

CHOICES AND DECISION MAKING

How are “Choices and Decision Making” utilized in *The Berenstain Bears*?

Each *The Berenstain Bears* episode focuses on an ordinary, everyday situation or “challenge” that young children may encounter in the home, with friends, in the community or at school (like jealousy, peer pressure, a new neighbor, a bad grade – or lack of “quality” family time). A path to resolving this common problem is provided as Brother and Sister (and viewers) see the consequences of the choices and decisions that they make. As each storyline progresses, family members interact to reveal solutions to conflicts and illustrate valuable life lessons.

Series characters model how to use resources and strategies to make responsible choices and decisions in both their personal and social lives. The overall goal is to help young audience members feel more confident about themselves as decision-makers, and recognize that they have skills and experiences that can be used to make their own responsible choices.

Why is teaching about “Choices and Decision Making” important?

Researchers in child development agree that young people’s lives are growing increasingly complex. As parents and teachers struggle to find safe places in which their children can grow, they bemoan the fact that their children seem to be getting older younger – at least superficially. Children as young as 5 or 6 years of age may look sophisticated to us, but they remain children—figuring out how to do things and feel successful, curious about how their friendships and families and community work, seeking the love and approval of their parents, and trying to define their place. Helping children make sound, age-appropriate choices in a world that sends mixed, complicated messages about who they are supposed to be, is one of our biggest (and most important challenges as adults).

The following activities provide opportunities for children to practice making their own choices and decisions. Note that learning areas and themes can be strengthened by first taping and showing the associated *The Berenstain Bears* episode (listed at the top of each page), reading and discussing any associated story or book – and then conducting the hands-on activity or lesson with children. Be sure to tie together the common themes of the show, book and activity with plenty of discussion and analysis!

A PROBLEM-SOLVING CIRCLE

Learning to identify, discuss, and resolve problems.

Learning Area(s): Personal Integrity, Problem-Solving, Honesty, Decision Making

Episode: "Trouble at School" Synopsis: Brother neglects his homework and receives a bad math grade. Initially, he's afraid to tell his parents. But he comes to realize that admitting problems and discussing them is the best problem-solving strategy.

Objectives:

Children will:

- * Listen to a story about admitting a problem.
- * Discuss the character's problem, suggest solutions and discuss outcomes.
- * Talk about how and why children should communicate problems to adults.
- * Form a problem-solving circle in which school-related concerns are addressed.

Grades: 1-2

McRel Standard(s): Life Skills-Thinking and Reasoning - Standard 5.1, Identifies simple problems and possible solutions.

Core Curriculum Area(s): Social Studies, Language Arts

Materials Needed: storybook about admitting a problem, chalkboard, chalk

Think & Do Activity Description:

1. Choose a storybook that depicts a child character who encounters a problem but demonstrates difficulty telling an adult about it.
2. Read the beginning of the book aloud, pausing right after the character encounters the problem but doesn't tell anyone about it.
3. Ask children: "What has happened? What might happen because the character hasn't told an adult about the problem (s)he is having? How could the problem be solved? Who might the character turn to for help? What do you think (s)he should do?"
4. Conclude the story and discuss its outcomes: "How was the problem solved? Which adult did the character turn to for help? Who else could the character have gone to? How and why should problems be dealt with right away instead of waiting? What might happen if we hide problems instead of getting help with them?" (Chart responses on the board.)
5. Ask children if they have ever had a problem to solve, how they got help and who helped them with it.
6. Tell the class that today they will practice helping each other with problems by forming a "Problem-Solving Circle."
7. Sitting in the circle, encourage children to discuss any real or "made-up" school-related problems (Generate some problematic scenarios to get them started - i.e., with homework, arguments on the playground during recess, teasing, bullying, etc.)
8. As each problem is described, go around the circle and ask children to identify who they might turn to for help and how, specifically, the problem could be solved. Allow for open conversation and debate.
9. As the mediator, come up with two or three potential solutions to the problems.
10. Ask the child with the concern to describe which person they would turn to for help, which solution they think would work best and why.

Suggested Reading

Home Connections

Teacher Tips

"The Big, Fat Enormous Lie" by Marjorie Weinman
 "I'll Do It Later" by Louise Vitellaro Tidd
 "A Day's Work" by Eve Bunting

In mediating and coming up with potential solutions for problems, be sure to stress personal responsibility and honest discussion.

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EARTH EMPATHY

Learning about things we can do to care for the environment.

Learning Area(s): Choices, Decision Making, Analysis

Episode: "Don't Pollute (Anymore)" Synopsis: The Bear family realizes that little pollution problems add up to big ones. But little solutions also add up to big solutions.

Objectives:

Children will:

- * Listen to a story about disregard for the earth's environment.
- * Discuss these problems and how/where they exist.
- * Create shopping bag montages using magazine pictures and crayon drawings.
- * Take a "clean-up" walk around the school or in the neighborhood.
- * Bury biodegradable and non-biodegradable items and assess the results.

Grades: K-2

McRel Standard(s): Life Skills-Thinking and Reasoning, Standard 5.1, Identifies simple problems and possible solutions.

Geography - Standard 14.2 (Level II), Knows the ways in which the physical environment is stressed by human activities.

Core Curriculum Area(s): Earth Science, Social Studies

Materials Needed: ecology-themed book (see suggestions below), shovel, plastic gloves, paper bags, magazines, scissors, glue, crayons, small flag or stick, parent note

Think & Do Activity Preparation:

1. Write a short note to parents about this activity (notifying them that children will be taking a "clean-up" walk around the school or in the neighborhood).
2. Collect magazines and paper shopping bags (preferably with handles).
3. Designate an area to in which to take the "clean-up" walk. Also locate a spot where a hole may be dug and a few trash items buried.

Think & Do Activity Description:

1. Read a book to children about disregard for the earth's environment.
2. Discuss these problems and where/how they are seen on the school grounds, in the neighborhood, and around the city. Talk about different ways that we can help.
3. Pass out magazines, paper bags and scissors and tell children to find as many examples of "disregard for the earth" that they can (i.e., cars polluting, littering, etc.). These should be cut out and pasted on the bags, along with any additional drawings they'd like to make.
4. Explain that one of the things the class can do to help with these problems is to keep their own school yard and neighborhood free of trash. Today they will take a "clean-up" walk and put trash they find into their bags.

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Suggested Reading

"The Lorax" by Dr. Seuss; "Wump World" by Bill Peet; "The Great Trash Bash" by Loreen Leedy; "Someday a Tree" by Eve Bunting

Home Connections

Teacher Tips

Good items to bury include: wilted cabbage or lettuce, an apple core, a paper or plastic cup, and a soda can.

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Think & Do Activity Description:

5. Make sure all students wear inexpensive, plastic gloves and take them on a clean-up walk. Monitor the items that they pick up closely for safety.
6. In the classroom, talk about what was found. Ask what children know about “biodegradable” and “non-biodegradable” trash. Then explain the concepts using specific examples.
7. Help students separate trash items into these two categories. Take examples of both, (i.e., fruit, vegetable or garden remains and plastic, paper or metal containers) back outside.
8. Bury the items and mark the spot with an identifier such as a small flag. Ask children what they think will happen to each item after about a month.
9. After a month has passed, return to the site and allow children to analyze why certain objects decomposed or “rotted” and why others remain unchanged.



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ANIMAL ATTRIBUTES

Identifying different animals' attributes and needs.

Learning Area(s): Identification, Matching

Episode: "The Baby Chipmunk" Synopsis: Sister finds a baby chipmunk and wants to keep it as a pet. She learns to look beyond her own desires in order to make a good decision for the animal and her family.

Objectives:

Children will:

- * Learn about and discuss different types of animals.
- * Identify and draw animal: baby, mother, food, and appropriate habitat.
- * Use blocks and other manipulatives to build "homes" for different animals.

Grades: PreK-K

McRel Standard(s): Life Science - Standard 6.2, Knows that living things are found almost everywhere in the world and that distinct environments support the life of different types of plants and animals.

Core Curriculum Area(s): Language Arts, Life Science

Materials Needed: book involving different types of animals, handout, blocks, Legos, paper, cardboard, and/or other "building" manipulatives

Think & Do Activity Preparation:

Photocopy the Help Brother and Sister Find... handout—one per child.

Think & Do Activity Description:

1. Read a book to the children involving different types of animals.
2. Talk about different animal attributes: types of mothers and babies, where different animals live, animal survival needs (food, water, protection, companionship, etc.).
3. Discuss which animals do or do not make good pets and why.
4. Pass out the Help Brother and Sister Find... activity handout and explain that Brother and Sister have found these bunch of baby animals but they need our help!
5. Tell the children that today they will help brother & sister bear by drawing the right animal mother, place to live & food preference for each baby animal pictured.
6. Review answers as a group. Guide children to identify & draw the right attributes.
7. Ask each child to choose one animal. Encourage them to use blocks, Legos and other "building materials" to make a good home for the animal selected.
8. Encourage them to work individually or in groups to make the different animal homes.

Suggested Reading

"Are You My Mother?" by P.D. Eastman, "Each Living Thing" by Joanne Ryder
"Animal Homes" by Sally Hewitt, "Baby Bird" by Joyce Dunbar
"Is Your Mama a Llama?" by Deborah Guarino
"An Extraordinary Egg" by Leo Lionni

Teacher Tips

Be sure to provide opportunities for children to talk about their designs and the animals that will live in them. Encourage them to share why their "home" is good for that particular animal.

REPRODUCIBLE PAGE
HELP BROTHER AND SISTER FIND...

BABY ANIMAL	MOTHER	HOME	FOOD
<p>Chipmunk</p> 			
<p>Puppy</p> 			
<p>Baby Fish</p> 			
<p>Kitten</p> 			

IMAGINATIVE INVENTORS

Exploring inventions and patents. . .then acting as an inventor.

Learning Area(s): Problem-Solving, Decision Making, Perseverance, Goal Setting, Creativity

Episode: "Fly It!" Synopsis: While trying to create a new invention, Brother learns that perseverance is often necessary to complete a goal.

Objectives:

Children will:

- * Learn about inventions, inventors and patents.
- * Identify small problems they'd be interested in solving.
- * Choose one problem to solve, then Design and Create an "invention."
- * Share the results of their work.
- * Complete a patent for their original idea.

Grades: K-2

McRel Standard(s): Life Skills Thinking and Reasoning-Standard 5.1, Identifies simple problems and possible solutions
Self Regulation-Standard 1.6, Identifies resources necessary to complete a goal.

Core Curriculum Area(s): Language Arts, Social Studies, Science

Materials Needed: information or books about different inventors and inventions, miscellaneous artistic "invention" materials, simple gadgets, fabrics, boxes, crayons, paper, containers, rubber bands, letter to parents, handout

Think & Do Activity Preparation:

1. Gather invention gadgets and materials prior to this activity. Once students have identified their project, additional materials will need to be found and brought in.
2. Write a note to parents and guardians about the project, listing items that could be donated from home.
3. Photocopy the Berenstain Bears Invention Patent handout – one per student.

Think & Do Activity Description:

1. Talk with children about inventions, inventors and patents. Explain that an inventor doesn't have to be a "genius" – just someone who thinks of a problem, then comes up with a new answer or solution. Describe patents as something that protects inventors' ideas.
2. Provide children with information about inventors and patented inventions. For example: Josephine Cochrane - the Dishwasher, Sarah Boone - better Ironing Boards, Willie Johnson the Egg Beater, Alexander Graham Bell - the Telephone, The Wright Brothers - the Airplane, Mary Anderson - windshield wipers.
3. Mention that inventions can solve simple problems (like zippers), yet can be very important.
4. Encourage students to come up with simple problems that they'd like to help solve. Ask them to brainstorm ways to solve the problem. What type of invention would help? What type of materials would they need? Which materials are easily accessible? Which are not? What substitutions could they make? What will they name their invention?

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Suggested Reading

"Zippers Have Teeth: And Other Questions About Inventions" by Barbara Taylor, "Imaginative Inventions..." by Charise Mericle
"The Story of Thomas Alva Edison, Inventor" by Margaret Davidson
"The Real McCoy" by Wendy Towle

Teacher Tips

Be sure to include women and a diversity of ethnic backgrounds in your "inventors" discussion.

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Think & Do Activity Description:

5. Collect materials and set time each day for a week for children to work on their inventions. Help with suggestions, guidance and encouragement. Explain that the invention need not work "perfectly."
6. After a week, ask students to talk about a) the problem that they tried to solve, b) the process used to create the invention, c) how the invention works/would work, d) how they feel about officially being an Inventor!
7. Have children fill in and color the Imaginative Invention Patent sheet. At the bottom, have them draw and/or write about their invention.

REPRODUCIBLE PAGE
IMAGINATIVE INVENTION PATENT

_____ has invented a _____
Name of Inventor Name of Invention

this _____ day of _____
date month year

Description of invention/problem it helps or solves:

Picture of invention:



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I WANNA BE...

Learning about and acting-out different careers.

Learning Area(s): Choices, Decision Making, Expression

Episode: "On the Job" Synopsis: Brother is overwhelmed by the seemingly endless number of jobs that exist as he writes a report on, "What I want to be when I grow up." He comes to realize that though there are many interesting choices, he can take his time to decide.

Objectives:

Children will:

- * Listen to a story about jobs and discuss different careers.
- * Interview a caregiver about their job and collect an item that represents it.
- * Have the class guess their caregiver's job, then share details about it.
- * Choose a career, act it out, then have the class guess what it is.
- * Play with different "career" items in the dramatic play area.

Grades: K-2

McRel Standard(s): Life Skills - Self Regulation, Standard 2.19, Identifies desired future accomplishments.

Core Curriculum Area(s): Social Studies, Language Arts

Materials Needed: book about different occupations, note to parents, "career" prop boxes—boxes containing play items related to different careers or businesses such as: [a bank, grocery store, doctor's office, etc.], item from home representing parent or guardian's career

Think & Do Activity Preparation:

Write a short note to parents and guardians about participating in this activity. Inform them that as a home assignment, students are to interview them about their job, then are to be given a sturdy, inexpensive item (such as a hard-hat or badge) that represents it.

Think & Do Activity Description:

1. Read a book to students about careers. Then discuss jobs seen in and around the neighborhood.
2. Give children the parent note to take home. Ask them to talk with parents, guardians, care providers, an older friend or relative about: their job title, what's done on the job, how they found it, what skills are needed, what's good and bad about it, etc.
3. Then they should ask for something they can bring to school to have the class guess what the job is. Give the example that if the person is a librarian, the child could bring in a book. For a postal worker, they could bring in a letter, stamps and carrier's bag.
4. The next day, have children present their "job item" while the class tries to guess the career. Details about the job should be given until someone guesses correctly.

#5-7 Continued on next page

Suggested Reading

What Will I Be?" by Wendy Lewison
"When I'm Big" by Nila Aye and Tim Drury
"All About Things People Do" by Melanie & Chris Rice

Home Connections

Invite parents who are able to come in and talk with the class about their jobs and take a "question and answer" period with students.

Think & Do Activity Description:

5. Explain that now that they've talked about different careers, students should think about what job they might like to have when they're older. Ask them to think about the types of things someone would do on this job, the movements and noises they'd make, etc. As an example, perform the sounds and movements of a career they'll be able to guess, like a doctor: asking a patient what symptoms she has, miming listening to heartbeat, etc.
6. Encourage children to individually (or in small groups) act-out the job they'd like to have while the rest of the class, again, watches and guesses.
7. Allow children to continue "career" dramatic play by setting out prop boxes with different business clothing, play items, etc. (if these are available).

