
- ❖ When he's imagining riding the waves, how do you think he feels?
- ❖ Who makes up what the little guy is thinking?
- ❖ Does that mean that everybody makes up their own feelings about whatever happens, just by what they think about it?
- ❖ What happens if we're having thoughts and feelings we don't want to have? What can we do with them?

Offer students a fun way to move the thoughts and feelings they don't like out of their heads. Kamden, a second-grader from Boyceville, Wisconsin, in the classroom of Ms. Debbie Bell, was wondering about this, and you know what he thought of? He pictured a big train coming by. The train pulled into the station and stopped. Kamden said, "I throw my thoughts I don't want into this train." So Kamden took the thoughts

in his head he didn't want to be feeling and he threw them on the train. Then the train pulled out of the station and took away all those thoughts, so he didn't have to think about them anymore.

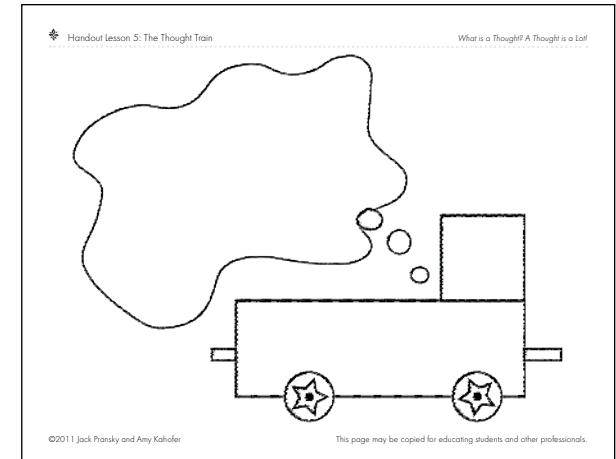
- ❖ *How do you think Kamden felt when the train went down the tracks with all the thoughts on it that he didn't want?*
- ❖ *Picture some thoughts you've been thinking that you don't want to have anymore. I'll do it, too.*

Pass out "The Thought Train" handout for students to draw/write down their unwanted thoughts. Then tell students it's time to let those thoughts go: "OK, everybody, here comes the Thought train. Let's throw all those thoughts on the train. OK, there it goes, pulling out of the station. Hey, we don't need to think about those thoughts anymore!"

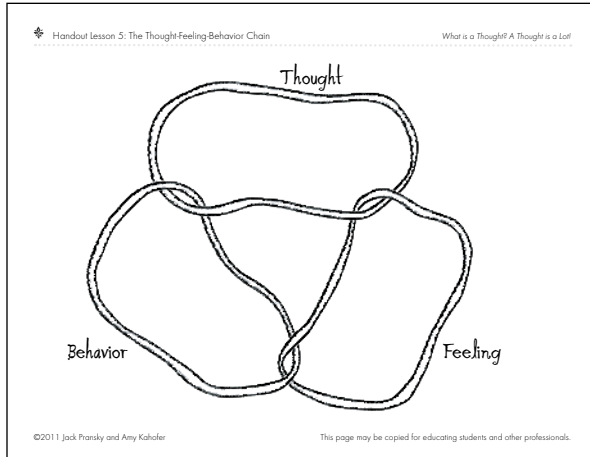
- ❖ *How do you feel now?*
- ❖ *When can we bring the train around to move out the thoughts and feelings we don't want? (Anytime we want!)*
- ❖ *Which thoughts might the little guy in the story want to keep, and which might he want to put on the train?*
- ❖ *Who decides which thoughts we let have power over us? (We do!)*
- ❖ *Who gives thoughts power over us? (We do!)*

Discussion:

Anytime we're having a yucky feeling, we don't have to hold onto the thoughts. We can picture the Thought Train coming our way, and put those yucky thoughts and feelings on the train, and watch them go away as the train goes away. That way, we help ourselves feel good again, we get back to a place of calm, and we get our power back.



Activity. **The Thought—Feeling—Behavior Chain** (appropriate for ages 8-11)



Materials:

- Markers
- Picture of a chain, or a real chain
- Handout: "The Thought-Feeling-Behavior Chain"

Instructions:

Guide students in a discussion that demonstrates how our thoughts can lead to our behaviors. "Let's imagine we are having a craving for an ice cream sundae." Have students describe their favorite flavors, toppings, sauces, cones, etc. Then ask students about their reactions:

- *Does anyone feel like eating an ice cream sundae right now?*
- *Is anyone craving an ice cream sundae?*
- *Even though we do not have a real sundae in front of us, our senses are craving one – that is our power of thought. How did that happen?*
- ❖ Use "The Chain" handout to illustrate this idea. Write "ice cream sundae" in the thought link. In the feeling link, write "hunger," and in the behavior link, write "eat ice cream." Explain that our thoughts lead to feelings, and our feelings lead to our words and/or behaviors.
- ❖ Next, offer students another example, but this time start with the behavior link and go through the process backwards. Write, "Hit someone" in that box and ask students:
 - *What do you think someone would have to feel if they hit someone? Odds are, one of the kids will say "angry." Write "angry" in the feeling link.*
 - *What might someone have to think about for him to feel angry? Whatever they come up with, write that in the thought link.*
- ❖ Share the pictures with the class, and if using a real chain, describe how a chain is linked together, and that the links repeat over and over.
- ❖ Pass out blank handouts to students and have them create their own thought/feeling/behavior chains to share with each other. Invite students to discuss their handouts with the class. Brainstorm ideas together if necessary.

Discussion

Thought is so powerful that it can affect our behavior! We've learned that thought leads to feelings that lead to behavior. When our thought is good and calm, our behaviors are too. When our thought is angry or mixed up, our behaviors can be that way too.

What would happen if the thought link breaks? If that link breaks, the chain breaks and the behavior does not happen. We have the power within us to break the chain at the thought link, and then the whole cycle stops. We won't be able to change how we act or behave or feel unless our thinking changes first! We cannot force our thoughts to change, but knowing the fact that thoughts do change reminds us that we do not always have to "buy in" to one particular thought. We may think of it as "the answer" or the "only way" one moment and then another time, we have totally different thoughts about the matter.

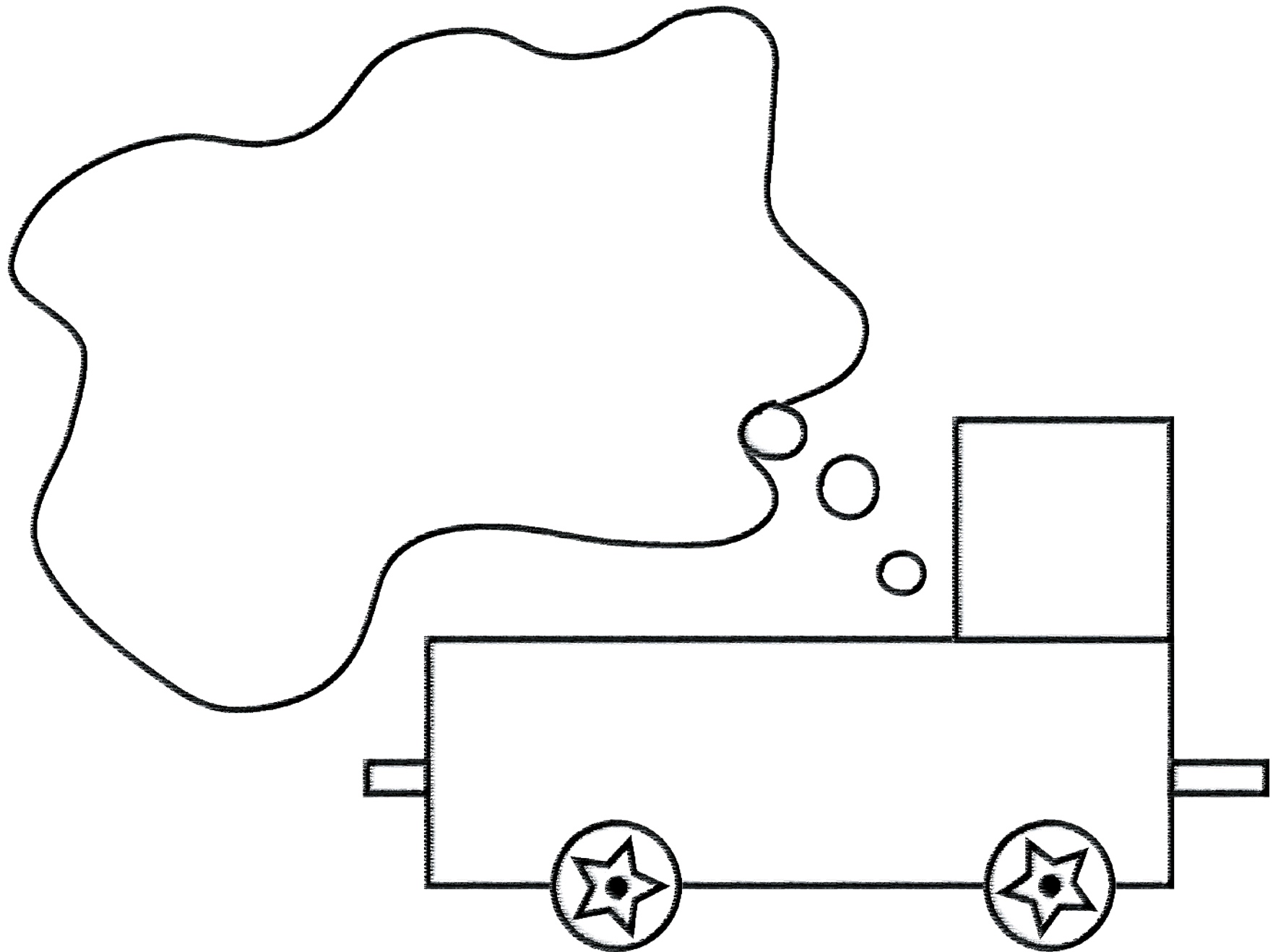


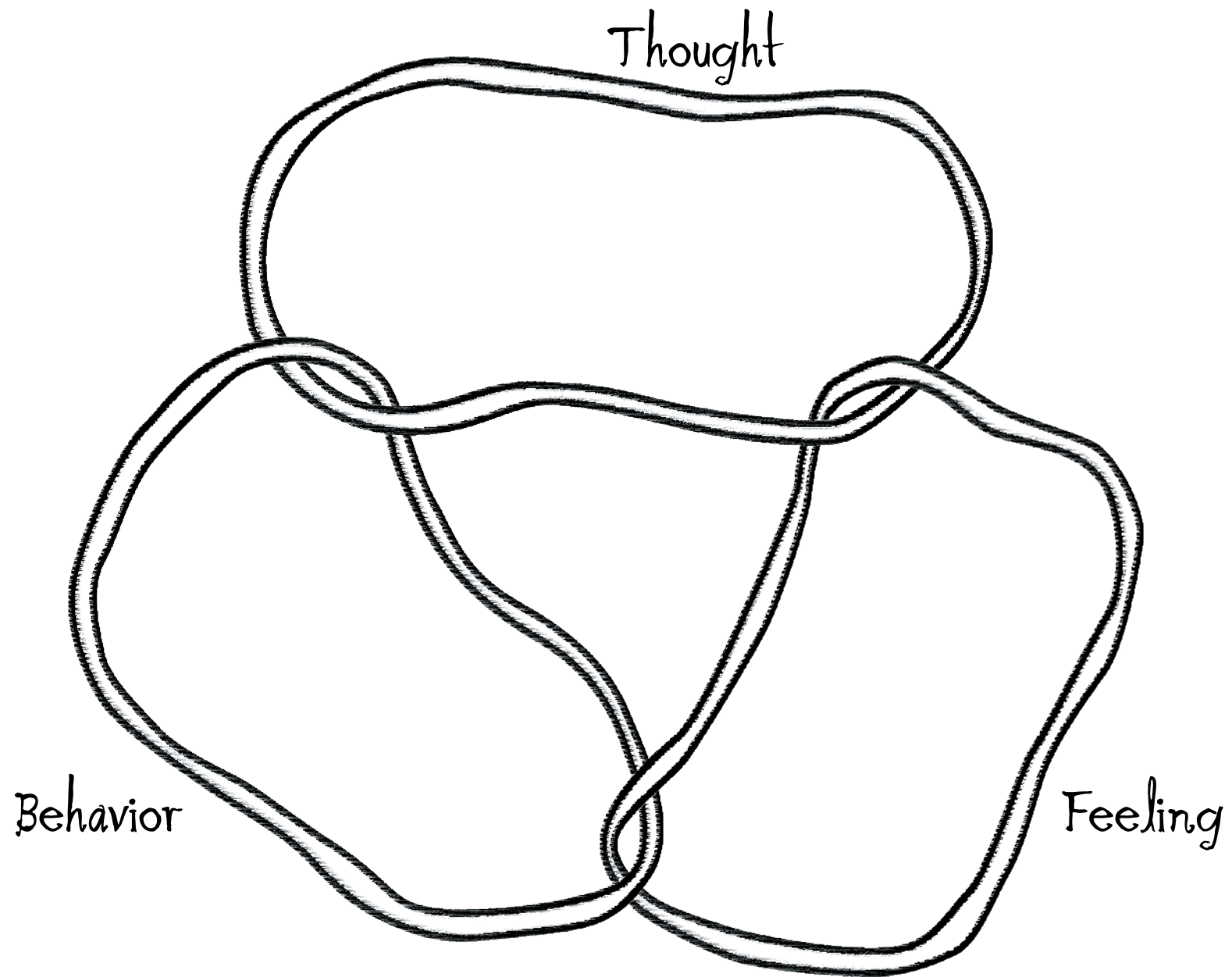
Sidebar to the Teacher of Children with Social Learning Challenges

The synergy between thought, feelings, and behavior is a complex idea, one that may be challenging for the child with social learning challenges. If your students struggle with this Lesson or understanding The Chain Handout, you may want to put it aside for now and introduce basic Social Thinking concepts instead.

- These children can struggle with understanding cause and effect, or that a relationship even exists between thought, feelings, and behavior, in themselves or in others. *You Are a Social Detective: Explaining Social Thinking to Kids* (Winner and Crooke) outlines basic social concepts such as people think about each other, and then have feelings and expectations based on those thoughts. In a child-friendly, fun and engaging manner, Social Detective starts children on the path to recognizing their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and then how to look for them in others.
- Many children with social learning challenges view the world around them in all or nothing, black and white ways, with nothing in between. They find it difficult to understand nuance and the many "shades of gray" that exist

in our responses and emotions, and therefore, their reactions to situations may be mismatched, where a very minor situation results in a huge, explosive reaction on the part of a child. The Superflex series of books (Winner and Madrigal), starting with *Superflex®: A Superhero Social Thinking Curriculum*, is an excellent next-step teaching tool to help children observe their own thoughts and behaviors, develop more flexible thinking, and learn powerful strategies to help themselves when their brains get stuck in thinking that makes them have negative feelings and reactions.





✿ Lesson 6. Page 16.

Are Our Thoughts Always True? Real?



We don't need to believe every thought that comes into our heads.

Thought is so powerful we can even imagine monsters hiding under our bed at night and get a scary feeling from it that feels really real. The monster isn't real, it's just coming from our own thinking, from our imagination running wild. Once we know that, even if we can't stop the thoughts about the monster, we're safe.

The little guy in this picture (point to page 16) is using his incredible imagination to think a monster is hiding under his bed. The thought gives him a "real" feeling of being scared. Remember the Thought Train we learned about? The train is coming by and he would love to put those thoughts about the monster on the train, but they seem too real, like maybe there really is a monster hiding under the bed. He can't seem to put his thoughts on the train, or so he thinks. Invite children to answer these questions:

- ❖ *What do you think would help the little guy? (One answer: Knowing that it's just his own thinking and his thoughts aren't real; he's just making them up without knowing it.)*
- ❖ *If you imagine the monster, how would you feel?*
- ❖ *What are some things you feel scared about?*

If anyone wants to share those things, fine, but you don't have to. I'm going to let you think about those scary thoughts you have by yourself right now. Are they just like the little guy's monster thoughts? Now you know that you don't have to think your thoughts are real either. But if anyone wants to come and talk to me privately about scary thoughts you think are real, we can do that.

When we imagine scary things, like monsters under the bed, we can use the power of our thoughts to change how we feel!

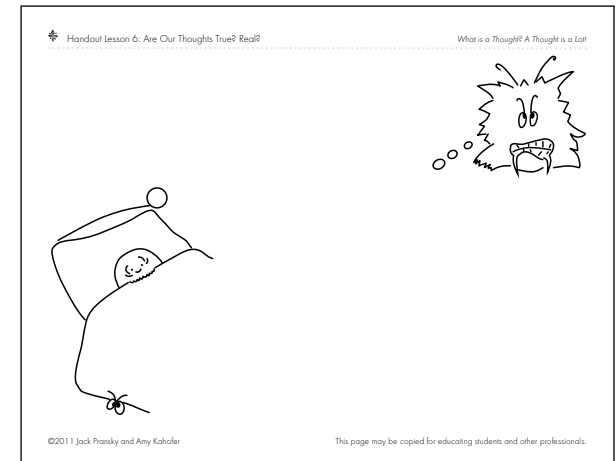
- ❖ *Now imagine a beautiful starry night or a sunrise. How do you feel now?*

Isn't that interesting? Nothing has changed outside of us. The only thing that's changed is inside of us — our own thinking. That's power! Thoughts create our scary feelings.

Pass out the handout, "Are Our Thoughts True? Real?" Children may illustrate their ideas and share in small groups or with the whole class.

Discussion

Our thoughts are so powerful they can cause us to be really afraid, but if we realize we make up our thoughts in the first place, things may not seem so real or frightening! It is extremely helpful to know that when we imagine monsters and other scary things those thoughts aren't real; we're just making them up without realizing we're doing it. Even if we can't stop the thoughts in our heads, as long as we know they're only coming from inside us, then we're safe. Those thoughts have no power over us.





✿ Lesson 7. Pages 16, 18.

Moods and Changes



In low moods it would be wise not to believe, trust or follow our thinking. The mood will lift later on its own and the same situation will look different.

We all have thoughts and we all have moods. Sometimes we know what puts us in a "good mood" or "bad mood". However, many times we just happen to be in a good, bad or just low mood without understanding why we feel this way. That's just the way it is. What most people don't understand is when we're in a bad or low mood, it's because we're having low-quality thoughts. If we say something or take action at those times we'll probably regret it later.

The good news is that moods change on their own, and usually we can wait out a bad mood and take action later. Or if we're stuck in the middle of a class or other situation and we can't wait for our mood to change, at the least we don't have to take it so seriously. Children and students (and co-workers, administrators and partners) all have moods. We don't have to take personally what people say or do during their low moods. We all do better when our low moods lift.

Point to the illustration on page 16, drawing attention to the little guy on the bed and the window.

- ✿ What is the little guy seeing out the window?
- ✿ Is what he sees all dark, or is it light?

Now turn to the next illustration on page 18, which is the same scene, but from a different perspective. Point again to the little guy on the bed and the window.

- ✿ What is the little guy seeing out the window now?
- ✿ Is it still night out? But now he's seeing something different? He's looking out the same window at night, but now things are looking different to him. What do you make of that? What do you suppose is going on?

Everything out the window is the same, except in the first picture he's in a bad or low mood and is therefore having low-mood thoughts. The world outside his window lacks color and interest. In the second picture he's in a better mood and is therefore having good-mood thoughts. That's why things look different and better to him.

- ❖ *If you're in a bad or a low mood and all you're seeing is dark and yucky and it's making you mad or scared or sad, what could you do to see stuff that makes you feel better instead? (One answer: We don't have to believe our low-mood thinking. It will pass and things will look different.)*

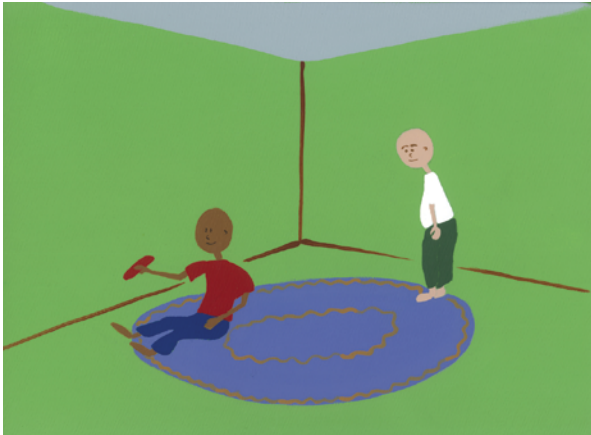
Discussion

When we're in a bad mood, we're having yucky thoughts. It's really hard to try to think good or happy thoughts at that time. But if we wait, our mood eventually will change on its own, and then we'll automatically see things that make us feel better. Some days we're in a bad mood and we don't like school. Some days we're in a good mood and we like school. The school hasn't changed, only our mood-thinking has changed. So when we're in a bad mood it is best to not believe our thinking, not open our mouths to say anything mean and not act the way we feel like acting. We wait until our mood changes, and then we can talk and act.



✿ Lesson 8. Page 20.

Fighting and Angry Moods



If we want to fight, it's just angry-mood thoughts making us want to do it. If we don't take the thoughts seriously and don't follow them, the feeling that we want to fight will pass.

The only time we ever want to fight with someone is if we're in an angry mood. That means we're having angry thoughts that look real to us. Just like the monster we imagined, these angry mood thoughts are not real either. It's only the way we happen to be seeing our thoughts at the time. Some questions to discuss with students:

- ❖ *How many of you have never been in an angry mood?*
- ❖ *You mean everybody gets angry thoughts sometimes?*
- ❖ *If you have angry thoughts, what are you feeling?*
- ❖ *Is it possible to have angry feelings without having angry thoughts?*
- ❖ *When you're in an angry mood, does that mood last forever and ever?*

The boy in the picture is having angry mood thoughts because the other boy has his toy surfboard. We just don't think right when we're in a bad mood. Sometimes we're in such an angry mood it feels like we just want to punch someone, or we feel all messed up in the tummy. If we believe this bad-mood thinking and trust it and follow it, it might lead to a fight.

- ❖ *What do you think it means to believe or not believe our thinking?*

Discussion

"Believing our thinking" means we forget our thoughts come from us, that we're the ones making up those thoughts – although not on purpose. When we're in an angry mood and we feel like doing something or saying something bad, we have mix-up thinking and our thoughts seem to be truth, or fact. They can feel hard like stones, like something that can't change. But our thoughts can change! What if we had another thought that said, "Wait a minute, I'm just in a bad mood. This is just bad-mood thinking. I don't have to act on it. I just need to wait a while and my mood will change. Then I'll see this situation differently. Then my friend will look like a friend again and I won't feel like punching him." Our thinking can get calm, and then we can trust it again.

✿ Lesson 9.* Pages 22, 24.

How We See It



It is never the outside world that makes us feel things (even though it sure looks that way). It is always our own thinking about what happens that makes us feel the way we do.

Both these illustrations suggest the little guy is reflecting on what he has learned about the power of thought. We might reflect also: What have we learned about the power of thought? Why is a thought a lot?

1. The power of thought is a gift we get to use in any way we want. It can make our lives better or worse. Yet, if we know thought is a gift, then we will more likely use it to make our lives even better.
 2. How we use our power of thought affects us. It stands between what happens out in the world and the feeling we get as a result. In other words, the outside world can never make us feel anything. Only our own thinking about what happens makes us feel something. Thoughts are directly linked to feelings.
 3. When our minds are calm, we automatically feel more peace of mind, we have more loving feelings, and we are more likely to receive thoughts of wisdom.
 4. Our thinking is always changing. If we don't like the feelings we're getting in one moment, things will look different and often better in another moment when our mood-thinking changes on its own and our level of consciousness rises.
 5. Our thinking is not our real problem. We are always thinking thoughts. The problem is how seriously we take our thinking and the thinking of others – whether we believe those thoughts or not.
- ✿ Point to the picture on page 22. The little guy is reflecting on all he has learned. He is beginning to understand why a thought is a lot. He is beginning to understand the power thought has to create everything we feel and do. Ask students:
- *Why do you think a thought is a lot?*
 - *Look at the thought bubbles coming out of him. They are wrapped in bows. Do you know why?*

* Note: This is a long lesson with many discussion points. You may want to break it up over two or more days.



- ✦ The little boy now understands that thought is a gift because our thoughts come from inside us and we get to decide which thoughts to give power to and which to not believe. The little guy realizes he can use this gift in any way he wants to make himself feel good or bad. It's the same for each of us. We all get to decide which thoughts to listen to and which to ignore. That is power! It's the most powerful thing we can possibly have. We can always use this understanding of thought to help ourselves or hurt ourselves – we get to decide! What does this mean in our daily lives? Let's use an example: someone pushes you in line.

- *How would that make you feel?*
- *How can kids have all those different feelings about the same thing? How can that be true?*

It's true because everyone has different thoughts about being pushed in line. You may have one thought about it and I might have a different thought. The classmate sitting next to you may have a thought that's different from either of ours! For instance:

- *Suppose you felt mad if someone pushed you in line. Tell me what you might be thinking to feel mad. (Students/teacher might say: "Nobody pushes me" or "I don't like to be pushed.")*
 - * *So if somebody thinks that, they'd be mad.*
- *Suppose you felt sad if someone pushed you in line. Tell me what you might be thinking to feel sad. (Students/teacher might say: "He's hurting me.")*
 - * *So if somebody thinks that, they'd be sad.*
- *Suppose you felt calm if someone pushed you in line. Tell me what you might be thinking to feel calm. (Students/teacher might say: "Poor guy. He must feel bad about himself to do that to others.")*
 - * *So if somebody thinks that, they'd be calm.*

- Suppose you felt scared if someone pushed you in line. Tell me what you might be thinking to feel scared. (Students/teacher might say: "He's a bully. I'm afraid of him.")
 - * So if somebody thinks that, they'd be scared.
- Suppose you stayed happy even if someone pushed you in line. Tell me what you might be thinking to stay happy. (Students/teacher might say: "No matter what he does, he can't bother me.")
 - * So if somebody thinks that, they would stay happy.
- Suppose you realize the kid didn't even push you - he just lost his balance and bumped into you. How would that change your thought and your feeling? You may have almost no feeling at all about it.

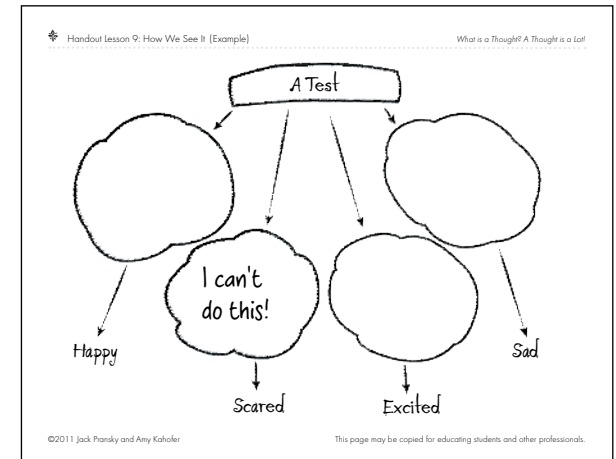
Isn't this interesting! The same thing happened, some kid pushed you in line, but the way you felt depended on what you thought about it.

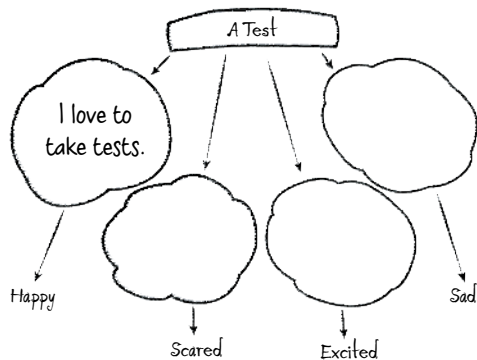
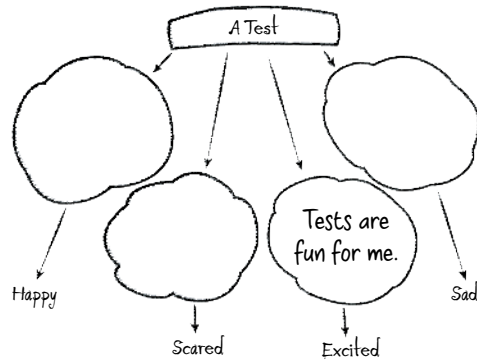
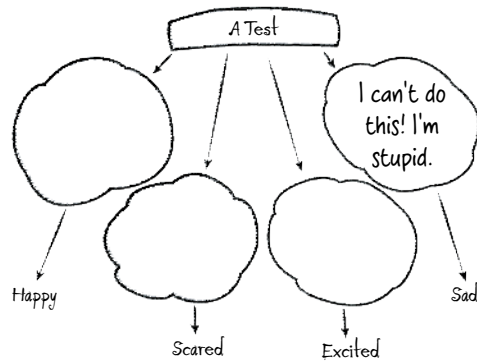
- Do you think that's always the way it is no matter what happens?

Always! There are no exceptions.

It's always our own thinking. It's always how we "see" whatever happens because of how we think about it. Now let's go through the same process about taking a test.

- ❖ Pass out the handout, "How We See It" with the words "A Test" filled in at the top. A blank handout is also available for students and teachers to create an example on their own.
 - Suppose you felt scared if you were taking a test. Look at the thought bubble over the word "scared" and tell me what you might be thinking to feel scared. (Students/teacher might write in the thought bubble: "I can't do this!")
 - * So if somebody thinks that, they'd be scared.





- Suppose you felt sad if you were taking a test. Look at the thought bubble over the word "sad" and tell me what you might be thinking to feel sad. (Students/teacher might write: "I can't do this. I'm stupid.")
* So if somebody thinks that, they'd be sad.
- Suppose you felt excited if you were taking a test. Look at the thought bubble over the word "excited" and tell me what you might be thinking to feel excited. (Students/teacher might write: "Tests are fun for me.")
* So if somebody thought that, they'd be excited.
- Suppose you were happy if you were taking a test. Look at the thought bubble over the word "stay happy" and tell me what you might be thinking to be happy. (Students/teacher might write: "I love to take tests.")
* So if somebody thought that, they would be happy.

The same thing happened: The way you felt depended on what you thought about it, whether you were taking a test or being pushed in line. (Note: You might hear, "But for some kids tests are easy and for some they're hard." Then you can say, "Who decides that?" or "Isn't that just a thought, too?")

- Do you think that's always the way it is, no matter what happens? That the way you feel isn't about being pushed or the test or anything else that happens to you, that it's all about what you think about it? Could that be the way it is with everything that happens to us?

Always! There are no exceptions.

It's always our own thinking. It's always how we "see" whatever happens. Now, here's a very important question:

- If you have thoughts that give you a bad feeling, do you have to believe them?

It's always up to us whether we believe those thoughts or not. We could have thoughts like "I hate tests" or "I'm scared of that big guy who pushes kids," but if we put those thoughts on the Thought train and let it ride away or put them on a cloud and let it float away, or know it's only our own thinking and we don't have to believe it, the thoughts wouldn't get to us. Then we'd be back to calm.

- *Do you think it would work out better for you to act out of a calm feeling or act out of an angry, sad, or scared feeling?*

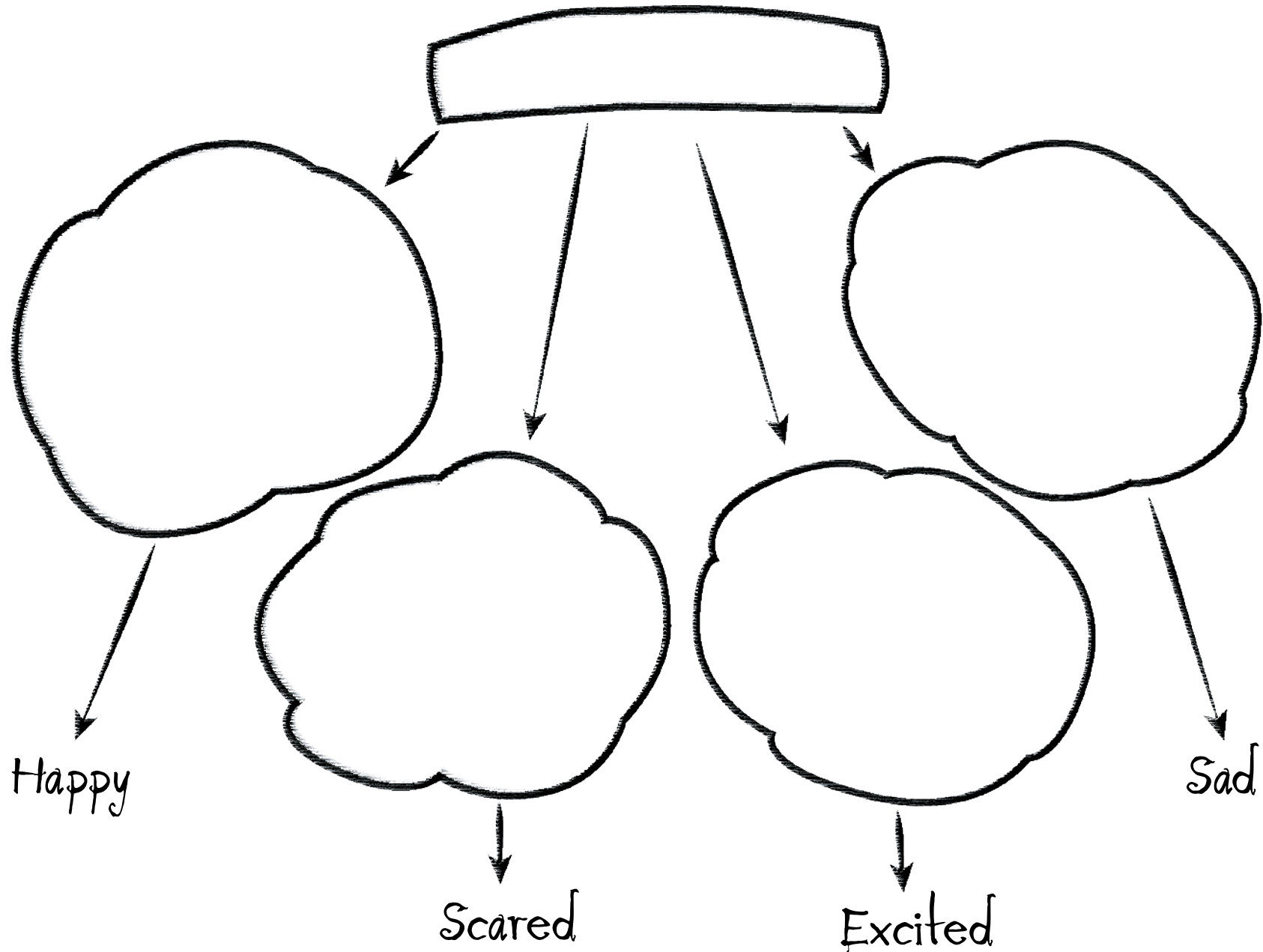
Our best choices come from thinking that feels calm. Even if we do not like what is happening, we can stop ourselves for a moment and decide if we really want to believe our mad, scared, or sad thoughts and act out of those kinds of feelings. We can think up anything with our power of thought! We can think things that make us feel good, or we can think things that make us feel bad. We all have the power to do that. Nobody else or nothing else can ever make us feel anything. It's always our own thinking. And if we're thinking thoughts that make us feel bad and we can't stop them, we can know it's just our thinking and we don't have to believe it or we can wait until it changes and we see differently.

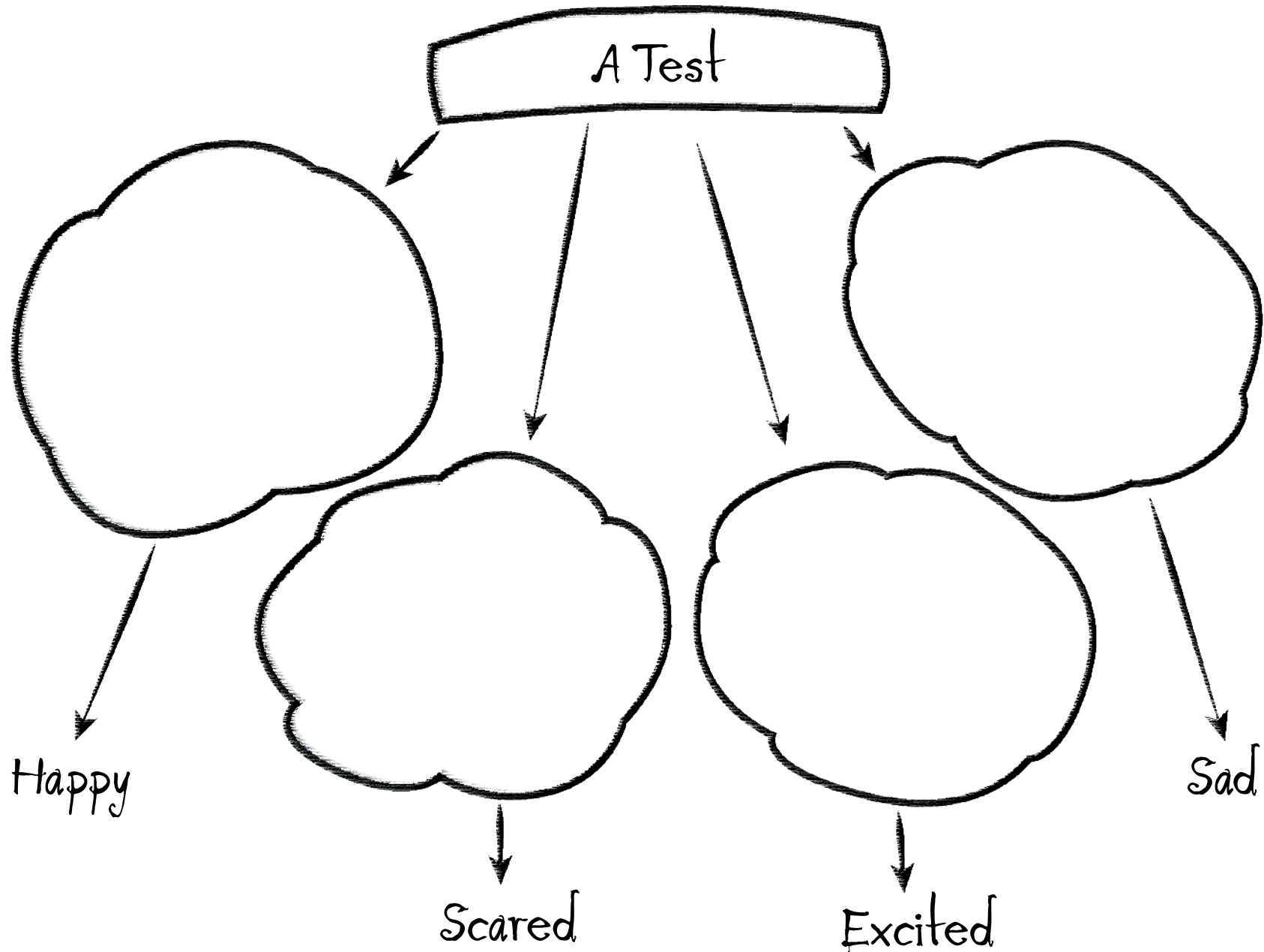
- *Who decides whether to believe what we think is "real" or not?*

We do! We are in charge of it all, and that is what can make our life so great! If thoughts come to us that make us feel nice and act well, we want to trust those thoughts because then we will actually feel nice and act well. If we think thoughts that make us feel bad or want to do bad things, we could just say to ourselves, "Oh, it's just my own thinking, that's all. Maybe I don't have to feel this bad or do what my thinking is telling me to do now. Maybe I'll wait until I feel more calm." Then better things happen for us. That's the power of thought! Knowing about thought really can help our lives be better.

A thought is a LOT!

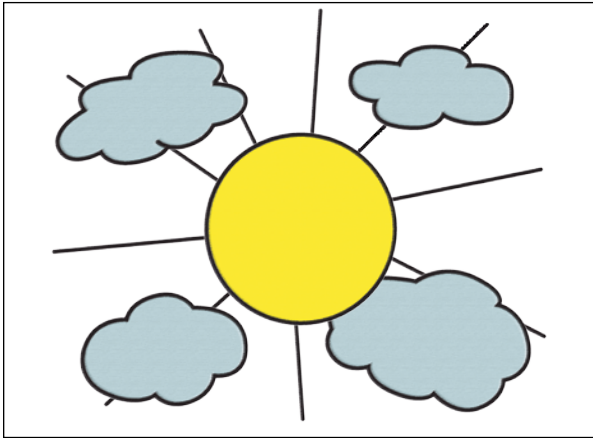






✿ Lesson 10. After the book.

Sun and Clouds



Do we have to go out of our way to think positive thoughts when things aren't going well for us? No! That's too hard. What we simply need to do is not believe, or let go of our negative thoughts, because if we weren't thinking negative thoughts, we would naturally feel good. When our mind calms down from stressful or angry or worried thoughts we feel better automatically. Our mind clears and feelings of love, peace of mind, and wisdom (our best ideas) appear without effort on our part. We only need to look inside ourselves to know this is true.

When children (and adults!) understand this, it is very powerful and comforting to them. Even the most insecure or troubled children can experience a greater sense of calm in their lives once they realize that inside they are perfectly whole and beautiful. It is only their own thinking that can get in their way.

Materials:

- Colored construction paper (blue, yellow, white)
- Markers (yellow, gray, plus other colors)
- Scissors, glue
- Chart paper
- Handout: "Sun and Clouds" (blank or filled in)

Instruction:

- ✿ Divide chart paper in half. On one side draw a sun and color it bright yellow, and on the other side draw a cloud and color it gray.
- ✿ Ask students to come up with some words that describe how they feel when they just feel good, such as love, happy, or peaceful. Write those words inside the sun. Ask if anyone also feels smart or wise when they feel good, and if anyone does add that in the sun. Explain that those words represent "sunshiny feelings."
- ✿ Next ask students to write some words that represent "cloudy thoughts." For instance: "Nobody likes me," "I'm stupid," or feelings such as angry, worried, scared, etc. Write those examples in the clouds.
- ✿ Instruct students to create collage pictures of sun and clouds from construction paper (or pass out

blank Sun and Clouds handouts) to use to illustrate their own sunshiny feelings and cloudy thoughts. In the sun, students write words that describe how they feel when they feel good. In the clouds, they write words that correlate with thoughts that do not feel so good.

- ❖ Have them cut out the clouds and place them partly over the sun. Before they glue the clouds over the sun, ask them how much of the sun they would like to shine through.
- ❖ Students share pictures with each other.

Discussion

This lesson helps students see, visually, the idea that even though clouds sometimes cover the sun, we all know the sun is still there. Talk about how this visual picture represents what goes on inside us. We all have cloudy thoughts at times, but even when that happens those sunshiny feelings are always still inside us, just hidden sometimes by those thoughts. Just like the real sun, our sunshiny feelings *never* go away, no matter what happens! They can *only* get covered up by cloudy thoughts so we don't feel them all the time! Reinforce to students the idea that we're the ones making up our thoughts, no matter what is happening to us. Knowing and remembering that those beautiful feelings are always waiting inside us is very soothing and comforting.



Sidebar to the Teacher

- Now that students understand something about thought and having a calm mind, when discipline problems arise or when students give up or feel down about themselves, it may be helpful to remind them of the ideas learned through this book: "The only thing going on is you're letting your mixed-up or low mood thoughts run away with you and you're taking them seriously and forgetting they're not real. So if you know it's only a thought and not real, you can feel better again. And don't forget, thoughts change on their own; if you wait until you are more calm, you'll feel better and make wiser decisions." (Note: If the child is not able to calm down on his/her own, the teacher may want to have the child take a break from the situation that was leading to mixed up thoughts, until calmer, more wise thinking returns. Then the child can be with everyone again.)
- Just because students have been exposed to the power of thought doesn't mean in every situation that arises they will remember all this. When kids (parents and teachers, too!) are caught up in the moment and their feelings are intense, they will forget all this about the Thought Train and that we do better when we act from a place of calm and peace of mind. Teachers can remind students about the relationship between the way they are thinking, the way they are feeling, and behaving (the thought-feeling-behavior chain), and the difference between a calm mind and a scrambled, mixed-up mind. As students synthesize this understanding into their lives and more fully understand the power of thought, teachers should find it easier to deal with discipline problems.



Sidebar to the Teacher of Children with Social Learning Challenges

- Children with social learning challenges experience much higher levels of anxiety than do neurotypical children when involved in social situations that make up a typical day. This anxiety can lead to behavior issues that arise not out of willfulness on the part of the student, but different brain processing that affects understanding and social cognition. It may take much more direct teaching and conversation, and many more reminders about thought for these lessons to make sense to these children. If there is any question about a student having difficulty controlling his thoughts due to persistent anxiety, please refer the child to a counselor for more finely tuned treatment.
- Many children with autism spectrum disorders and related social learning challenges also have sensory issues that interfere with their ability to establish or regain calm as quickly as would their neurotypical peers. Information taken in through the senses that goes to the brain for processing may be delayed, jumbled, or impaired in a multitude of different ways.

Some of our students get overloaded by too much sensory stimuli and this can lead to mixed up thinking. Allowing our students time to calm down their sensory systems and helping them find a quiet place to do so can lead to calmer thinking. When students have a lot of mixed up thinking, sometimes talking about it right in that moment can mix them up even more! Once children have calmed down they can explore their mixed up thinking better than when they were mixed up to begin with! At minimum, teachers need to be knowledgeable about such issues and how these biophysical system breakdowns can interfere with thought and related social functioning. Demonstrating patience and providing safe sensory places that help these children regain calm can improve outcomes and facilitate learning.

For more information, Google "sensory integration disorder" or consult with your school's Occupational Therapist.

