

Lesson 5: Power to Think

PURPOSE

To learn to appreciate the power to think and use it in an excellent way.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson students will be able to:

1. Recognize the powers to think and choose as uniquely human powers.
2. Understand that the power to think needs to be developed through practice.
3. Recognize different thinking traps that hinder us in using the power to think in an excellent way.

MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- River-Crossing Conundrum worksheet
- Recognizing Thinking Traps worksheet
- The Thinking Traps
- Tips to Escape the Trap!

VOCABULARY

- Power to think: the human ability to understand and connect ideas

PROCEDURE

Step 1: Review the previous lesson. Recall the distinction between treating persons as subjects and treating persons as objects. Ask students if they completed the [Start-Stop](#) worksheet. Gather the worksheets and decide as a class on three things to commit to stop doing and three things to start doing, based on the suggestions from the students. Write the final Start-Stop list on a large piece of paper visible in the classroom and have all students sign the paper, to remind students of their commitment to treat everyone as subjects equal in dignity.

Step 2: Ask students if they can remember the two powers that are unique to human beings? The uniquely human powers are the powers to think and choose. Neither plants nor animals have these powers.

To help students better understand the power to think and how it can enable them to become excellent, divide the students into groups and give each group a [River-Crossing Conundrum](#) worksheet. The groups should try to figure out the solution to the conundrum as fast as possible. The group which finishes first is the winner. After all groups finish, walk them through the solution using the Answer Key for the Teacher.

Step 3: Highlight that in order to solve the puzzle, students needed to use their power to think.

The power to think enables us to understand ideas, to connect different ideas and to find solutions to difficult problems. Just like when trying to find the solution to the conundrum.

Write the vocabulary definition on the board:

Power to think: the human ability to know and connect ideas

The power to think enables humans to understand themselves and the world around them. While other living beings do things instinctively and automatically (with their senses) humans also use their senses to know and understand the world around them but they additionally reflect on their actions and the things they experience. Human beings also connect facts and ideas into complex structures called theories.

However, this power can sometimes be impaired. As we all know, sometimes emotions can overwhelm us, which makes it harder to think clearly. There are also other thinking patterns that hinder us on the path of developing our power to think in an excellent way.

Step 4: Introduce the students to the concept of thinking traps. Thinking traps are faulty ways of using our power to think.

For example, one thinking trap is that we often exaggerate the negative emotions we feel: “I’m so overwhelmed with school, I don’t know how to do anything, my teachers are all against me and everyone in class thinks I’m dumb.” This kind of exaggeration of the negative can then drive us to make bad choices: “I may as well just skip class because it doesn’t matter if I try or listen anyway.”

It is important to recognize different thinking traps, so that we can practice and develop our power to think in the most excellent way. There are lots of different kinds of thinking traps but this class will learn about six of the most common:

1. **Mental Filter:** when we are focusing only on the negative aspects of the situation, while disregarding positive ones. For example, a teacher gives us feedback after a test which involves some things we did well and some we did poorly, but we only focus on the things we did poorly. This is focusing on one part and choosing to misrepresent the whole picture.
2. **Mind Reading:** is when we conclude what another person thinks (when they didn’t tell us). For example, seeing another person yawning while we are speaking, we think: “she thinks I’m boring.” (This person might not have slept well last night, and they yawn. It is not enough to conclude that they think you are boring.)
3. **Catastrophizing:** is when we are expecting only the worst outcome from any given situation. For example, thinking that if I get a bad grade in one class, all my grades until the end of the school year will tumble.
4. **“All or Nothing”:** when we are explaining everything in “all” or “nothing” terms without considering everything in between. For example, thinking that if I am not perfect, then I am a total failure.
5. **Blame Game:** is when we are blaming others for our problems and not taking responsibility for any choices. For example, blaming another person for everything in a fight, without considering our faults.
6. **“Taking it personally”:** believing that others are behaving in a certain way necessarily because of us, without considering other possibilities. For example, thinking that since my best friend is in a bad mood, it must be my fault.

Step 5: To improve students' recognition and understanding of the thinking traps, divide them into groups and ask them to work on [Recognizing Thinking Traps](#) worksheet. For each situation described in the exercise, groups should determine which thinking trap is associated with it and why it is not an excellent way to use the power to think.

After all groups finish working, ask them to share their answers with the rest of the class. Then lead the class discussion on the basis of the Answer Key for the Teacher to reinforce the students' correct understanding of each example. Give each student [The Thinking Traps](#) handout so that they can revisit the definitions and examples later.

Explain that in order to escape thinking traps, three steps should be made:

1. Recognize the trap.

We should recognize thinking traps for what they are - a trap! It is important to reflect on our thoughts and behaviors so that we can identify one of the six thinking traps when they arise.

2. Consider the situation from a different angle.

After recognizing that we are finding ourselves in a particular thinking trap, we should try to consider the situation from other angles in order to see why our thinking is wrong and how we can make it better.

3. Form a positive and accurate thought.

Replace negative thinking traps with a positive, constructive thought. This will enable us to escape the trap and use our power to think in an excellent way so that we don't get bogged down by emotions or worries about what others think about us, etc.

Give each student the handout, [Tips to Escape the Trap!](#) It may also be helpful to pin this up somewhere in the class for students to view and remember.

Step 6: Summarize. Highlight the importance of using the power to think in an excellent way. Recall how different thinking traps hinder us in using the power to think in an excellent way and review the three steps to escape the trap!

RIVER-CROSSING CONUNDRUM

co-nun-drum: a confusing and difficult problem or question; a riddle.

A woman, a rowboat, a chicken, a fox and a bag of corn are standing on one side of the river. The woman has a dilemma – she needs to get the fox, the chicken and the bag of corn across to the other side of a river in as few moves as possible.

But there are THREE IMPORTANT RULES:

1. The rowboat can only carry the woman and **one item** at any point in time.
2. The fox and chicken cannot be left alone.
3. The chicken and the bag of corn cannot be left alone.

How does the woman transfer everyone to the other side?



River-Crossing Conundrum – Answer Key for the Teacher

To begin, the woman and the chicken cross the river together. The fox and corn are safe together.

Once on the other side, the woman leaves the chicken and returns to the fox and corn. She takes the fox across the river, and since she can't leave the fox and chicken together, she brings the chicken back with her (that is the trick which many groups do not think of.)

She cannot leave the chicken with the corn, so she leaves the chicken and rows the corn across the river and leaves it with the fox.

Finally, she returns to pick up the chicken and rows across the river one last time.

RECOGNIZING THINKING TRAPS

Do you know what a trap is?

1. A device designed to catch and retain animals.
2. A situation in which people lie in wait for a surprise attack: “we were fed false information by a double agent and walked straight into a trap!”

For each situation, a “thinking trap” is described. Select which thinking trap it is from the list of six traps below. Briefly write down what’s wrong with this kind of thinking trap.

Situation	Thought	Thinking trap	What’s wrong with this thinking trap?
A person I know passed by me and didn’t say hello.	What did I do wrong? Why is this person mad at me?		
Getting a bad grade on the exam.	The teacher hates me.		
I had trouble understanding some math tasks.	I will never be good at math.		
Lately you and your friend got into a few arguments and you are not spending so much time together anymore.	If we stop being friends, I will be unhappy for the rest of my life.		
My mom praised me for getting A’s in math and English, but critiqued me for getting a C in science.	My mom is really mad and thinks I’m terrible in school.		
I’m not very good at sports, and in the last sports class I failed at some tasks.	I’m terrible at sports, I will never be good at it.		
A group of classmates are laughing hard in the other part of the hallway. They also happen to look your way.	They must be laughing at me, they think I’m a loser.		

Mind Reading

All or NOTHING

Catastrophizing!

BLAME game

BLAME game

Taking it Personally

Mental Filter

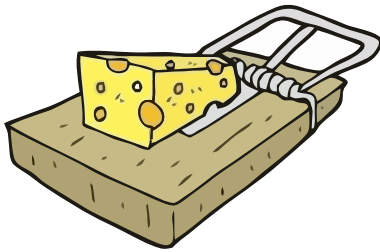
Recognizing Thinking Traps – Answer Key for the Teacher

Situation	Thought	Thinking trap	What's wrong with this thinking trap?
A person I know passed by me and didn't say hello.	What did I do wrong? Why is this person mad at me?	Taking it personal, mind reading	There might be many other reasons why the person did not say hello, which might not have anything to do with me.
Getting a bad grade on the exam.	The teacher hates me.	Blaming	It is more likely that I did not study hard enough.
I had trouble understanding some math tasks.	I will never be good at math.	"All or nothing" thinking	Truth is, if I study more, I will certainly improve and perhaps also become good at math.
Lately you and your friend got into a few arguments and you are not spending so much time together anymore.	If we stop being friends, I will be unhappy for the rest of my life.	Catastrophizing	Even though good friendships should be cherished, if they come to an end, there are many other things in life that can make us happy.
My mom praised me for getting A's in math and English, but critiqued me for getting a C in science.	My mom is really mad and thinks I'm terrible in school.	Mental filter	Truth is mom does not think I am terrible, but she only critiqued my poor grade, and praised my good grades.
I'm not very good at sports, and in the last sports class I failed at some tasks.	I'm terrible at sports, I will never be good at it.	"All or nothing" thinking	If I regularly practice, I will certainly improve in sports. I do not have to be the best in the world, but I can improve.
A group of classmates are laughing hard in the other part of the hallway. They also happen to look your way.	They must be laughing at me, they think I'm a loser.	Mind reading, taking it personally	Their laughter is maybe not connected to me in any way. Just them looking in my direction is not enough to conclude that.

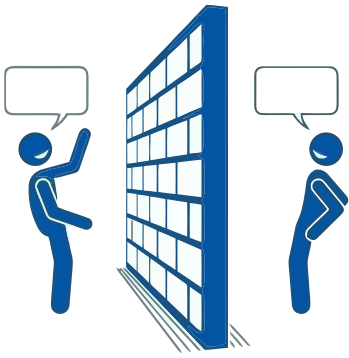
THE THINKING TRAPS

Name of the trap	What does it mean?	Example
Mental filter	Focusing only on the negative aspects of the situation, while disregarding the positive ones.	A teacher gives us feedback after an exam which involves some things we did well and some we did poorly, but we focus only on the latter.
Mind reading	Concluding what another person thinks without hearing what they have to say.	Seeing another person yawning while we are speaking and thinking that she must be bored by us.
Catastrophizing	Expecting only the worst outcome from a situation.	If I get a bad grade in this exam, my grades until the end of the school year will tumble.
"All or nothing" thinking	Explaining everything in "all" or "nothing" terms without considering everything in between.	<i>If I am not perfect, then I am a total failure.</i>
Blame game	Blaming others for our problems and not taking personal responsibility.	Blaming another person for everything after a fight without considering our faults.
Taking it personally	Believing that others are behaving in a certain way necessarily because of us, without considering other possibilities.	<i>My best friend is in a bad mood, it must be my fault.</i>

TIPS TO ESCAPE THE TRAP!



1. Recognize the trap



2. Consider the situation from another angle



3. Form a more positive (and accurate!) thought