



# iversity Discussion Starters

A Collection  
of Ice Breakers  
Designed  
to Start  
Conversation  
about  
Diversity



PENNSSTATE



College of Agricultural Sciences  
Agricultural Research and Cooperative Extension

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# I ntroduction

Diversity means differences and includes all of us in our rich and infinite variety. Currently, technological advances are making communication around the world easier and faster. The U.S. population is undergoing demographic changes. As a result of these changes, diversity is more prevalent in schools and in the workplace. These demographic changes also create the need to implement multicultural educational experiences in both formal and nonformal educational settings. As youth development leaders provide quality educational experiences for youth, utilizing curricula that are inclusive of diversity education training is important. We need to prepare youth (and people of all ages) to function and succeed in a diverse society and world.



## Overview

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This publication is designed to help facilitate discussion about diversity among youth and adults. Diversity is discussed in a broad sense in this publication through a variety of stories and poems. Each story and poem is set up as an activity that includes a brief discussion and several thought-provoking questions. These activities cause youth and adults to think critically about the meaning of diversity. This guide is also designed to help youth and adults value their own cultures as well as other people's cultures and to reflect on the lives and perspectives of people who are different from themselves.

## Goals of this Guide

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This activity guide will help facilitate discussion about diversity. The goals of this guide are:

- To provide materials that will further prompt discussion about diversity and related issues.
- To offer thought-provoking questions regarding diversity for use with various audiences.



## **How Can These Activities Boost an Understanding of Diversity?**

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Learning about diversity can be fun. However, beginning to discuss the topic of diversity can be difficult. Therefore, this publication will provide activities that can help participants:

- Define and think about how they interpret the term “diversity.”
- Interpret the stories’ and poems’ meaning for themselves.
- Share their feelings regarding the stories and poems.
- Accept and respect differences and similarities between themselves and others.

## **When and Where Should These Activities Be Used?**

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The materials and activities in this publication are appropriate for use by teachers, youth development leaders, diversity educators, child-care professionals, and education professionals in other settings. Although the materials in this publication are appropriate for elementary school-age youth, many of the discussion starters are adaptable for use with people of a variety of ages. In fact, adults will benefit from engaging in thought-provoking discussions and questions found in this discussion guide. Select the questions that are most appropriate for the group. Adapting the materials for various audiences will be left up to the facilitator’s discretion.

This guide can be used a variety of ways. The facilitators may select the approach that best suits their groups’ needs. Facilitators should know that the activities in this guide should be used as discussion starters or icebreakers. However, many activities may serve as the basis for an entire lesson. In both cases, the facilitators should allow ample time for discussion at the end of the activity. This will depend on the size of the group, the setting, and the amount of time available. The facilitators must select the activities that fit their groups and their situations.

### **Note to Facilitators**

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Discussion of unresolved feelings is important for clarification and dissolving any misunderstandings. Since discussing the topic of diversity often leads to revealing personal information, participants need to feel comfortable when taking part in these activities. These activities should be conducted in an environment that allows participants to feel comfortable with sharing.

# Life Skills

Learning and facilitating discussion about diversity isn't all that will result from using this guide. This guide also allows participants the opportunity to practice skills that they will be able to use in real life.

This section will explain the many skills participants will gain by working through the activities in this guide. The definition of each life skill has been adapted from *Targeting Life Skills*, by Patricia A. Hendricks, former Iowa State extension youth development specialist. Life skills found in this guide include:

- Valuing Diversity
- Thinking Critically
- Learning to Learn
- Problem Solving
- Cooperation
- Caring for Others
- Working in a Team
- Decision Making
- Communication

## Definition of Life Skills

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**Valuing Diversity**—recognizing and welcoming factors that separate or distinguish one person from another. It also means being aware of the many similarities and differences among people and their cultures. In valuing diversity, one must be willing to accept that differences are okay and learn to value one's own uniqueness and "specialness."

**Thinking Critically**—can be thought of as talking things over with yourself in your mind, deciding what to think or do, and improving the quality of decision making. The critical-thinking process can be stated as a set of questions you ask and answer yourself.

- Observing the situation carefully: Do I agree with what is being said or done?

- Examining your reaction: How do I really feel about what is being said or done?
- Considering alternative responses and opposing viewpoints: Based on what I know, is the statement true?
- Deciding among the alternatives: What implication does this decision have on my future and me? Am I willing to use this information in making decisions?

**Learning to Learn**—acquiring, evaluating, and using information; understanding the methods and skills for learning.

- Observing or using the senses to gain new information or finding new ways to use information.
- Understanding the meaning of the information.
- Questioning to gain more information.
- Using the learned information in new situations, to solve problems, or to change your behavior.
- Being able to break down information into parts.
- Integrating parts of information to form a whole.
- Judging the value of information for a given purpose.
- Being able to communicate information to someone else.
- Supporting the efforts of others to learn.

**Problem Solving**—clearly identifying a problem and a plan of action for resolution of the problem. The problem-solving process involves the following:

1. Identifying/clearly defining the problem situation.
2. Gathering information; considering priorities, resources, needs, and interests.
3. Thinking of alternative solutions.
4. Comparing and selecting the best alternatives.

5. Planning a strategy—setting a goal and determining ways to reach that goal.
6. Carrying out the plan—applying the solution to the problem.

**Cooperation**—working or acting together for a common purpose or mutual benefit. This includes the following skills:

- Communicating effectively
- Setting group goals
- Using social skills
- Interacting effectively with others
- Building and maintaining trust
- Providing leadership
- Engaging in discussion and controversy that produces results
- Managing conflict
- Accepting responsibility

**Caring for Others**—showing understanding, kindness, and concern toward others; giving attention to the well-being of others.

- Showing sensitivity to other's situations and their well-being.
- Being sympathetic; capacity for sharing or understanding the feelings of another; compassion.
- Involving oneself in helping others; demonstrating concern.
- Being able to accept expressions of concern from others.



**Working in a Team**—work done by two or more people, each doing parts of the whole task. Teamwork involves:

- Communicating effectively.
- Identifying a common task.
- Dividing a task by identifying contributions by each person (roles).
- Accepting responsibility for your part of the task.
- Coordinating the interaction (working together) to complete the task.
- Sharing accomplishment.

**Decision Making**—choosing among several alternatives. The decision-making process includes:

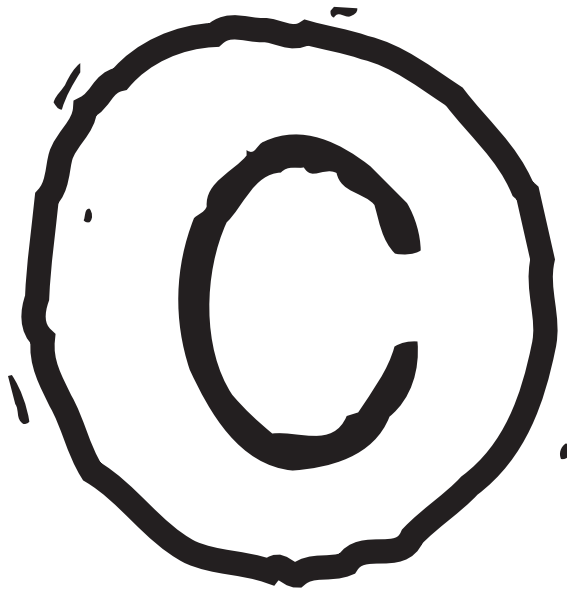
1. Specifying goals and constraints (limits).
2. Generating alternatives.
3. Considering risks and appraising alternatives.
4. Choosing an alternative to implement.

**Communication**—exchanging thoughts, information, or messages between individuals; sending and receiving information using speech writing and gestures. Messages must be sent and received for communication to have taken place. Some examples are:

- Reading: considering ideas, thoughts, information, or messages that have been written.
- Speaking: talking or verbal communication; conversation; planning, organizing, and presenting a speech.
- Listening: hearing and interpreting verbal (spoken) communications.
- Giving feedback: responding to communication.
- Observing: being attentive to and interpreting nonverbal communication, such as body language and gestures.

# *C*opyright Information and Disclaimer

In an effort to provide quality poems and stories, we diligently sought information on each of the works. We, the creators of this activity guide, exhausted every possible avenue to find author information and to gain permission for including each work. We want to ensure our work reflects the highest level of integrity and professionalism. All items are believed to be in the public domain unless otherwise noted. If you know that an item displayed is not in the public domain, please notify us with the publishing information. Upon verification, the item will be removed from the publication unless permission to use it has been granted by the author.



# D

## iscussion Starter 1

### Diversity

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*Author unknown*

The second-grade school teacher posed a simple enough problem to the class. “There are four blackbirds sitting in a tree. You take a slingshot and shoot one of them. How many are left?”

“Three,” answered the first 7-year-old boy with certainty. “One subtracted from four leaves three.”

“Zero,” answered the second 7-year-old boy with equal certainty. “If you shoot one bird, the others will fly away.”



### Discussion

The problem, as it turns out, was not so simple after all. In some ways it gets to the very heart of what the fuss is all about regarding cultural diversity and the need to recognize, understand, value, and, finally, manage it.

### Questions

- Pretend you were in the class in the story. How would you have answered the teacher’s question?
- Why do you think the two 7-year-old students answered the question the way they did?
- Take a moment to think about what diversity means to you. Do you think it means the same thing to other people?
- What’s the correct answer? Is there only one way to answer the question?
- How do people’s perspectives play a role in how they may answer the teacher’s question?
- Why do you suppose the first child answered, “Three,” while the second child answered, “Zero”?
- The author of this vignette illustrates the viewpoints of children who grew up in different environments. What is the lesson the author is trying to present?
- Reflect on the story. Do you think birds can be compared to human situations? Why or why not?





# D

## iscussion Starter 2

### The Man and the Eagle

*Author unknown*

There was once a man who had never seen an eagle. One day a magnificent eagle landed on his windowsill, and when he saw it, he exclaimed, "What an ugly creature!" The man grabbed the eagle and pulled it into his house. "First, I'm going to fix that curved beak of yours." He used a file to remove the hook in the eagle's beak. "Those claws are vicious looking," the man said as he clipped the eagle's claws until there was little left. When he finished, the man said, "There, now you look better." And he put the bird back on his open windowsill and shooed it away. You can imagine how long the newly trimmed eagle lasted in the wild.

### Discussion

The man changed the bird drastically in this story. Without valuing the bird's special qualities, the man altered the bird to what he thought would be better. This story can be used to discuss discrimination and the effect it has on those who are discriminated against.



### Questions

- Think about the eagle for a moment. How important do you think it is for the eagle to have its claws and sharp beak?
- Why are the eagle's beak and claws important to its survival?
- After reading this story, why do you think the man changed the bird?
- Did the man know the importance of the eagle's claws and beak? If he knew more about eagles, do you think he would have appreciated the eagle instead of changing it?
- Have you ever tried to change a person who is different from you?
- Are some people cruel in this manner to people with whom they are not familiar?
- Do you think it's ethical to change people because you think their characteristics are different or somehow less superior to yours? If so, in what situation do you feel this is justified?
- What happens when people place their beliefs on others?
- Can all people be judged by the same standard of beauty? Why or why not?
- In your opinion, what makes a person beautiful/attractive?
- What role does a person's preference play in deciding what is beautiful or attractive?
- How do we treat people who don't look like us—have different skin colors; are taller, thinner, or heavier; have braces or glasses; use a cane to walk; have wrinkles; are older, younger, deaf, or blind?
- How does this story parallel the history of America?



# D

## iscussion Starter 3



### Color Blind

#### *Clever Black*

If all of us were color blind  
I know it's then we would find  
That of the problems facing nations  
There'd not be one on race relations.

The color of a fellow's skin  
Is just on top, and very thin  
He's really just the same down under,  
But how we treat him makes me wonder.

I asked a preacher—a nice fellow  
If souls were black or white or yellow;  
He said he thought the soul of a man  
Was neither white, nor black, nor tan.

He said he thought that it was true,  
From listening to a God he knew  
That we would someday, somewhere find  
That even Christ was color blind.



### Discussion

Judging others by the color of their skin is a form of stereotyping. Look up this word in a dictionary and discuss any stereotypes you have as well as ones others have made about you. Think about the effect it had on you and on others.

### Questions

- What do you think it means to be color blind?
- Do you believe it is possible to be colorblind in today's society?
- What do the colors of people's skins say about them? Does it accurately describe their personality, intelligence, or ability?
- Why do people have different skin colors?
- Can you name a group of people who were persecuted simply because of the color of their skin?
- Have you ever made judgments about people because of the color of their skin? If so, what did you think? Did you realize you were making assumptions at the time? How did you feel after making that assumption? Please share your experience(s).
- How do people's upbringings affect their acceptance of people who are different from themselves?
- Has anyone ever made an assumption about you based on your race (physical attributes)?
- What do people's skin colors mean to you?
- What does racial profiling mean?
- What effects do you think racial profiling will have on those who are targeted? What about those who do the profiling—are they wrong?
- Is racism the only reason nations fight? If not, what other reasons exist?

# D

## iscussion Starter 4

### Crayons

*Author unknown*

We could learn a lot from crayons:  
Some are sharp,  
Some are pretty,  
Some are dull,  
Some have weird names,  
and are all different colors,  
But they all have to live in the same box.



### Discussion

Appreciating diversity is valuing what makes us similar as well as different. This poem talks about learning to live together and appreciating the unique qualities of others. Encourage participants to look around themselves and take note of all the things that make them who they are. This poem is special because it can be adapted to discuss all areas such as gender, age, physical abilities, intelligence levels, racial/ethnic backgrounds, economic status, beliefs, family structures, places of residence, and so forth.

### Questions

How are people similar to a box of crayons?

- Have you met people who have distinct names or talk differently than you do? How did you react when you first met them? How did they react to you?
- Do the ways people look indicate their level of intelligence?
- How can people with varying traditions, beliefs, and values learn to live together in the same community? What would you expect to be the positive and negative about that type of situation?
- What if everyone in the world was exactly the same? If they all looked the same, talked the same, shared the same views, practices, and traditions, what kind of world would it be? Do you think this would be a place you'd want to live? Why or why not? Explain.

# D

## iscussion Starter 5

### **The Crayon Box That Talked**

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*Shane DeRolf, reprinted with permission from Random House, Inc.*

While walking in a toy store, the day before today,  
I overheard a crayon box with many things to say.

“I don’t like Red,” said Yellow. And Green said, “Nor do I.”  
And no one here likes Orange, but no one knows just why.

“We are a box of crayons that doesn’t get along,”  
said Blue to all the others, “Something here is wrong!”

Well, I bought that box of crayons, and took it home with me,  
And laid out all the crayons so the crayons could all see. . . .

They watched me as I colored with Red and Blue and Green,  
and Black and White and Orange, and every color in between.

They watched as Green became the grass and Blue became the sky.  
The Yellow sun was shining bright on White clouds drifting by.

Colors changing as they touched, becoming something new.  
They watched me as I colored. They watched me till I was through.

And when I’d finally finished, I began to walk away.  
And as I did the crayon box had something more to say. . . .

“I do like Red!” said Yellow  
And Green said, “So do I!  
And, Blue, you were terrific,  
So high up in the sky!”

We are a box of crayons,  
Each one of us is unique  
But when we get together . . .  
The picture is complete.

## Discussion

This is a vivid story about a box of crayons that did not get along. At first they disliked each other, but after learning to value each other's unique qualities, the crayons in the box began to appreciate each other as they worked together to create a beautiful picture. Young children will relate to these colorful characters. Use this carefully created story to promote open-mindedness and cooperation and to dispel stereotypes about different groups of people.



## Questions

- Why didn't the crayons in this box get along?
- Why did the little girl take the box of crayons home?
- What did it take for the crayons to begin to appreciate each other?
- What were the benefits of the box of crayons working together?
- Are people sometimes like this box of crayons? In what ways do you think they are similar to the box of crayons?
- Is the box of crayons similar to your classroom, club, or group? How is it similar? How does it differ? Explain.
- Do you think this box of crayons became more open-minded toward each other? Were new friendships formed?
- Each crayon had a unique quality that contributed to the picture. Think of two unique qualities you have as an individual. Share them with a partner or the group. Listen as your partner shares their qualities. Take note of any similar and/or different qualities that you and your partner have.
- Pretend you and your friends were like this box of crayons. What would the picture that you color look like?

# D

## iscussion Starter 6



### If All the Trees Were Oaks

*Author unknown*

What if all the trees were oaks  
How plain the world would seem;  
No maple syrup, banana splits,  
And how would orange juice be?

Wouldn't it be a boring place,  
If all the people were the same;  
Just one color, just one language,  
Just one family name!

-But-

If the forest were the world,  
And all the people were the trees;  
Palm and pine, bamboo and willow,  
Live and grow in harmony.

Aren't you glad, my good friend,  
Different though we be;  
We are here to help each other,  
I learn from you, and you, from me.

### Discussion

This poem paints a picture of how the world would be without diversity. Use this poem to discuss the importance of valuing differences in people. Remember, the focus should be broad in scope—do not limit discussion to race issues. Expand dialogue to include physical disabilities; learning styles; places of residence: urban, rural, and suburban; rich, poor; age; gender; religion; morals, values, traditions, and more.

### Questions

- How is the forest like the world?
- The poem lists four different types of tree—palm, pine, bamboo, and willow. What are some of the differences found in people? Make a list, then share it with others in the group.
- What would it be like if all your friends were exactly the same? If they liked the same things, talked the same, and acted the same, would you have as much fun with them?
- What would happen if all the people in the world were the same? What kinds of traditions would exist? What holidays would we celebrate? Which holidays would no longer be celebrated? How difficult would it be to decide on those important things? What would we gain and what would we lose?
- Do you think it is positive or negative that everyone in the world is different? Explain.
- How important is it to learn from people who are different from you?
- What kinds of things can you learn from a person who comes from another part of the country or a country outside the United States?
- How do our differences help each other and allow us to learn from each other?
- What are the benefits of diversity?



# D

## iscussion Starter 7

### The Black Balloon

*Author unknown*

The little black boy watched a man,  
Blow up balloons one day  
When each balloon was filled, the man  
Let each one float away.

The little boy watched patiently,  
And waved each one good-bye  
As all the pretty bright balloons  
Went drifting toward the sky.

He asked the man if black balloons  
Would go up like the rest.  
The man said, "Son, I'll blow one up,  
And put it to the test."

And when the black balloon was filled,  
They watched it rise and glide.  
"It's not the color, son," he said,  
"But what you've got inside."

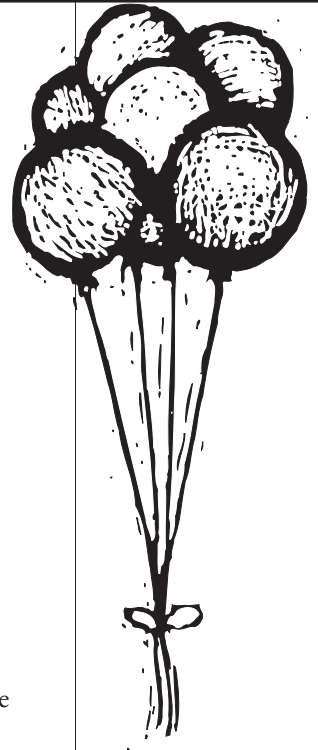


### Discussion

Young people often look to trusted adults to provide them guidance and clarity in life. This poem depicts a situation in which a young boy wondered if the color of the balloon affected its ability to float away. This can be used to discuss how physical characteristics may or may not affect a person's potential in life. As you facilitate discussion be sure to talk about stereotyping and how it too may affect a person.

### Questions

- How different were the balloons in the story? What did they all have in common?
- Why do you think this man was filling balloons and then letting them float high into the sky?
- What do you think made the boy ask about the black balloon?
- Do the colors of people's skins determine who they are inside? What do the colors of people's skins say about them?
- Does the color of your skin or a disability dictate your potential in life? Will it help or hinder your from accomplishing your dreams and goals?
- Why do people make predetermined judgments about others? What should you do when people around you make judgments about another person? How can you handle the situation?
- Do you believe that our world judges people by their outside differences or the beauty within?
- What lessons did the boy learn from this encounter?
- What questions might the boy have following this encounter?



# D

## iscussion Starter 8

### **The Cold Within**

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*James Patrick Kinney*

Six humans trapped by happenstance  
in bleak and bitter cold  
Each possessed a stick of wood,  
Or so the story's told.

Their dying fire in need of logs,  
the first woman held hers back  
For on the faces around the fire  
She noticed one was black.

The next man looking 'cross the way  
Saw one not of his church  
And couldn't bring himself to give  
The fire his stick of birch.

The third one sat in tattered clothes  
He gave his coat a hitch,  
Why should his log be put to use  
To warm the idle rich?

The rich man just sat back and thought  
Of the wealth he had in store,  
And how to keep what he had earned  
From the lazy, shiftless poor.

The black man's face bespoke revenge  
As the fire passed from his sight,  
For all he saw in his stick of wood  
Was a chance to spite the white.

And the last man of this forlorn group  
Did naught except for gain,  
Giving only to those who gave  
Was how he played the game.

The logs held tight in death's stilled hands  
Was proof of human sin.  
They didn't die from the cold without,  
They died from the cold within.

### **Discussion**

This story depicts six humans brought together by a common happenstance. Each individual in the group sat silently, harboring prejudices against the others in the group. In the end, the group perished because of their inability to get past their negative views of others. This is a powerful story that can be used to show what can happen when people hold prejudiced views.

### **Questions**

- How do you think the six people in this poem died? Why?
- Describe how this story made you feel.
- What is the fire a metaphor for in this story?
- Pick one character from this story. Describe the character.
- What surprised you about the characters in this story?
- What assumption did each of the characters make about the others around the fire?
- What major effect did the characters' opinions have on their lives?
- What do you feel contributed to each person's decision not to share his or her log of wood?
- Do you think it is okay for people to act this way? Why or why not?
- Have you ever shared any of the thoughts or beliefs of the six characters?
- How do you think this story should have ended? If you could rewrite the ending of this story, would you? What would you change and why?
- This poem presents the story of five men and one woman, each with their own prejudice that inhibits rational thought. What would you have done if you were trapped in the bleak and bitter cold with a dying fire and you had a stick? Would you have hesitated to share your stick of wood?
- Explain the last verse. What impact does this verse have on the way you view others?



# D

## iscussion Starter 9

### A Cat & A Mouse

*Dr. J. Norris & Dr. C. Whetten  
Texas A&M University  
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The setting is a typical dockside scene in a foreign port somewhere in the world. The cat, rather than being a typical, scrawny, underfed specimen, is well fed and powerful. The mouse is the typical, small, meek, desperate creature we would expect. The cat is chasing the mouse. The mouse is just about finished when he spies a hole in the wall. In a last, desperate attempt he sprints and dives into the hole just ahead of the cat. With pounding heart and heaving lungs, he cannot believe that he is safe. As he begins to regain his composure, he begins to worry about his immediate future. He quickly sees that the hole does not have another exit and he will have to go back out of the entrance. But he knows that the cat will be waiting for him. Suddenly, he hears a dog barking just outside the hole . . . “Ruff!! Ruff!! Ruff!!” Now, the mouse begins to reason that dogs hate cats, and that cats are frightened of dogs, and if there is a dog, then the cat must be gone. Feeling extreme elation at his good fortune, the mouse saunters forth out of the hole only to be grabbed up by the cat. As the cat dangles the beaten mouse by his tail in preparation for a tasty morsel, the mouse in a plaintive, dejected voice says, “But I don’t understand. I know I heard a dog barking.” And the cat, with a sly grin spreading across his face, replies, “To be successful in today’s world, one must be bilingual.”

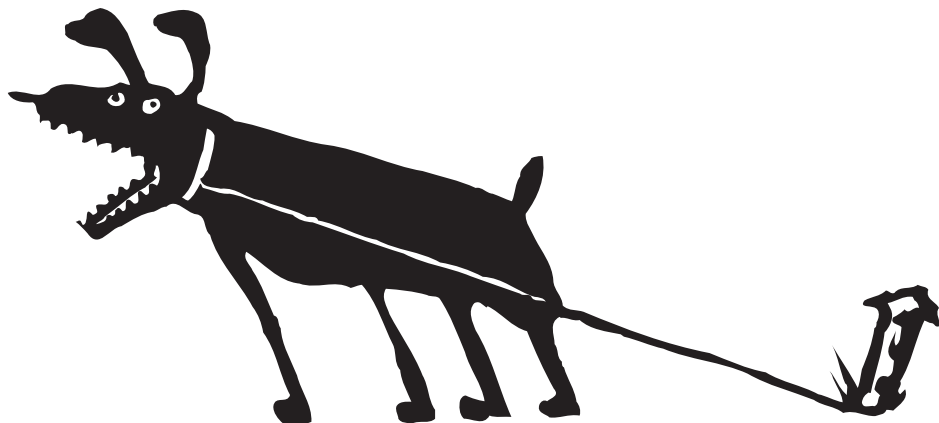
### Discussion

This story provides a vivid picture that will allow participants to imagine how the mouse feels before he is swallowed up by the cat. As businesses in the U.S. become more globally focused, the need to prepare youth to be competitive in the marketplace is even more prevalent along with the need to teach sensitivity. Use this story to discuss the importance of gaining marketable skills such as learning another language, other than a native tongue.



## Questions

- Did the ending of the story surprise you? Why or why not?
- Describe the cat's special skill. How did she use it?
- What does it mean to be bilingual?
- What analogy does the "bilingual cat" apply to the real world today?
- What are the benefits of being bilingual?
- How important is open-mindedness to experiencing other cultures and languages?
- Do you think students should be required to learn another language in school? Why or why not?
- What other skills are useful to have when interacting with people who speak another language?
- Do people's abilities to speak multiple languages increase their marketability in the workplace?
- Explain why you agree or disagree that you have to be bilingual to succeed in today's world.
- Have you ever been faced with an unusual problem or situation that required you to use a specific skill? What was the situation and what skill(s) did you use?
- Write about a time when you've been in a situation similar to one of the characters. How did you get through it? What did you learn as a result?
- How important is it to learn other languages? Does it increase your chances of communicating with others? Explain. Do you find it to be a useful communication tool or skill?
- If you could rewrite the ending of this story, how would you change it?
- Who do you think the cat and the mouse represent in our society?
- If the mouse in the story was deaf, how would this story differ? What challenges would the mouse face?



# *D*iscussion Starter 10

## **Welcome to Holland**

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*Emily Perl Kingsley*

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I am often asked to describe the experience of raising a child with a disability—to try to help people who have not shared that unique experience to understand it, to imagine how it would feel. It's like this. . . .

When you're going to have a baby, it's like planning a fabulous vacation trip—to Italy. You buy a bunch of guide books and make your wonderful plans. The Coliseum. Michelangelo's *David*. The gondolas in Venice. You may learn some handy phrases in Italian. It's all very exciting.

After months of eager anticipation, the day finally arrives. You pack your bags and off you go. Several hours later, the plane lands. The stewardess comes in and says, "Welcome to Holland."

"Holland?!?" you say, "What do you mean Holland?? I signed up for Italy! I'm supposed to be in Italy. All my life I've dreamed of going to Italy."

But there's been a change in the flight plan. They've landed in Holland and there you must stay.

The important thing is that they haven't taken you to a horrible, disgusting, filthy place, full of pestilence, famine, and disease. It's just a different place.

So you must go out and buy new guide books. And you must learn a whole new language. And you will meet a whole new group of people you would never have met.

It's just a different place. It's slower paced than Italy, less flashy than Italy. But after you've been there for a while and you catch your breath, you look around . . . and you begin to notice that Holland has windmills . . . and Holland has tulips. Holland even has Rembrandts.

But everyone you know is busy coming and going from Italy . . . and they're all bragging about what a wonderful time they had there. And for the rest of your life, you will say, "Yes, that's where I was supposed to go. That's what I had planned."

And the pain of that will never, ever, ever, ever go away . . . because the loss of that dream is a very, very significant loss.

But . . . if you spend your life mourning the fact that you didn't get to Italy, you may never be free to enjoy the very special, the very lovely things . . . about Holland.

## Discussion

Raising a child that has a disability is an experience Emily Perl Kingsley referred to as similar to planning a trip to Italy but being taken to Holland instead. There are differences in the way parents feel regarding this subject. Each individual's experience is unique depending on the situation and severity of the child's disability. This story is a wonderful way to generate dialogue with adults regarding the topic of physical and mental disabilities.

## Questions

- What are some of the stereotypes that you have heard about people with disabilities? These stereotypes don't necessarily have to be something you believe, just something you may have heard at some point in time. Write down as many as you can. Be open and honest; remember to include mental, physical, emotional, and developmental disabilities along with any others.
- How can a parent prepare to raise a child with a disability (e.g., hearing impairment, Down's syndrome, autism)? Does the preparation change with the type of disability?
- In this story, "Welcome to Holland," Kingsley wrote, "... the pain of that will never, ever, ever, ever go away. . . ." What was she referring to here?
- In your opinion, should children with learning disabilities be mainstreamed into regular education classes?
- Imagine you lost your ability to walk, see, or hear. How would you react? Would you want to remain independent? Do you think you'd enlist the help of others? How would you want people to react to you? How do you think you would react to others?
- Children with disabilities must overcome many challenges in life. As parents of able-bodied children, how can you encourage them to have positive interactions with children who have disabilities?



# D

## iscussion Starter 11

### Where Monsters Can Grow

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Beware of the monsters  
Who dwell in the mind,  
Who grow in the shelter  
Of shadows they find.

Beware of the demons  
Who hide from the lights,  
Who only survive  
When our spirits lose sight.

Those creatures can thrive  
Where our knowledge is low;  
They fill in the spaces  
Of what we don't know.

Beware of the monsters  
That cause us to hate,  
To strike out in anger  
When we can't relate.

For ignorance darkens  
The mind and the heart,  
And helps all our monsters  
To tear us apart.

But learning and thinking  
Will strengthen us so  
We won't be the places  
Where monsters can grow.

### Discussion

This poem reminds us that the lack of knowledge can lead to unwarranted fears, anger, and even hate. If we do not make the effort to learn about the things we do not know or understand, we create beliefs in our minds that do not exist at all. This poem can be used to discuss how easy it can be to make assumptions in the absence of knowledge.

### Questions

- Who or what are the monsters?
- What helps these monsters grow?
- What can prevent the monsters from growing?
- In this poem, what does darkness represent? What does light represent?
- What is the main idea of this poem?



# *A*dditional Resources/References

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# Life Skills Chart

Discussion Starter	Valuing Diversity	Thinking Critically	Learning to Learn	Problem Solving	Cooperation	Decision Making	Communication	Caring for Others	Working as a Team
1. Diversity	●	●	●	●					
2. The Man and the Eagle	●	●		●	●		●	●	
3. Color Blind	●			●	●	●	●	●	
4. Crayons	●	●	●		●	●		●	
5. The Crayon Box That Talked	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
6. If All the Trees Were Oaks	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	
7. The Black Balloon	●	●			●			●	
8. The Cold Within	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	
9. A Cat & A Mouse	●	●	●	●		●	●		
10. Welcome to Holland	●	●	●	●		●	●		
11. Where Monsters Can Grow	●	●		●			●	●	

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