

Wisdom

Syllables

wis•dom

Pronunciation

wiz-duh m

Definition

The ability to make sensible judgments based on knowledge and experience.

*(The ancient teachings were based on the **wisdom** of the elders.)*

Simply put: Having real understanding ... and knowing how to use it.

Related Terms

Perception: Insight

Fundamental Question:

Are being smart and being wise the same thing?

Students will investigate the idea that people everywhere have passed down cultural lessons and wise insights through folktales; and that intelligence (aptitude with which you were born) and wisdom (understanding and judgment based on experience) are not synonymous.

Objectives

Each student will:

1. Examine three or more folktale situations in which characters in difficult positions have to make decisions that will disentangle them from their problems;
2. Look for words, phrases, or ideas in the stories that hold lessons or morals;
3. Determine other ways the story could end; and
4. Give advice that others could use when faced with difficulties.

Before you begin

- Enlist the help of your media specialist as you select three or more folktales of wisdom from different cultures*;
- Print out a copy of *A Question of Wisdom* for each student.

Suggested sidebars:

Speaking of Wisdom (Discussion Idea)

Discuss: What does it mean to be intelligent? What does it mean to be wise? Are all intelligent people wise? Are all wise people intelligent?

*An excellent resource for this lesson is *Wisdom Tales from Around the World: Fifty Gems of Story and Wisdom from Such Diverse Traditions as Sufi, Zen, Taoist, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, African, and Native American* by Heather Forset, August House Publishers, Inc., Little Rock, Arkansas, 1996.

Taking It to the Next Level

Go on a *Scavenger Hunt for the Wisdom!* In advance, prepare several small sheets of paper on which is clearly printed “My name is _____. I was born in the year ____ and I am ____ years old.

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The most important thing I learned during that time is _____.”

Bring a pencil or a pen with you and ask each person you contact to fill in the blanks. Try to get a range of ages, but focus on people 60 years old or older.

(Important! Discuss safety and manners with your teacher before doing this project. Get your parents' permission, too.)

Procedure

1. **Ask:** “What can you tell us about the history of your family? Did your ancestors come from a different country? Do you celebrate unusual traditions?” (Allow for responses.) “Did you know that just about every culture has stories or folktales that give advice? Today we’re going to read (hear) a few from different cultures around the world.”
2. **Referring to the first of the three stories on your list say:** “Sometimes it is important to know a little bit about the people and where they live in order to fully understand a folktale. Our first story comes from (place/culture: _____).” (If appropriate, help the students locate the area on a map and briefly discuss any aspects of the culture or environment that play an operative role in the children’s comprehension of the story.)
3. Read the first story to the students, together as a choral reading, or whatever best suits the needs of your class. Afterwards, encourage the students to identify the lesson or moral of the story. Also explain that folktales sometimes have themes dealing with opposites. Was this story one of them? Can the children identify examples of opposites such as “wise and foolish” in the story?
4. **Ask:** “What else might the characters in the story have done to solve their problems?” (Discuss.)

Experiential Component

Learners will create posters that graphically represent examples of decision-making or advice recommended for those facing difficult situations. These will be posted in common areas so that they may impart “wisdom” to those who view them.

Discuss how many times in life it is difficult to know which course of action to take. Solicit examples from everyday life. What advice can the learners suggest that might aid others to know what to do when it is not clear which way to go? Put the list on the board and save it for the end of the lesson.

5. **Follow Up:** Pick one or more of the following quotations to discuss.
 - “Knowledge speaks, but wisdom listens.” Jimi Hendrix, 1942–70
 - “We can be knowledgeable with other men’s knowledge but we cannot be wise with other men’s wisdom.” Michel de Montaigne, 1533-92
 - “Intelligence tells you what the problem is and how to solve it; wisdom tells you whether or not you should.” Author Unknown
 - “Intelligence asks, ‘What?’ Wisdom asks, ‘Why?’” Author Unknown

Name _____

Reminder: Wisdom is the ability to make sensible decisions and judgments based on knowledge and experience.

A Question of Wisdom

What do you think the wise Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–99) meant when he said, “One’s first step in wisdom is to question everything?”

By asking questions, we gather knowledge, but knowledge itself is not wisdom.

After asking questions, what other steps should we take to reach wisdom?

Some questions are more appropriate for developing wisdom than are others. Which of the following is more likely to help you gain a deeper understanding of your world and to help you make wise decisions and judgments about it?

___ Which do you like better, vanilla or chocolate?

___ Is it possible to know the absolute truth about a situation?

Make up three “wise questions” of your own.

1.

2.

3.

Today’s Thought: *All this worldly wisdom was once the unamiable heresy of some wise man.*
— Henry David Thoreau, Author