

Lesson 6: Freedom for Excellence

PURPOSE

To motivate students to live freedom for excellence in their lives.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

1. Recognize that true freedom is always connected with responsibility.
2. Identify and distinguish between freedom for excellence and freedom to do whatever I want.
3. Recognize examples of using the freedom for excellence and freedom to do whatever I want in their class.

MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- The Spiderman Principle
- What Would Spiderman Say?
- Game: What Kind of Freedom?
- Interim Quiz 1

VOCABULARY

- Freedom for excellence: using one's freedom to make excellent choices
- Freedom of indifference: using one's freedom carelessly; failing to consider whether one's actions are excellent or non-excellent

PROCEDURE

Step 1: Review the previous lesson. Highlight the importance of using the power to think in an excellent way. Ask students if they can recall some of the six thinking traps and the three steps to avoid these traps.

Step 2: In earlier lessons, the class learned that humans possess two unique powers which other beings do not have. Those are the powers to think and to choose. The power to choose is one of the most important human powers. Explain that in this lesson the class will learn about freedom and how we can use our power to choose in the most excellent way.

Ask the students the following questions:

- What is freedom?
- Is freedom not having to listen to anyone or not doing what grown ups tell you to do?
- If someone regularly chooses to skip practice or studying, does this make them more or less free?
- Is a person who makes bad choices more free than a person who makes good choices?

Leave questions open-ended and explain that the class will explore some of these questions through this lesson.

Hand out the text, [The Spiderman Principle](#) and have students take turns reading aloud. When the class has completed reading the text, lead the class in discussion with the Answer Key for the Teacher provided.

Highlight that freedom is always connected to responsibility. Humans possess great powers which enable them to become excellent human beings. What are two of the greatest powers? To think and to choose. As Spiderman says: "With great freedom comes great responsibility." Having such powers enables human beings to choose what is excellent but also, at times, what is not-excellent.

For example, someone could use their power to think to learn lots of embarrassing facts about someone and then spread these things around the classroom, school, or community in order to hurt that person. Similarly, someone could use their power to choose to hurt someone. These are both examples of using the power to think and to choose "whatever I want", which can also be called: freedom of indifference.

Write the vocabulary definition on the board:

Freedom of indifference: using one's freedom carelessly; failing to consider whether one's actions are excellent or non-excellent

People who practice making non-excellent choices are still practicing their power to choose. However, they are using their freedom carelessly; failing to think and choose what is excellent. Instead, they practice thinking and making choices that make them less free, over time. How? If someone chooses to eat unhealthy food, stays up late playing video games or hanging out with friends watching TV, skips doing their homework and studying for a test because they don't feel like doing it... after some time, this person will become unhealthy, tired, be in a bad mood and perform worse and worse in school. This will make him less free to do things that will actually make him happy: have the fitness to play sports, make good friends and pass his tests at school.

But there is another kind of freedom. Ask students if they can recall the name of a second kind of freedom? The answer is not The Spiderman Principle, but it's close. Write the vocabulary definition on the board:

Freedom for excellence: using one's freedom to make excellent choices

Explain that using their powers to think and to choose freedom for excellence in everyday situations is what makes a human person excellent. This type of freedom says that we are free only when we think and try to choose what is excellent. Choosing freedom for excellence is often the harder choice, but it is what makes us more free, and believe it or not: happy and proud of ourselves, too. This freedom also implies that we should consider whether our choices respect human dignity in ourselves and others and make only the choices that do respect human dignity.

Step 3: To reinforce the distinction between using freedom responsibly and irresponsibly, divide the students once more into groups and ask them to work on the [What Would Spiderman Say?](#) worksheet. The students should circle the statements that they Spiderman would say and cross out the statements that are contrary to the Spiderman Principle.

Explain that there are two main ways in which freedom can be understood. They are freedom of indifference, or "freedom to do whatever I want" and freedom for excellence. "Freedom to do whatever I want" doesn't think about whether my actions are good or bad, excellent or non-excellent, whether they will do harm to myself or others. Freedom of excellence by contrast, is aligned with the "Spiderman Principle", which says that real power lies in choosing what may be hard, but is the most excellent choice, for myself and others. Our human powers to think and to choose are powerful! We can't control everything in our lives, but we always have the power to think and to choose what we will do in response.

Step 4: To conclude the class, ask students to play the [What Kind of Freedom? Game](#). Each student should write one sentence that is an example of a freedom of indifference statement (“you should be able to do whatever you want”) and one sentence that is an example of a freedom for excellence statement (“It’s important to return the books that you’ve taken from the classroom”). Have students put their papers in a box and mix them up. Then, go around the class and have each student take one paper from the box and read it aloud. Have the class vote if they think it is a “freedom of indifference statement” or a “freedom for excellence” statement.

Recall the distinction between freedom for excellence and freedom of indifference, e.g., “freedom to do whatever I want”, as any questions arise in the game. Help students to understand the ways in which their freedom can be used in both an excellent and a non-excellent, or indifferent, way.

Step 5: Emphasize that people should always use their freedom to think and choose what is excellent. This will not only ensure that their choices are excellent, but they themselves will become more excellent as human beings. Recognizing the excellent choice in each situation is not always easy, and more often than not, it is also much more difficult than using one’s freedom to do whatever I want. For this reason, it is important to practice freedom for excellence throughout one’s life, in small details and in big.

FOLLOW-UP & HOMEWORK

Ask the students to Fill in [Interim Quiz 1](#) at home and bring it to the next class. Let them know that solving the interim quiz will help them in the Final quiz which will happen during the last class.

THE SPIDERMAN PRINCIPLE

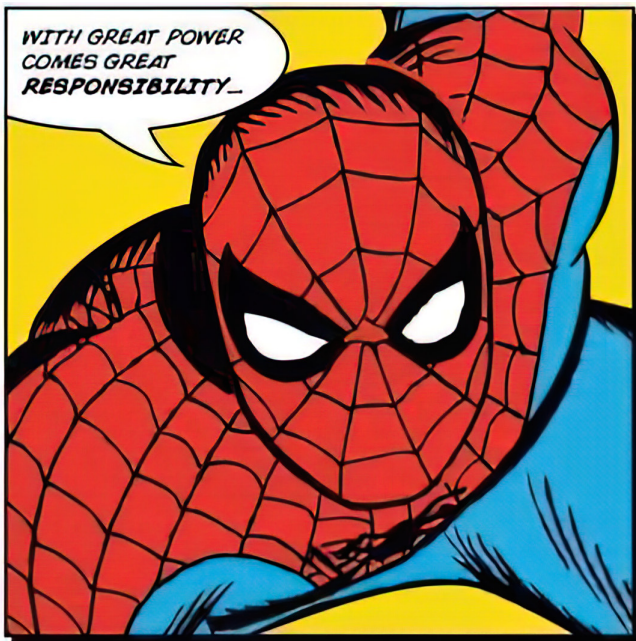
Have you ever imagined that you have a superpower? Ever since I can remember, I wanted to have superpowers, like Spiderman, Superman or other cartoon superheroes.

Have you ever thought about which power you would choose? Would it be to fly? Or, what about becoming invisible? That would be cool. Oh wait, what if you could read people's thoughts!

Having a super-powered memory or being really amazing at soccer would be cool, too. But for me, I always wanted to become invisible. If I was invisible I could sneak into people's houses, go to the cinema without paying, get out of the classroom during tests to check the correct answers and then slip back in, unnoticed... Or, I could listen in while my friends were talking about something, go to the store and take anything I like, or simply disappear when I didn't want to be somewhere.

Of all the superheroes, I think Spiderman has always been my favorite. He has that perfect combination of physical power and being able to create a spider's web, basically in the palm of his hand. I think I've read all of the comic books about Peter Parker, i.e. Spiderman.

But one day, I stumbled upon this picture:



This one sentence really hit me. What did it mean? After reading it a couple of times, it suddenly dawned on me. While I was dreaming about superpowers as an ability to do whatever I wanted, Spiderman was actually saying something totally different. For instance, I was thinking of the superpower to be invisible as a way to take things from people or cheat on tests, but I wasn't thinking about how this would actually be causing harm to myself and to others (e.g. by taking things from them or by getting in the habit of not studying).

Spiderman understood that having superpowers could do harm to himself and others, or it could do a lot of good. This made him aware that with great power comes a great responsibility. And in one of those classic cartoons "aha!" moments, the lightbulb went on in my head. The fact that Spiderman had the power to "do whatever he wanted" and yet he chose to only use his powers to help others and to make the world a better place, is what makes him a superhero. It's not his great strength. It's not even about how much other people like and admire him. The thing that makes Spiderman a hero is one thing only: that he chooses, day in and day out, to use his powers for the good. If that isn't the hardest thing to do, what is?

QUESTIONS FOR A DISCUSSION:

1. If you could have a superpower, which one would you choose?
2. How would you use it? Would you apply The Spiderman Principle?
3. Which unique powers human beings have which no other living or non-living beings possess?
How should we use them, according to The Spiderman Principle?

The Spiderman Principle – Answer Key for the Teacher

1. **If you could have a superpower, which one would you choose?** Students can choose different versions of this answer.
2. **How would you use it? Would you apply The Spiderman Principle?** The Spiderman principle applied to different superpowers would imply that these superpowers should be used responsibly, i.e. not causing harm to oneself and others, but always trying to use these superpowers for the benefit of everyone involved. It means using superpowers to do good and not bad things.
3. **Which unique powers human beings have which no other living or non-living beings possess? How should we use them, according to The Spiderman Principle?** Human beings in fact have two great powers which no other living or non-living beings possess, and those are powers to think and choose. These powers are uniquely human and are very important since they enable us to do great things and become excellent.

These powers should be used responsibly and in an excellent way. This is especially so with the power to choose. We can make choices that hurt others or do harm to ourselves, and we can make excellent choices which make ourselves and others better. We should obviously always choose the latter.

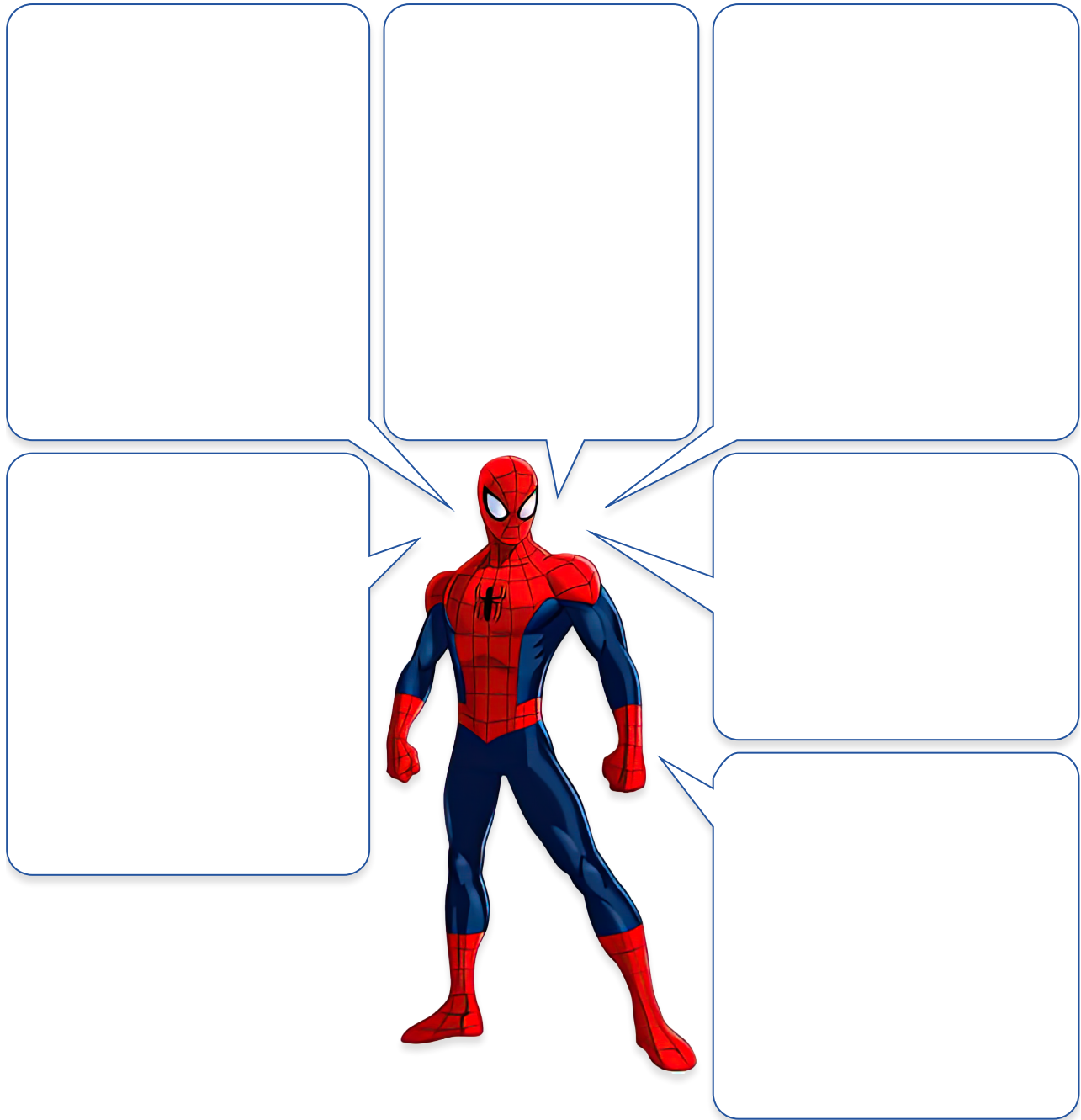
WHAT WOULD SPIDERMAN SAY?

1. Read the sentences below. Which statements would Spiderman say? Which statements would he never say? Use The Spiderman Principle as a guide for finding the answers.

Spiderman Principle: “With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility.”

“If my teacher wasn’t out to get me I’d have better grades.”	“I don’t have to practice, I choose to practice because I want to get better.”	“I know I could cheat and no one would find out, but I choose not to do it since I know cheating is wrong and won’t help me in the long-run, anyway.”
“I would really like to watch funny Youtube videos until late in the evening, but I have an exam tomorrow so I won’t do it since I need to rest.”	“You can’t tell me what to do. I don’t care!”	“My parents are so annoying. They never let me do anything fun.”
“I enjoy making fun of others and I don’t care how this makes them feel.”	“Studying is sometimes boring, but I know it’s good for me so I choose to do it.”	“I’m upset, but I just need to cool off, as I don’t want to say or do something that will hurt others and that I’ll regret later.”
“I hang out with some people because I know I can get something from them. But they are not my friends, I would never spend time with them otherwise.”	“I’ve heard an embarrassing rumor about a friend. I don’t spread such things further since I don’t know if they are true and I’m sure they will hurt my friend.”	“School is boring and stupid. I would never go to school if grown ups wouldn’t force me to.”

2. Write those sentences that you think Spiderman would say in the speech bubbles, below.



What Would Spiderman Say? – Answer Key for the Teacher

The crossed out sentences are those Spiderman would never say, and the rest should be written in the speech balloons as the sentences Spiderman would say.

"If my teacher wasn't out to get me I'd have better grades."	"I don't have to practice, I choose to practice because I want to get better."	I know I could cheat and no one would find out, but I choose not to do it since I know cheating is wrong and won't help me in the long-run, anyway."
"I would really like to watch funny Youtube videos until late in the evening, but I have an exam tomorrow so I won't do it since I need to rest."	"You can't tell me what to do. I don't care!"	"My parents are so annoying. They never let me do anything fun."
"I enjoy making fun of others and I don't care how this makes them feel."	"Studying is sometimes boring, but I know it's good for me so I choose to do it."	"I'm upset, but I just need to cool off, as I don't want to say or do something that will hurt others and that I'll regret later."
"I hang out with some people because I know I can get something from them. But they are not my friends, I would never spend time with them otherwise."	"I've heard an embarrassing rumor about a friend. I don't spread such things further since I don't know if they are true and I'm sure they will hurt my friend."	"School is boring and stupid. I would never go to school if grown-ups wouldn't force me."

INTERIM QUIZ 1

Mark sentences as True or False:

1. T / F Not all people have human dignity.
2. T / F The power to choose is shared by all living beings.
3. T / F It's OK to treat someone as an object if you get something for free as a result.
4. T / F Catastrophizing is the situation in which we are expecting only the worst outcome of any given situation.
5. T / F Mind Reading is when we conclude that we know what another person is thinking.
6. T / F Choosing to go to bed on time and play sports are both examples of using our freedom for indifference.
7. T / F With great power comes great responsibility.

Writing Response:

8. What is the difference between freedom to do whatever I want and freedom for excellence?

Pair the concept with an appropriate definition:

Choosing carelessly by failing to consider whether one's actions are excellent or non-excellent	Human Dignity	Freedom for excellence	The ability of a living being to do something on its own
Treating a Person as a Subject	Power to think	The human ability to understand and connect ideas	
Power	Valuing a person for their intrinsic worth	The special value of every human person	Freedom to do whatever I want

Interim Quiz 1 – Answer Key for the Teacher

True or False:

1. F – all people have human dignity.
2. F – only humans have the power to choose.
3. F – people are never to be treated as mere objects
4. T
5. T
6. F – Choosing to go to bed on time and play sports are both examples of using our freedom for what is excellent. Note: if we practice choosing what is excellent, “doing what I want to do” can also be what is excellent!
7. T

Writing Response:

8. Freedom to do whatever I want says that we are free simply if we can do what we want and nothing or no one can prevent us from doing that. This type of freedom fails to consider whether our actions are good or bad, excellent or non-excellent, whether they will do harm to others or ourselves. It is an irresponsible type of freedom. Freedom for excellence says that we are free only if we make good or excellent choices. This freedom also implies that we should consider whether our choices respect human dignity in ourselves and others and make only the choices that do respect human dignity.

Pairing Game:

Power: the ability of a living being to do something on its own	Excellence: becoming the best we can be based on our dignity	Human dignity: the special value of every human person	Freedom to do whatever I want: choosing carelessly by failing to consider whether one’s actions are excellent or non-excellent
Freedom for excellence: using one’s freedom to make excellent choices	Power to think: the human ability to understand and connect ideas		