



**Title:** Peaceful Problem Solving – Why Bears Have Short Tales

**Grade Levels:** 1-2

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**Description:** This lesson introduces students to a process for collaborating and making decisions with a partner. Students apply the process to deciding roles for the story. The process is a great foundation for empowering student rehearsal of partner and group stories in future lessons.

**Time to Teach:** 2 class periods, 60 minutes

**Learning Outcomes:**

- Use the body to create a character
- Demonstrate collaboration skills for planning with a partner
- Use decision-making strategies to make peaceful decisions

**SEL Competencies Taught:**

*Self-awareness*, which is the ability to recognize one's emotions and know one's strengths and limitations

*Relationship skills*, which refers to one's ability to demonstrate prosocial skills and behaviors in order to develop meaningful relationships and resolve interpersonal conflicts

**2014 National Core Theatre Standards:**

Grade 1

TH:Cr2.1.1b. With prompting and support, participate in group decision making in a guided drama experience

TH:Pr4.1.1b. Use body, face, gestures, and voice to communicate character traits and emotions in a guided drama experience

## Grade 2

TH:Cr2.1.2.b. Contribute ideas and make decisions as a group to advance a story in a guided drama experience

TH:Pr4.1.2.b. Alter voice and body to expand and articulate nuances of a character in a guided drama experience

### **Materials Required for Instruction:**

- Legend: “Why Bears Have Short Tales” (found in *The Drama of Color* by Johnny Saldaña)
- A slide or flip chart to present a visual of Mood Meter & the decision-making process
- A container of pennies (for making decisions)

### **Session One**

**Opening:** The Mood Meter is a quick self-check that teaches students to observe and share their mood on their fingers using a scale of 1-10. As a teacher this gives me a quick sense of how students are doing when they get to class. It also helps students learn to become aware of their emotions.

#### *SEL Teaching Moment - Self Awareness*

1. Invite students to sit in the circle to begin. Explain the purpose of the activity: “Sometimes my mood or emotions change during the day. When I’m feeling excited, I have lots of energy. If I’m feeling sad or tired or bored, I don’t have a lot of energy. Sometimes I don’t even notice that my mood has changed unless I check in with myself. I like to check in by closing my eyes, taking a couple of breaths, and noticing how I feel.” Invite them to close their eyes, take 3 silent breaths and check for their mood.
2. Sharing emotions with the Mood Meter: Explain that one way to describe our mood is using a Mood Meter. Show a visual of the Mood Meter using emojis and/or descriptions - a “10” is fantastically happy, a “5” is in the middle, a “1” is really struggling in some way (sadness, tiredness, worry). Share your mood with a quick reason. (E.g., Today, I’m a “7” because I’m very excited about the new story we’ll be acting out today. I might be a “1” if I had a headache or I’m having a really bad day.)
3. Invite students to close their eyes again, breath, check in and show their number on their fingers. If time, invite 2-3 students to share their number and one reason they feel that way.
4. Thank students for sharing and transition to characters in the story. “Understanding emotions is also important as actors because our characters have emotions. Today we have a story with two characters - Bear and Fox. Fox is feeling proud because he caught a lot of fish for dinner. Bear is feeling hungry and curious about how Fox caught so many fish. Show me on your fingers what you think Fox’s mood is (1-10). Show me Bear’s mood. Let’s try the characters out with our bodies.”

### **Instructional Procedures:**

1. Character Movement & Action warm-up: Students find actor space, transform their bodies and move around the room as a bear. Provide movement cues from the story: walking, sneaking, hiding, spying from behind a tree. Give a freeze signal. Students transform into a fox and move as that animal might move. Provide movement and action cues from the story: walking, prancing, catching fish, counting and packing up the fish, carrying the fish home through the forest.

Side coaching tips: If needed, coach students to move on two feet rather than crawling on hands and knees. Coach them to explore the physical parts of their characters as they move. (Both characters in the story begin with long, fluffy tails.) Coach them to imagine how the fox catches fish – with paws, with a fishing pole, or some other way.

### *SEL Teaching Moment - Relationship Skills*

2. Students return to the circle to discuss how to make decisions and solve problems in drama. Explain that they will be casting their own roles today with a partner.
3. Share: “I feel sad when I argue with my friends. Sometimes, I feel frustrated if they don’t accept my ideas or what I want to do.” Ask students if they have ever had trouble making decisions with friends or siblings before – perhaps what to play or who goes first. How do they feel when this happens? Explain that sometimes friends argue about choosing parts and this is a problem. Together, we will think of some ways to solve this problem and make decisions in a peaceful way.
4. Fishbowl Modeling: Set-up the problem by modeling a non-example of how to decide roles with a student volunteer. Ask for a volunteer to be your partner and sit with you in the middle of the circle. Tell the student that they have to be Fox because you really want to be Bear. Pause and notice your partner’s facial expressions. Ask your partner how they felt when you told them what to do. Apologize to your partner and ask students if there you could have started the conversation in a different way (rather than telling your partner what to do).
5. Introduce the process for making a peaceful decision. This can be done with direct instruction but is more effective if the teacher models the process with a partner - wanting different roles and the same role. Teaching this process explicitly and using it regularly builds self-management and relationship skills. Discuss how Step 3 can be hard if you don’t get the role you want. Have students share ideas for how to feel disappointed but accept the outcome.

### Peaceful Problem-Solving Process

**Step #1: Ask each other - "What do YOU want to be?"**

**Step #2: Choose a decision-making strategy** (if actors want the same role)

- Flip a coin (I keep a little tin of pennies for students to take as needed.)
- Pick a number between 1-10
- Take turns
- Be flexible – "I don't mind, you can be..."

**Step #3: Accept the decision.**

*\*Note: Students love to play rock, paper, scissors but this game can create conflicts around fairness (and lots of ties!). Use the list of strategies to steer students toward games of chance that work well for the group.*

6. Assign students to partners and have them sit in their partner spaces to decide roles (Bear and Fox) using the decision-making strategies. Let students know there will be 2 scenes in the story so actors use the "take turns" strategy. Ask if there are students who are willing to start the conversation by asking the question. Circulate and listen for groups that are asking. Coach students who forget to ask or need assistance going through the process.
7. Narrative Pantomime: When all are ready. Partners stand and transform into statues of their characters. Then, partners act out the beginning of the story as the teacher tells it. Stop after Fox tells Bear how to catch fish using its tail.

**Closing:** Come back to the circle to reflect on the experience. Below are ideas to guide the reflection.

- Share positive examples you saw/heard while observing.
- Use the Peaceful Problem Solving student rubric (attached) to allow students to self-assess what was easy and what was hard. Take time to reflect on any challenges.
- End by asking a few students to offer compliments to their partners for their cooperation.

## **Session Two**

**Opening:** Invite students to the circle and begin with the Mood Meter from the previous session to check in with how they are feeling today. Explain: "Our moods and emotions change every day and through the day. I wonder how all of you are feeling today." Reflect by asking 2-3 students to share their number and one reason why they feel that way.

### **Instructional Procedures:**

1. Introduce the criteria on the Character Rubric and model/review showing an animal character through movement.
2. **Character Walk Warm-up:** Students transform and move as a variety of animal characters as they are named. End the character walk with Bear and Fox.
3. Invite students back to the circle and tell the story "Why Bears Have Short Tales."

### *SEL Teaching Moment - Self Management*

4. Pause to problem solve a few moments in the story:
  - a. What is Fox doing while Bear is fishing?
  - b. How can the scene where Bear lifts up Fox be done safely and believably? Let students know that it is important in drama to keep our fellow actors safe. The audience also needs to feel that the performers are safe. Ask who has an idea for keeping the actors safe in this scene. Have a couple of volunteers model how to act this scene safely and believably.
5. Students return to their partners and sit in partner space to plan and practice this scene. Remind them that this is scene two, if groups decided to take turns with roles.
6. After a few minutes of rehearsal, check in with the Character Rubric and have students do a quick self-assessment (e.g. thumbs up, middle, down or 3-2-1). Have them think about what they want to work on and practice one more time.
7. **Narrative Pantomime:** Narrate the story beginning with Bear heading to the river to fish and Fox returning to the forest to cook the fish (or whatever students decided Fox was doing). Students play the story in their partner spaces as it is told.

**Closing:** Return to the circle to reflect. Discuss the problem in the story if the characters could have found a more peaceful solution. Have students share compliments for their partners on peaceful problem solving and communicating character.

**Assessment:** Teacher and Student formative assessment using checklists for Animal Characters and the Problem-Solving Process

**Peaceful Problem-Solving Reflection**

I've got it!	I'm working on it!	This is hard for me.
<p>I ask my partner who they want to be.</p> <p>I pick a strategy with my partner for choosing roles or solving a problem.</p> <p>I smile and accept the decision we choose.</p>	<p>I sometimes forget to ask my partner who they want to be, but I remember if someone helps me.</p> <p>I pick a strategy with my partner for choosing roles or solving a problem.</p> <p>I accept the decision, but sometimes I need help or some time to think about it.</p>	<p>I often forget to ask my partner who they want to be.</p> <p>It is hard for me to choose a strategy without the teacher's help.</p> <p>Sometimes I can't accept the decision even with help and time to think about it.</p>

**Animal Character Checklist**

	Wow!	I've got it!	I'm working on it!	This is hard for me.
<b>Animal Characters</b>	<p>I create clear detailed animal characters with my body without crawling on the floor; you know right away what animal I am playing.</p> <p>I remember to use my whole body (shape, movements, facial expressions, and actions) to show off my character's personality and match the details in the story.</p>	<p>I create animal characters without crawling on the floor; it is easy to tell who I am after watching me for a little bit.</p> <p>I remember to use my whole body (shape, movements, facial expressions, and actions) that make sense for the story.</p>	<p>Sometimes, it is hard for others to understand what animal character I am, or I forget and crawl on the floor.</p> <p>I try to use my whole body (shape, movements, facial expressions, and actions) that make sense for the story, but sometimes I need reminders.</p>	<p>I didn't remember not to crawl and I struggled to use my body to show my animal character.</p> <p>Sometimes my shape, movements, facial expressions and actions fit the story and sometimes they don't.</p>

**Learning for all: Please use the space below for suggestions for any specific adaptations or accommodations needed for neuro-diverse or atypical learners.**

Provide visuals for ELL students or students with hearing accommodations (images of the characters, animals for the character walk, images from key parts of the story, and supporting images for the Problem-Solving Checklist). A translation of the story could be provided, if needed.

Plan partners to peer buddy students with autism or other behavioral or emotional needs. Plan to sit with groups that need support during decision making. Have a calm corner or space in the classroom for students who need this for emotional regulation.

**How does this lesson's content model inclusivity and honor diversity?**

It is essential that a wide range of stories are selected that reflect and celebrate a variety of cultures. Where possible, stories from the backgrounds and interests of students should be highlighted so all students can make connections and learn from each other. The story in this lesson is an Iroquois Legend.

**Works Cited:**

Version of "Why Bears Have Short Tales" found in *The Drama of Color: Improvisation with Multiethnic Folklore* by Johnny Saldaña. (Heinemann, 1995.)

Problem solving strategies and the decision making process were adapted from Erickson, Karen L. "Concentration Partner Work." <https://onestopdramashop.com/> Accessed June 2021.

**Additional Tools & Resources:**

- Mood Meter Slide (attached)

# How am I feeling?

