

# THEME: OVERCOMING POOR DECISIONS

## PERSEVERANCE

### GRADE: FIFTH

**Core Curriculum:** Supplements social studies

**Focus:** Respect for others, character development, critical thinking

**Overview:** The purpose of this lesson plan is to help fifth-grade students understand the importance of overcoming poor decisions. As is true for all people, children will sometimes make poor decisions. However, the extent to which children are able to recognize a poor decision, make necessary changes, and learn important lessons from life experiences can have a significant impact on how children feel about themselves and those who make poor decisions. The implications for cognitive and moral development are evident.

**Goals:** Students will learn

- To identify poor decision making;
- To distinguish between poor responses to poor decisions and good responses to poor decisions;
- To see the possible consequences of not overcoming poor decisions;
- To see the possible benefits of overcoming poor decisions;
- To improve their sense of self by recognizing that poor decisions are not synonymous with being a bad person; and
- To recognize the power they have in their own lives to choose how to respond to a poor decision.

**Materials:** The activity sheet for this lesson can be found in the student workbook.

**Other:** A guest speaker who works at a homeless shelter

**Family/Home Activity:** The family/home activity can also be found in the student workbook and is for each student to take home to do with their parent/guardian.

## Lesson Plan

**Activity 1:** Teachers could begin by telling students the following story:

*John was a new kid in school. He did not say much in class, and the other fifth-graders would sometimes laugh at him. He wore the same thing to school every day, and his clothes were not fashionable. If anything, they were big and sometimes not very clean. The teacher, Ms. Lewis, was concerned about John. He missed at least one day of school every week and he was falling behind in his homework—especially in math. One day after school, Ricky followed John home. He was curious about John since he seemed secretive. John did not play games with the other kids, and he always kept to himself during recess and lunch. To Ricky's surprise, he discovered that John lived at the new shelter for homeless families. That evening, Ricky told his dad what had happened that day after school. Ricky's dad*

*said that John's family was going through a difficult time. His father even talked about the stories that his grandfather used to tell him about the Great Depression, when people did not have enough food to eat. Ricky's dad told Ricky to keep what he saw to himself—not to tell the other kids, who might not understand. The next day in class, Ricky simply could not keep what he knew to himself, so he told some other kids where John lived. Some of the kids did not understand, and they laughed at John. Some kids even called him names, like "Shelter Boy." This upset John so much that he started to cry. Ms. Lewis wanted to know who was responsible for starting the trouble. When she found out it was Ricky, she scolded him for his meanness and said that he was old enough to know better. She told Ricky that she thought a conversation with his parents was in order. Ricky did not know that John's mom had lost her job at the mill and that John's dad*

*was sick with cancer. Ricky felt bad, and he was in trouble. His father had told him to keep quiet. John had been so humiliated in front of the other children. What should Ricky do?*

**Activity 2:** Divide students into groups of four for discussion. Ask each group to appoint a spokesperson to summarize for the rest of the class their group's responses to the questions.

The spokesperson must be sure to include all of the views voiced in the group, even those that are inconsistent with the majority. Students should be encouraged to voice their opinions, not what they think they should say based on what others are saying.

Give the Activity 2 worksheet to each group (or have the students get it from the student workbook) and ask the students to consider the list of questions. (Following is the list for teacher's reference.)

1. Did Ricky make a poor decision?

Possible answers:

- Each student could say yes;no; maybe; I do not know. (Students should be questioned about any response they give. It is important for both teachers and students to understand why they think the way they do.)

2. What was poor about Ricky's decision?

Possible answers:

- Ricky's father told Ricky that John's family was going through a difficult time and that Ricky should keep quiet about what he knew.
- Ricky disregarded his father's advice.

3. What would be a good response to Ricky's poor decision?

Possible answers:

- Ricky could apologize to John.
- Ricky could tell his teacher that his father had taught him better manners but that he had chosen not to listen.
- Ricky could tell his father about what had happened at school.

4. What would be a poor response to Ricky's poor decision?

Possible answers:

- Ricky could continue to tell other students about John.

- Ricky could conceal the incident from his father—at least until Ms. Lewis told him.

5. What are the benefits of a good response?

Possible answers:

- You feel better about yourself when you tell the truth.
- You learn that all people make bad decisions sometimes.
- You learn that after a bad decision has been made, a good response is still possible.
- You learn that you can overcome a poor decision.
- You learn that there is a difference between a bad decision and a bad person.

6. What are the consequences of a poor response?

Possible answers:

- It may provoke you to lie to people (teachers, parents, other kids).
- You might participate in the same bad behavior again.
- You do not have the benefit of learning that poor decisions can be overcome.
- You sacrifice potentially good friendships. (John and Ricky might not become friends because John knows how mean Ricky was to him; John might never trust him.)

**Activity 3:** Share each group's answers.

The teacher can help the students participate in role-play to emphasize the importance of perspective. The following characters are needed: Ricky, John, and Ricky's father.

- Select a student to role-play Ricky making a good response and telling his father the truth.
- Select a student to role-play Ricky's father responding to Ricky. Here, the father would probably encourage Ricky for being honest and being remorseful for his decision.
- Select a student to role-play how John might have felt if Ricky were to have befriended him.

Repeat the above assignment with different children but have them role-play the following situations.

- Select a student to role-play Ricky making a bad response and not telling his dad the truth.

- Select a student to role-play Ricky’s father, who thinks that Ricky is sensitive to the difficulty of a homeless family.
- Select a student to role-play how John feels when he discovers that other children know where he lives. Have students speculate on what it must feel like to live in a shelter.

**Activity 4:** Guest Participation

A representative from a shelter for the homeless could be invited to talk with students about some of the reasons families live there.

**Activity 5:** Ask the students to anonymously write down some situations describing a poor decision they made, or a situation they currently face where they need help to avoid making a poor decision.

Collect these slips and use them another day. Select situations that are most appropriate for class discussion, or exchange situation descriptions with another class doing the same exercise. Paraphrase or rephrase the situations before presenting them so that the privacy of the students is protected.

**Reflection:** Tell students: *Once a poor decision has been made, you still have a chance to make a good response. Making a poor decision is not the same as being a bad person. It is important that you learn to recognize that you can decide for yourself how to respond to a poor decision you have made.*

*Think of a poor decision you made in the past. How did you respond afterward? Did you make a good response or a poor response? If you made a poor response, what would you do differently today?*

*What are some of the benefits of making a good response to a poor decision you have made? What are some of the problems that could occur if you make a poor response to a poor decision?*

*Making good responses to poor decisions shows us that we are still in charge of our own lives, that we are good people trying to make the best of a bad situation.*

*How do you think the people around you feel when you make poor responses to poor decisions you have made? How would they feel if you made good responses?*

*Why is it important to you to make good responses to poor decisions?*

**Recognition:** See “Classroom Instructions,” page 5, for information regarding recognitions.

# ACTIVITY 2

## *RICKY'S DECISION*

**Directions:** As a group, discuss the following questions and decide the answers to the following questions about Ricky's decision. Appoint a spokesperson to share your views and comments with the rest of the class. Each student in the group should voice his or her own opinion about Ricky's actions.

1. Did Ricky make a poor decision?
2. What was poor about Ricky's decision?
3. What would be a good response to Ricky's poor decision?
4. What would be a poor response to Ricky's poor decision?
5. What are the benefits of a good response?
6. What are the consequences of a poor response?

# FAMILY/HOME ACTIVITY

## Theme: Overcoming Poor Decisions Grade: Fifth

Dear parent/guardian, here is a character-building activity to do with your child as part of the school's Learning for Life program. It reinforces the Learning for Life lesson that was taught in the classroom.

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• **Goal:** Your child will identify poor decision making. Your child will improve responses to poor decisions by recalling situations in their own lives. Your child will see the possible benefits of overcoming poor decisions.

• **Activity:** Journal

• **Materials:** Attached sheet, pencil

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**Directions:** Have your child respond to the journal prompt.

