

There's an old story about a young boy who notices that his grandfather is troubled. "What's wrong grandfather?" asks the boy. "There's a battle raging within me" says the grandfather, "A battle between an angry resentful wolf and a patient understanding bear". "Who will win?" asked the young boy. The grandfather replied, "It all depends on which one I feed."

The wise grandfather was aware of one of the most important truths about human emotions, and he was trying to teach his grandson a valuable life lesson. Here it is:

1. My feelings come from my thoughts.
2. I think my own thoughts.
3. Therefore I create my feelings and I'm responsible for them.

Many people fail to grasp this concept. And it's obvious when you hear someone say things like, "My coach makes me mad" or "My mom drives me crazy" or "My boy friend makes me jealous."

In each case a student is claiming that something that happened, - which we'll call "A" - is causing an emotion - which we'll call "C". While it appears that "A" causes "C", the truth is it doesn't actually work that way. It's simply not true.

You can learn to control your emotions if you can remember one little secret. Here's it is: In between "A" and "C" is a moment...perhaps only a millisecond ... when you tell yourself a story to explain or make sense of the things that happen to you. Let's call that moment "B". The emotions you experience at "C" depend on what story you tell yourself at "B". In reality, "A" does not cause C.. A causes B, and B causes C. Let's look at an example. When an athlete makes an error in a game, if he FEELS embarrassed, it's probably because the story he told himself was "People are thinking I'm really bad." This kind of story can lead to even more errors as the game goes on. What can he do about this? He can learn to tell himself a better story. After an error, the story could be "I'm better than that; I'll get the next one" which would create an emotion of determination, not embarrassment. You have a split second after any event when you can choose how to interpret its meaning....whether you're in a game, or walking down the hall at school when someone ignores you, or comments on how you're dressed. We choose the meaning of every event, by the stories we tell ourselves.

You see, it's not what happens to us that matters; it's what we think it means, and how we respond. So, like the boy's grandfather, you get to choose which animal you'll feed every day. Will it be anger and resentment, or patience and understanding?

LEARNING OBJECTIVE:

Students will identify how circumstances generate personal interpretations and emotional reactions.

INSTRUCTIONS: Distribute the handout to students after viewing the video. Invite students to share their answer to question #1 only.

KEY POINTS:

- Telling ourselves better stories doesn't mean lying to fool ourselves. It means looking for alternative explanations for events that could also be true.
- With practice we can learn not to jump to the worst possible interpretation of why other people do and say things.

The Stories We Tell Ourselves Worksheet

Questions #2 through #6 are for your private answers.

1

Why do we blame others for the emotions we have?

2

Think of a strong emotion that you felt recently?

"I felt very _____."

3

Identify the event ("A") that happened before the feeling came.

4

What story did you tell yourself about the event? ("B")

"I interpreted this event as meaning..."

5

Write a new story that could also be true. (New "B")

My new interpretation: