Can we introduce wisdom stories from the world’s traditions in pre-school and elementary school that will teach or reinforce core values and familiarize students with different cultures, that then become the foundation of “wisdom-based” learning and critical thinking as they grow in middle and high school? If so, we would begin to see a change in character and the beginning of some consistency of values in public life. The enclosed audio CD provides an equally important tool for both teachers and parents to play the stories for the children.

Stories have the power to once again create a positive narrative for our children and our world. I am convinced that this can and will work to restore a common ethos in schools and communities which will then foster a compassionate and responsible, fully engaged citizen of a pluralistic, civil society.

I invite you to join me in this exciting journey.

Ralph Singh, Chair
Wisdom Thinkers Network
Elbridge, N.Y.

Introducing Stories to Middle School

This book responds to the request of many educators around the country and the world for a simple resource that provides a bridge from the character education lessons which nurture children in elementary school to continue to undergird their growth in middle school. I think it’s safe to say that it’s a universal phenomenon that middle school kids think they’ve outgrown their “childish ways.” They have realized that the world outside doesn’t mirror the idyllic world we want them to mimic and they had better adjust to “reality.” And besides they feel they have more important things to do with their lives than worry about their parents’ or adults’ morality. For them, it’s time to break out, and begin to push the limits. And while we want to support them in their bursting forth to explore and express their hidden gifts, it is all the more important that we provide them with a consistent foundation of values which will keep their integrity grounded while allowing them to fly as high as they can. Many children have come to see character lessons as attempts to limit their personal expression as opposed to the positive framework or trellis which will continue to support their growth and allow them to bloom. Using these stories, many of which they may have heard in earlier grades, intuitively provides a positive narrative into which they can easily insert their own characters and in the process, further develop their own great story.

I have especially crafted the stories so they can become the lens through which children view the world. Rather than seeing the injustices, corruption, and violence as “reality,” I stretch them to understand that this version of the world is really a “virtual reality” that they were born to change. They are all familiar with creating avatars in games. I want them to understand that they are the real avatars in this game of life AND that stories are their most powerful tool to change the current dominant narrative from one of conflict to one of peace.
**Suggested Uses**

**Aligning the stories with middle school modules:**
Students are expected to move from personal awareness to awareness of the critical issues of the world around them.

Stories help students develop critical thinking in terms of personal decision making and its impact on everything from school communities to public policy.

Using these stories along with any other assigned reading or watching, allows the students to easily ask –
What could that story have become?
How could a character benefit from using an approach in this story?

Students are able to easily integrate the two parallel strands – one for understanding the subject matter put before them; the other, and equally important, how to interpret the subject.

So I suggest you pose the question:
“If this story informed you” and follow with any current issue, e.g.
What would our environmental policy be?
How would we deal with poverty – or racism?
Are there any lessons you might glean from a story to pass along which may lead to a better approach to public policy?
How would they help with bullying or conflict resolution in a school or community?

Then ask them to write, speak, discuss, debate about the issue, using the story to reflect or influence a change in policy.

**Class segments** –
Over the years, I’ve developed several ways to integrate the stories within existing class segments – be it ELA, social studies, science, and sometimes even math. Here are two of my favorites:

1) **What’s the story? – Using Foundational Wisdom Stories to Tell Yours.**
Try interpreting your world through the lens of your formational stories.
Weaving together your current experiences and newly learned facts, write about the world around you. Making sure how you reflect on ways to change the outcomes of events around you by using lessons, characters, and themes from some of your favorite wisdom stories

2) **Let’s Change the Story** –
What if you could change the story of our world?
Our media is dominated by violence and conflict – killings, constant conflict in reality shows and games, and the ideological gridlock and confrontations that our news show bombard us with. In short, the world is not a pretty place. How could we change the story?
Use foundational wisdom stories to show ways that we can change the world by changing the story.
Mentoring –
Nothing benefits school (and community culture) than having common stories (what I call a shared narrative). If you empower older students to mentor younger grades – not only will it reinforce the power of the stories in the upper grades – but it will create a simple and comfortable bridge from elementary to middle and upper school.

So within each lesson, challenge the students to think of ways to communicate the story in new and different ways to younger students. Let them practice becoming the story tellers of their world.

General Thoughts
While the accompanying audio CD provides the opportunity for you to have a guest storyteller in class at any time, I know you will want to craft the discussions to meet your particular needs. Following each story, I’ve given an essential question and added some additional sample questions which focus on the meaning of the story. This will help develop and test the student’s listening skills and provide what I call a foundation of wisdom for higher level critical thinking. I’ve also included a brief background statement on the source and the context of each story. Here are a few general questions and activities which you may find useful.

Some general questions:
What does this story teach you?
How does this story make you feel?
How would you share the story with friends or family?
Can you think of other similar stories from your tradition?
Ask Grandparents or community elders about a story which is meaningful to them.

Focused activities:
Create an animated short – a Prezi – record a youtube video or create a children’s book.
Interview friends, family, elderly and record their stories. This could then be printed as booklets for the class and also posted on our website. It could be done as an individual or group assignment.

Sample Projects:
Make a skit using characters in the story: Which characters and which scenes would you use?
Draw or paint some scenes from the story. What colors would you use?
Compose music: What music would you play in the background; what song would you sing?
Write your own version of the story: What would you name this story?

Please feel free to send me comments or suggestions and check our website for updates
www.wisdomthinkers.org/stories
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Story Title</th>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8th</td>
<td>Module 1: Finding Home: Refugees</td>
<td>The Boy Who Wasn’t Afraid</td>
<td>Self-Confidence and Courage</td>
<td>83 - 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shifting Sands</td>
<td>Forgiveness and Friendship</td>
<td>42 - 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Kingdom of How to be Good</td>
<td>Changing Yourself and the World</td>
<td>6 - 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Module 2A: Working with Evidence: Taking a Stand</td>
<td>The Child Who Loved His Neighbor</td>
<td>Compass</td>
<td>50 - 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Elephant and the Blind Friends</td>
<td>Respect Others’ Opinions</td>
<td>60 - 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brother Rabbit and the Tar Baby</td>
<td>Problem Solving</td>
<td>105 - 107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Turtle Who Just Couldn’t Keep His Mouth Shut</td>
<td>Self-Control</td>
<td>24 - 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Real Bargain</td>
<td>Sharing</td>
<td>33 - 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Module 2B: A Midsummer Night’s Dream and the Comedy of Control</td>
<td>The Child Who Swallowed the Sun</td>
<td>Nurturing Your Hidden Gifts</td>
<td>73 - 76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Module 3A: Japanese American Relations in WWII</td>
<td>The Elephant and the Stray Dog</td>
<td>True Friendship</td>
<td>93 - 97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Module 3B: The Civil Rights Movement and the Little Rock Nine</td>
<td>The Child Who Loved His Neighbor</td>
<td>Compass</td>
<td>50 - 54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Boy Who Wasn’t Afraid</td>
<td>Self-Confidence and Courage</td>
<td>83 - 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Child Who Swallowed the Sun</td>
<td>Nurturing Your Hidden Gifts</td>
<td>73 - 76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Kingdom of How to be Good</td>
<td>Changing Yourself and the World</td>
<td>6 - 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Module 4: Sustainability of World’s Food Supply</td>
<td>The Little Girl Who Spoke to Trees</td>
<td>Taking Care of Nature</td>
<td>16 - 18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Turtle Who Just Couldn’t Keep His Mouth Shut

A story of self control

Snappy the Snapping Turtle was always snapping at anything or anyone who came near him. Even those who just happened to say, “Good morning,” nearly got their heads bitten off. He was so angry that soon there was no one in the pond who would go near him. You might be grumpy, too, if you were always stuck in the mud.

But everything changed the day a pair of swans on their way home spotted the little pond where Snappy lived and decided to drop in for a rest. Snappy had never seen anything so beautiful.

It was hard for the pond residents to believe but Snappy actually made friends with the swans. He’d look forward to their visits and tales of the lands far away with lots of green grass and plenty of water. He longed to see those places, too. He would keep the swans busy for hours asking questions. They would smile at each other and take turns patiently answering him. And Snappy even thanked them at the end of the day.

Then one year it didn’t rain at all. The pond began to dry up under the heat of the burning sun. Everyone in the area, both the people and animals, were starving. The birds were leaving to find a better home.

The swans decided that it was time for them to leave as well. So they came to say a sad goodbye to their friend.

Poor Snappy couldn’t believe that they would leave him behind. The swans, too, wondered how they could save their friend. But everyone knew that turtles can’t fly.

Snappy came up with an idea. He told the swans to get a long stick. “My snappy jaws are strong enough so that if you fly slowly you could hold the two ends and carry me along. Once I clamp down on something, nothing escapes my grip.”

But the swans were worried. What if Snappy couldn’t control himself and opened his mouth? He would lose his grip and fall down. They made him promise not to open his mouth, no matter what.

So off the three friends flew. Higher and higher, over hills, valleys, fields and plains they went. “Wow, I never thought I’d be able to see these things,” thought Snappy. But no matter what new things he saw he still kept his promise and held on tight.

Birds would fly by and laugh, “Hey a flying turtle! I’ve never seen a turtle bird.” But the swans told their friend just to ignore them. “They’re just jealous. Don’t pay any attention. Just keep your mouth shut and enjoy the ride.”

But then, they flew over a city. The people of the city were amazed to see such a strange sight. They laughed and clapped their hands. Snappy tried his best to ignore them. But then someone shouted, “Look at the swans carrying that silly turtle.” That made Snappy angry. “Why are you foolish people making such a racket?” he snapped. He had forgotten his promise. He lost his grip on the stick. Down, down, down he fell and crashed to the ground, because he just couldn’t keep his mouth shut.
Thoughts:
So my fellow travelers, on this journey we have discovered that the most important thing to control is ourselves.

Essential Question:
Why is it important not be distracted by what others say or do?

Sample Questions:
In what ways are we like the turtle – what distracts us the most?

How did the swans help the turtle? Who are the swans in our lives?

Have you ever let go of your stick?

Sample Applications:
Talking too much is only one behavior we have to control.

How can we learn to control habits that distract us or take us off track?

What kinds of things help us pay attention?

How can our peers help us or hurt us?

Have we ever had to clamp down hard, too, to keep from saying something?

What do we miss when we do all the talking?

Background:
This story from India was adapted from the Panchatantra, “The Tortoise and the Geese.” Most people don’t realize that many of the stories from the Panchatantra have spread all over the globe. Some appear in Aesop’s Fables. Even more interesting is their origin. The stories were created to teach the princes of a local king how to be good rulers. The king was very sad because his sons had no interest in managing his kingdom. Finally the king offered a reward for anyone who could teach the boys. All the teachers failed. Finally a great saint came into the court. People laughed at the way he was dressed. “I’ll teach the boys,” he said. Everyone was amazed. So he made up these stories using animal characters, and within a short time, the boys had learned the art of statesmanship.
Lesson: “The Turtle Who Just Couldn’t Keep His Mouth Shut – A story of self-control” (6-8)

Essential Question: Why is it important to not be distracted by what others say or do?

Lesson Objectives:
1. I can read and comprehend literature including stories, dramas or poems within the 6-8 grade text complexity level.
2. I can engage effectively with my peers in a range of collaborative discussions.
3. I can include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations.

Materials:
1. Individual copies of “The Turtle Who Just Couldn’t Keep His Mouth Shut – A story of self-control” for each student
2. Index cards
3. Template for Public Service Announcement
4. Poster paper
5. Markers or colored pencils
6. Computers (for each pair of students)
7. Flip cameras (optional)

Lesson Procedures:
1. Pose the essential question to students as they enter the classroom and have them write their responses on an index card.
2. Have individual students share responses within their table groups or with a partner. How are their answers different? Similar?
3. Invite students to share situations or examples of what can occur if they are distracted by what others say or do.
4. Pass out student copies of “The Turtle Who Just Couldn’t Keep His Mouth Shut – A story of self-control” and have students read the text independently.
5. On the back of their index card, have students respond to the essential question again, but from Snappy’s perspective. What literally happened because he could not keep his mouth shut? What message/theme is this supposed to teach us about how we live our lives?
6. After completing the index card questions, students circulate the room trying to find someone with a message similar to the one written on their own index card. (If students are having trouble pairing up with someone, put them into pairs and have them generate a theme/message by merging both of their ideas.)
7. Working in pairs, students will create a Public Service Announcement that portrays the message of the story while relating to students of this generation/age. In their presentation students must include:
   - The essential question- Reworded if needed.
   - A situation/example of what happens when people are distracted by what others say or do.
   - A piece of advice/slogan to help student to remember stay focused and use self-control. (Not be like Snappy ☹)
8. Students will prepare a Public Service Announcement by using one of the following:
   - PowerPoint presentation
   - Prezi
   - Poster (Neatly done and presented to the class)
   - Recorded “announcement” using flip camera
9. After students have completed their projects, they will present them to the class.
10. A rubric will be used to score presentations to ensure criteria have been met.

Assessment:

Formative Assessments: Teacher observations, index card responses, completed PSA templates

Summative Assessment: competed projects and rubrics
**Extensions and Adaptations:** This lesson is written for use in grade 6-8. The lesson can easily be modified to reach all learners. Grade level standards may vary as seen below.

Adaptation ideas may include:
- Students reading and generating themes/messages in pairs or triads instead of individually.
- Reading the story whole group and generating a play or skit based on what message is being presented.

Extension ideas may include:
- Students presenting PSA posters and multimedia presentations to other classes/schools.
- Students write a narrative describing a time that they behaved like Snappy and describe how they could have behaved differently.

**Special needs and/or ELL accommodations may include:**
- offer an option of listening to the story with the CD version
- read/listen to the story more than once, with the first time spent just visualizing the story
- preview vocabulary (such as fable, moral/lesson, distract, clamp, ignore) with discussion and visuals
- offer the option for ELL students to create a bilingual poster PSA, with their situation and slogan written in their native language as well as English

**Common Core Standards**

**Grade 6:**
- **RL.6.10** By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature including stories, dramas and poems, in the grades 6-8 complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
- **SL.6.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- **SL.6.5** Include multimedia components (e.g. graphics, images, music and sound) and visual displays in presentations to clarify information.

**Grade 7:**
- **RL.7.10** By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature including stories, dramas and poems, in the grades 6-8 complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
- **SL.7.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- **SL.7.5** Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and finding and emphasize salient points.

**Grade 8:**
- **RL.8.10** By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature including stories, dramas and poems, in the grades 6-8 complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
- **SL.8.1** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- **SL.8.5** Integrate multimedia components and visual displays into presentations to clarify information, strengthen claims and evidence, and add interest.

**Domain/Module Connections:**

**Grade 6:** Module 2a: Working with Evidence (connect the theme of “The Turtle Who Just Couldn’t Keep His Mouth Shut” to the Rules to Live by seen in Bud, Not Buddy.)

**Grade 7:** Module 2a: Working with Evidence (connect the theme of “The Turtle Who Just Couldn’t Keep His Mouth Shut” to the story Lyddie and the importance of using self-control/staying true to a cause.)

**Grade 8:** Module 2a: Working with Evidence (connect the theme of “The Turtle Who Just Couldn’t Keep His Mouth Shut” to the novel To Kill a Mockingbird with a focus on individuals in the novel using self-control)

**Cross Curricular Connections**

**Common Core Mathematical Practices**
- **M.P.6** Attend to precision.

Mathematically proficient students try to communicate precisely to others. They try to use clear definitions in discussion with others and in their own reasoning. In the elementary grades, students give carefully formulated explanations to each other. By the time they reach high school they have learned to examine claims and make explicit use of definitions.
NYS Intermediate Level Science Core Curriculum 5-8
The Living Environment
Key Idea 3: Individual organisms and species change over time.
P.I.3.2 Describe factors responsible for competition within species and the significance of that competition.
Key Idea 6: Plants and animals depend on each other and their physical environment.
P.I.6.1 Describe the flow of energy and matter through food chains and food webs.

NYS K-8 Social Studies Framework
6.4 COMPARATIVE WORLD RELIGIONS (ca. 2000 B.C.E. – ca. 630 C.E.): Major religions and belief systems developed in the Eastern Hemisphere. There were important similarities and differences between these belief systems.