

## BSL tool 2: Society of Appearance/ Image

### Introduction into the sub-theme

Our society is often said to be appearance or image based. Many people struggle in their attempts to satisfy certain physical or behavioural standards set by society . People are afraid to stand out from the crowd, seeking recognition. Children and teens are among the most vulnerable groups.

Parents/grandparents can help their children to understand the true meaning of the proverb “don’t judge a book by its cover”. They can use different positive examples, to show that a person’s appearance does not make them ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than anyone else.

In this section we provide an example of how to discuss the issue of image and appearance with younger school age children.

### Society of appearance/image

#### Description

Parents / grandparents are encouraged to discuss this topic while reading stories together at any convenient time (not only at bedtime)

**We provide guidelines on how to discuss the topic with support of the short story “Black sheep”, by Bruno Ferrero.**

#### Age range

The story can be discussed with children ages 6-10. The age range may differ depending on children's maturity and readiness to discuss such issues.

## Learning objectives

To develop critical analysis skills - careful and attentive reading, attention to details, etc.

To develop critical questioning skills - to raise open questions of varying complexity

To develop critical interpretation skills –to interpret content/plot referring to the facts/evidence;

To develop synthesis skills – to make links between different content/plot parts; to interlink person/interpersonal and social responsibility

To develop critical evaluation and reflection skills - to make independent and reasoned judgments

## Preparation for the activity

- Before reading with children, parents/grandparents should read it themselves first and be prepared to raise and discuss critical questions;
- Complexity of questions will depend on age and individual readiness to understand and to interpret the plot;
- Parents/grandparents have to choose the best time for such activity. For example, after (or before) a school, neighborhood or community event
- Parents/grandparents may decide to read the entire story in one go or in separate parts by making stops for discussions. Choice depends on such factors as children's ability to focus attention, available time for discussions, etc. We present step-by step instructions for the second option below.

## Activity step-by step

In order to evoke interest in the story, it is advisable to start by guessing “what will the story be about?”. Several keywords can be used, such as *black sheep, a journey, flocks*.

First question: *What do you think the story will be about?*

- Allocate some time to share different scenarios about the possible plot of the story. And raise interest, provoke intrigue!

- Start reading first part:

*Once there was a black sheep. All the other sheep in the flock were white. They were disgusted by the black sheep and treated the black sheep badly. Whenever they saw her, they would begin to bleat.*

*"Go away from us. You are a freak. A mistake." They were happy only when they saw the black sheep begin to cry.*

*Belinda, a fat white sheep, was especially mean to the black sheep. She was the leader of the flock. All the other sheep always followed her. They all did whatever she did.*

1<sup>st</sup> stop:

- How do you imagine the flock? Please describe.
- How would you describe Belinda as a leader?
- What does it mean to you to be a leader?
- What do you think will happen next?

Second part

*The black sheep was sad. She wanted to be like the others. However, she could not change her colour. Sometimes she tried to run away and hide. But she always came back in the end because she did not know how to live on her own.*

2<sup>nd</sup> stop:

- What does it mean to be like others?
- How much is a person free to be different, unique?
- What do you think will happen next?

Third part:

*Belinda was strong and proud. She decided to set out on a journey to learn about life. She soon came across new pastures. Whenever she met a new flock she stood among them and said proudly: "I am the leader of my flock. Everyone listens to me. I am the one who decides what to do."*

*One day Belinda met a much larger and unusual flock. All the sheep in this flock were black. At first she was surprised, and then she began to giggle. She was so sure that her white coat was superior that she swayed back and forth laughing at them. She approached them.*

3<sup>rd</sup> stop:

- What can you say about Belinda? What new things have you found out about her?
- What do you think will happen next?

Fourth part:

*However, the entire flock began to laugh at her derisively. Belinda did not even have the chance to react when one strong black sheep looked at her and said: "Has anyone ever seen anything funnier than this. We will tear that awful coat from you and then we will see what is underneath." The entire flock began to laugh. Belinda turned and ran as fast as she could. The black flock stood and laughed at her. She ran as far as another pasture where she saw another large flock.*

4<sup>th</sup> stop:

- How would you describe the flock Belinda has met? Compare your vision with the vision about the first flock. Are they different or similar? How?
- What do you think will happen next?

Fifth part

She had never seen a flock like this before: there were black sheep, white sheep, brown sheep, spotted sheep, all mixed together into one flock. Now that she had lost confidence, she stopped and wondered: "How will this flock treat me?"

5<sup>th</sup> stop:

- How will this new flock treat Belinda?
- What do you think will happen next?

Last part:

*A sheep noticed her and asked her sincerely: "Where did you come from?" "I came from the other side of the mountain," Belinda answered. A black sheep approached them and Belinda prepared herself to run. The black sheep said: "Don't be afraid. Stay here with us as long as you like? The grass is very green here. We will welcome you here." Belinda stayed with that flock for two days. Then she decided to return home. Before she said good-bye to the flock, she said: "You are the best flock in the world. You accept and respect sheep of all colours. In our flock there is only one black sheep."*

Last stop:

- You have read about three different flocks in the text. Please, compare these situations with real life.
- Have you ever been in such "different flocks" situations? What does it mean in real life?

**Further discussion**

- What did Belinda learn about life on the journey? Would Belinda have learnt it without the journey?
- What did you learn?

- What does this story mean to you?

## Some doubts that may arise

*How will it go? Will it be interesting to children?* – It might be chaotic at the very beginning . Don't worry! Children (and you!) need to gain experience of such discussions. Things will improve the more you practice these activities.

*Where to make stops and how many?* - The stops should not be too far apart or too close together. All stops should be logical – something is ending and/or something new is expected to begin. If stops make no sense for you (or you don't feel comfortable doing it) read the entire story.

*What if the story is read to children of different ages?* - It is a good family learning opportunity! They will learn from each other. You are welcome to include senior family members in the discussion as well.

*Can all stories be analyzed in the same or similar manner?* – Those stories that have useful ideas, dynamics, are evoking and provoking discussions.

## Questions for reflection, self-assessment and conclusions

- What do you think your children have learned?
- What did you learn?
- What was most difficult?
- What would you do differently next time?

## Recommendations on how to adapt to different age-groups

For smaller children (kindergarten, pre-primary) – use fairy tales, pose fewer questions, give more space for free talking. If telling the “Black sheep” story, ask

children to draw a picture of the characters, especially the colourful flock.

For 10-14 years – choose films or/and real-life events to discuss while posing open questions.

It is recommended to make references to personal experience in all cases.

## References

Bruno Ferrero (2009). 365 trumpi pasakojimai sielai. Vilnius. Katalikų pasaulio leidiniai.

“Black sheep” translated from Lithuanian into English by Laima Vincė-Sruoginis

Bruno Ferrero. “365 short stories for the soul”