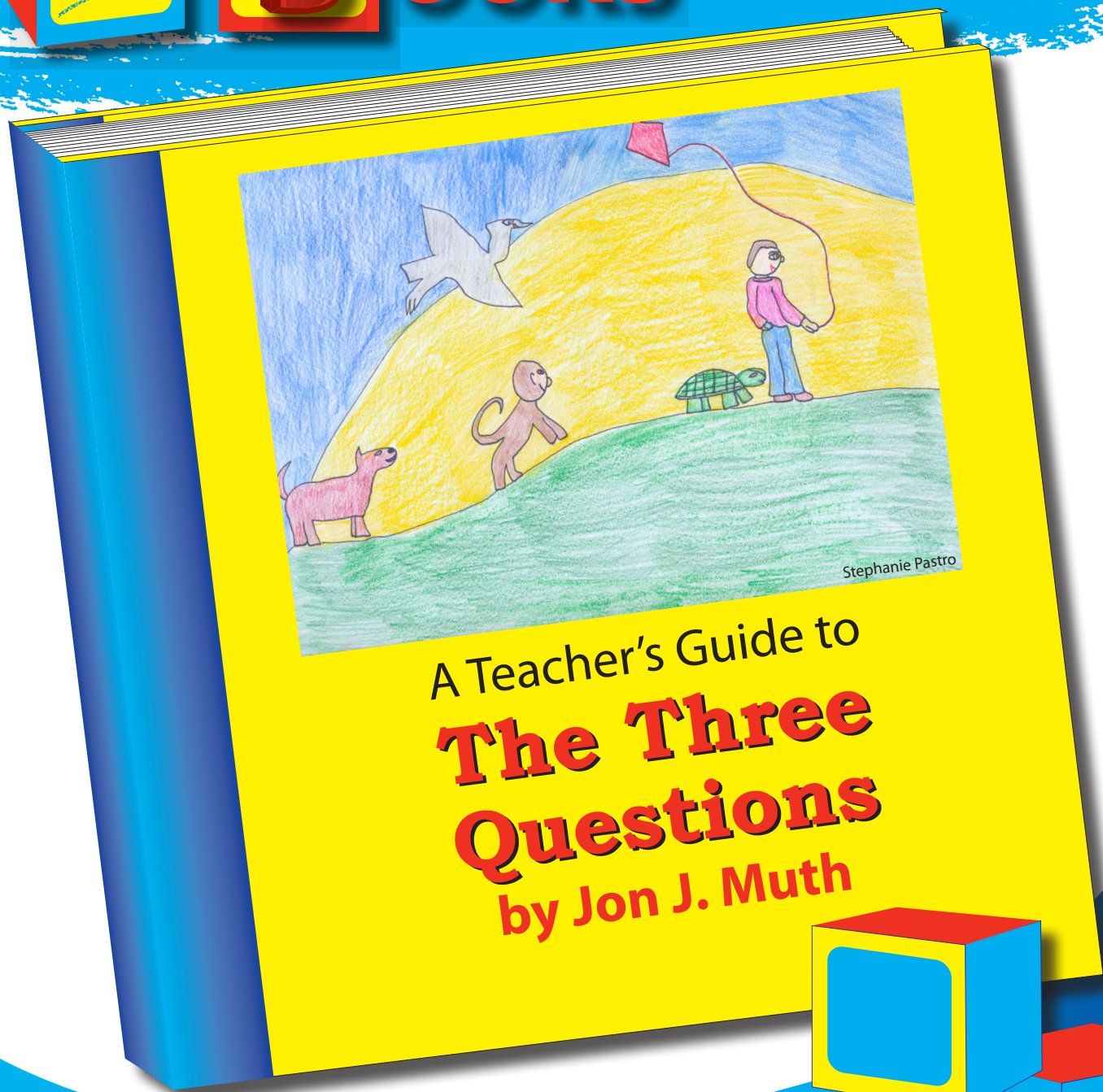


# Thoughtful Books

GRADES  
3+



Series Editor  
Author

Mary Abbott  
Trish Joly



# Note to parents and teachers

The Thoughtful Books Series makes use of exemplary children’s literature to help young readers learn to read critically and to thoughtfully consider ethical matters. Critical thinkers rely on inquisitive attitudes, utilize thinking strategies, access background knowledge, understand thinking vocabulary, and apply relevant criteria when making thoughtful decisions. We refer to these attributes as intellectual tools. Each resource in this series features specific intellectual tools supporting literacy development and ethical deliberation. Teachers and parents can introduce the tools using the suggested activities in this resource, and then support learners in applying the tools in various situations overtime, until children use them independently, selectively, and naturally.

## Reading as thinking

Reading is more than decoding words. It is the active process of constructing meaning. Good readers understand this process as engagement in critical thinking. They employ specific literacy competencies as they engage with text, create meaning from text, and extend their thinking beyond text. The activities in this booklet help develop the following literacy competencies:

- *Accessing background knowledge:* Good readers draw on what they already know to establish a foundation for approaching new texts. In this case, the concept of learning a lesson is discussed prior to reading the first fable. As well, students discuss their understanding of what it means to be a good person.
- *Reading with a purpose:* Good readers are clear about why they are reading a text, either by bringing a specific objective to their reading or by anticipating the author’s objectives. In this case, students listen to the fables and story to identify the intended lessons.
- *Finding important ideas:* Good readers discriminate between details and key or important ideas. In this case, students look for important ideas in creating the story map of Nikolai’s journey.
- *Synthesizing ideas:* Good readers thoughtfully apply key ideas and issues raised in text to their own lives and in broader global and community contexts. In this case, students discuss whether or not Nikolai learned a lesson, and apply their understanding of being a “good person” to real-life situations.

## Ethical considerations

A second focus of the activities in this booklet helps learners develop the intellectual tools necessary to think critically about ethical considerations. It is important to teach the tools, often through modelling and illustrating with examples, and continue to apply the tools in a variety of situations over time, until learners internalize them. The following ethical consideration is addressed in this resource:

- *Thinking of others:* Critical thinkers are able to recognize the position of others in a situation. In these activities, students explore the attributes of a good person and identify behaviours that exemplify these qualities.

# TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR: *The Three Questions*

by Jon J. Muth

## Critical question

What is the lesson in the story?

## Story

*The Three Questions* written and illustrated by Jon J. Muth, Scholastic (2002). One of Aesop's fables, which are available online at: <http://www.umass.edu/aesop/index.php>

- *The Ant and the Grasshopper*
- *The Lion and the Mouse*

## Summary

In this beautifully illustrated story, a young boy named Nikolai searches for the answers to three questions in his quest to become a better person. He consults his friends and a wise old turtle. In the story, Nikolai is led to find the answers within himself. Students examine the events in the story to discover how Nikolai's questions were answered.

## Main focus

### **Literacy competencies**

- accessing background knowledge
- reading with a purpose
- finding important ideas
- synthesizing ideas

### **Ethical considerations**

- thinking of others

### **Levels of involvement**

Consider students' interest and their level of maturity to determine whether or not all three levels of after-reading activities are appropriate.

- *Exposure:* Develop the criteria for identifying a lesson and identify the lesson(s) in a fable.
- *Investigation:* Create a story map of Nikolai's journey and identify the lesson in the story.
- *Application:* Apply the lesson to real life by identifying responses and behaviours that exemplify a "good person."

# Introductory Activities

## Session One

### Before reading

- Ask students if they have heard the expression “to learn a lesson.” Discuss what it means “to learn a lesson” and how we can know whether a lesson has been learned. Explain that sometimes lessons are taught through stories called fables.

### During reading

- Tell students you are going to read them a story that was written to teach a lesson. Ask students to listen to the story carefully and think about what the lesson might be.
- Read one or more of the fables available at <http://www.umass.edu/aesop/index.php>, such as:
  - *The Ant and the Grasshopper* (prepare for the future)
  - *The Lion and the Mouse* (no act of kindness, however small, is wasted)
  - *Two Travellers and the Bear* (a friend in need is a friend indeed)

### After reading: exposure level

- Review the events of the story with students and then ask: “What do you think the author wants people to learn from the story?”
- Brainstorm possible lessons contained within the fable(s) and record student suggestions on the board.
- Tell students they are going to investigate what makes something a lesson.
- Have students work with a partner. Provide each pair of students with a copy of *Are these lessons?* (Blackline Master #1), cut into cards.
- Explain to students that they will read a statement, discuss with their partner whether or not the statement is a lesson, and divide them into two piles. Model this, using examples such as: two minds are better than one; a carpenter makes things.
- When students have completed sorting the cards, invite them to share their decisions with the whole class. List the lessons and non-lessons on the board.
- Invite students to examine the lesson statements and identify common attributes of lessons. As a class, develop a list of criteria for identifying a lesson (for example, it teaches you something important in life and makes you a wiser person, changes your behaviour, applies to a lot of situations).
- Review the list of possible lessons from the fables and discuss which ones best meet the criteria.

Introduce the concept of lessons

Accessing background knowledge

Reading with a purpose

Develop the criteria for identifying a lesson

# Activities: The Three Questions

Read the story  
in chunks

## Begin new session

### During reading: investigative level

- Show the book *The Three Questions* and explain that it is a fable. Read the title and ask students what the story could be about.
- Read the first text page of the story, showing the illustration. Ask students: “What did Nikolai want to know?” (*how to be a good person*).
- Invite students to consider what qualities a good person has. Encourage students to be descriptive and move beyond “nice.” Record responses.
- Ask: “What do you think the three questions in the story could be?”
- Turn to page 2 of the text and invite students to read the questions aloud. Write the questions on the board.
- Ask students what they think Nikolai might do to find answers to his questions. Read the next four pages of the story to find out what Nikolai learns.
- Review with students the advice Nikolai receives from his friends. Create a chart similar to the one below. Tell students you are going to read the advice again and they are to listen carefully to find out what Nikolai learns. Assign three pairs of students to each of the character roles, Sonya, Gogal, and Pushin. Instruct one pair of students to listen to their character’s response to the first question, another to the second, and the third to the final question.
- Re-read the four pages of the story. Provide time for students to talk with their partners, then invite the pairs of students to tell the class the advice each of the friends gave Nikolai. Record responses in the chart.

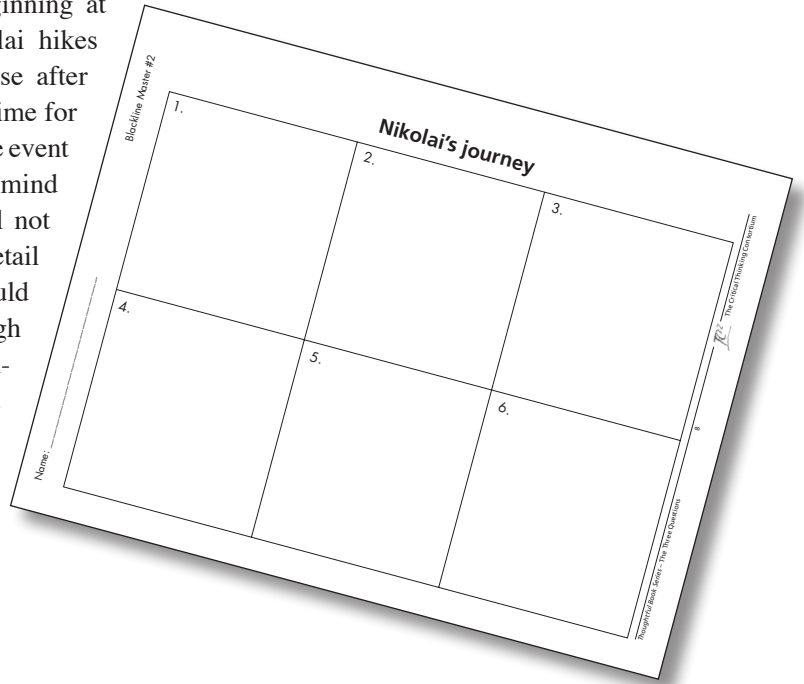
Advice Nikolai receives

	Sonya, the heron	Gogal, the monkey	Pushkin, the dog
When is the best time to do things?			
Who is the most important one?			
What is the right thing to do?			

- Review the information in the chart and ask the students if they think these answers will make Nikolai a good person.
- Read the next page of the story. Explain that Nikolai is going on a journey to find answers to his questions.

**Create a story map of Nikolai's journey**

- Read the story to the point where “Leo smiled when he saw what the boy had done.”
- Tell students they are going to make a story map of Nikolai’s journey to see if he finds the answers to his questions. Provide a copy of *Nikolai’s journey* (Blackline Master #2) for each student or pair of students.
- Re-read the story beginning at the point when Nikolai hikes up the mountain. Pause after each event and allow time for students to illustrate the event in the story map. Remind students that they will not be able to add a lot of detail to their picture and should focus on drawing enough information to remember what happened. Divide the reading as indicated below:



**Finding important ideas**

<i>Nikolai hikes up the mountain and asks Leo the questions.</i>	<i>Nikolai helps Leo dig his garden.</i>	<i>It starts to rain and Nikolai hears cries for help.</i>
<i>Nikolai finds an injured panda.</i>	<i>He takes the panda home and she looks for her child.</i>	<i>Nikolai finds the baby panda and brings it safely to its mother.</i>

- Continue reading the story to the point where Leo tells Nikolai that his questions have been answered.
- Invite students to review their story map and try to discover why Leo thinks the questions have been answered. Remind students that Nikolai was trying to find out how to be a good person.
- Continue reading the story and record the answers to the three questions.



Identify the lesson  
in the story

Synthesizing  
ideas

Apply the lesson  
to real life

## Begin new session

### After reading: investigation level

- Re-read the entire story without stopping.
- Refer to the story maps and invite students to add two additional pictures, one depicting the beginning of the story, before Nikolai started his journey, and the second illustrating the end of the story.
- Write the words uncertain, determined, peaceful, disappointed, surprised, and content on the board. Explain any words that might not be familiar to students.
- Refer to the story maps and invite students to talk to a partner and identify places in the story when Nikolai experienced these feelings. Provide a copy of *Nikolai's feelings* (Blackline Master #3) for students to record their thinking.
- Pose these questions: “Did Nikolai change in the story?” “How do you know?” Provide time for students to engage in partner discussion, then discuss as a class. Accept yes or no answers provided students have a valid justification. Tally student responses in a yes/no chart. Students could also record their responses in a journal entry.
- Review the criteria for identifying a lesson that were developed in session one. Post the critical question: “What is the lesson in the story?” Discuss as a class.
- Next, pose the following questions for partner and whole group discussion:
  - What did Nikolai learn?
  - How might Nikolai’s life be different because he learned this lesson?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Nikolai's feelings** Blackline Master #3

Nikolai felt **uncertain** when

Nikolai felt **determined** when

Nikolai felt **peaceful** when

Nikolai felt **disappointed** when

Nikolai felt **surprised** when

Nikolai felt **content** when

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## Begin new session

### After reading: application level

- Re-read the first page of the story. Review what Nikolai learned in the story.
- Pose the question: “What actions show what it is to be a good person?”

Review the list of qualities of a good person made in session two. Invite students to add new ideas.

- Consider the following situations, and think of ways Nikolai might respond as a “good person” or as a person who thinks about others.
  - Someone is feeling left out on the playground.
  - A bag breaks and someone’s lunch spills on the floor.
  - A new person joins your class.
  - Someone is struggling to open a door.
- As a class, consider situations in the classroom, at school, at home, and in the community where thinking about others could make a difference. You may want to point out the importance of personal safety in thinking about others. For example, if someone said they had lost their dog, it would not be safe to go and help them find it.
- Provide students with a copy of *Thinking of others* (Blackline Master #4), and invite them to illustrate one of the situations and an action that demonstrates thinking of others in a safe way.

## Assessment

- Use the rubric *Assessing understanding of lessons* (Blackline master #5) to assess students’ understanding of lessons and ability to think of others.

**Assessing lessons**

	<b>Sophisticated understanding</b>	<b>Emerging understanding</b>	<b>Basic understanding</b>	<b>Partial understanding</b>	<b>Pre-recognition</b>
<b>Uses a story map to identify an important lesson</b>	Creates a story map that accurately represents the important places, people, actions that Nikolai encounters on his journey. Uses the story map to explain the way and clearly explains their importance.	Creates a story map that accurately represents the important places, people, encounters that Nikolai encounters on his journey. Uses the story map to generally explain the way and offers a simple explanation of why they are important.	Creates a story map that represents most of the important places, people and/or actions that Nikolai encounters on his journey. Uses the story map to identify an important lesson, but does not explain its importance.	Creates a story map that represents most of the important places, people and/or actions that Nikolai encounters on his journey. Identifies a lesson that may not be important.	Is unable to create a story map or use one to identify an important lesson.
<b>Applies an important lesson from the story to real life</b>	Effectively applies an important lesson to a given scenario and real-life situation. Fully explains what Nikolai and themselves might feel, do and think differently in the situation given the lesson learned.	Applies an important lesson to a given scenario and real-life situation. Offers a simple explanation of what Nikolai—or themselves—might feel, do and think differently in the situation given the lesson learned.	Applies an important lesson to a given scenario or real-life situation. Offers a simple explanation of what Nikolai—or themselves—might feel, do and think in the situation, but may not consider the lesson learned.	Applies a lesson to a given scenario or a real-life situation. Offers a vague explanation of what Nikolai—or themselves—might feel, do or think in the situation, but may not be able to identify an important lesson, cannot apply it to a given scenario or real-life situation.	May be able to identify an important lesson but cannot apply it to a given scenario or real-life situation.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Extensions

- With a buddy, make a poster to illustrate the three questions and the answers.
- Teach others the answers to the three questions by rewriting the story as a play.
- Start a journal to document the times when you did something that made you feel like a good person.
- Ask your parents to record in your journal when they notice you being a good person.



## Are these lessons?

It is often easier to solve  
a problem with other people  
than by yourself.

Yesterday we had fun  
playing soccer.

Things you do  
affect other people.

You must be a friend  
to have a friend.

Think of other people  
before yourself.

A smile spreads  
happiness.

Christmas  
is a holiday.

The library has  
many new books.

# Nikolai's journey

1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		

# Nikolai's feelings

Nikolai felt **uncertain** when

Nikolai felt **determined** when

Nikolai felt **peaceful** when

Nikolai felt **disappointed** when

Nikolai felt **surprised** when

Nikolai felt **content** when

# Thinking of others

Situation

Safe action

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# Assessing lessons

	<b>Sophisticated understanding</b>	<b>Exended understanding</b>	<b>Basic understanding</b>	<b>Partial understanding</b>	<b>Pre-recognition</b>
<b>Uses a story map to identify an important lesson</b>	Creates a story map that accurately represents the important places, people, actions that Nikolai encounters on his journey. Uses the story map to explain the lessons he learns along the way and clearly explains their importance.	Creates a story map that accurately represents the important places, people, actions that Nikolai encounters on his journey. Uses the story map to generally explain the lessons he learns along the way and offers a simple explanation of why they are important.	Creates a story map that represents most of the important places, people and/or actions that Nikolai encounters on his journey. Uses the story map to identify an important lesson(s) he learns along the way but does not explain its importance.	Creates a story map that represents most of the important places, people and/or actions that Nikolai encounters on his journey. Identifies a lesson that may not be important.	Is unable to create a story map or use one to identify an important lesson.
<b>Applies an important lesson from the story to real life</b>	Effectively applies an important lesson to a given scenario and real-life situation. Fully explains what Nikolai—and themselves—might feel, do and think differently in the situation given the lesson learned.	Applies an important lesson to a given scenario and real-life situation. Offers a simple explanation of what Nikolai—or themselves—might feel, do and think differently in the situation given the lesson learned.	Applies an important lesson to a given scenario or real-life situation. Offers a simple explanation of what Nikolai—or themselves—might feel, do and think in the situation; may not consider the lesson learned.	Applies a lesson to given scenario or a real-life situation. Offers a vague explanation of what Nikolai—or themselves—might feel, do or think in the situation; may not be unsuitable. Does not consider the lesson learned.	May be able to identify an important lesson but cannot apply it to a given scenario or real-life situation.

Comments:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_





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The Critical Thinking Consortium  
Faculty of Education  
University of British Columbia  
6365 Biological Sciences Road  
Vancouver, BC Canada V6T 1Z4  
Tel: 604.822.9297  
Fax: 604.822.6603  
E-mail: [tc2@interchange.ubc.ca](mailto:tc2@interchange.ubc.ca)  
[www.tc2.ca](http://www.tc2.ca)



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### For more information about *TC<sup>2</sup>*

The Critical Thinking Consortium  
University of British Columbia  
6365 Biological Sciences Road  
Vancouver, British Columbia V6T 1Z4  
TEL 604-822-9297 • FAX 604-822-6603  
E-MAIL [tc2@interchange.ubc.ca](mailto:tc2@interchange.ubc.ca)  
WEBSITE [www.tc2.ca](http://www.tc2.ca)

