

BADGER ASSEMBLY STORIES

SENSITIVE ISSUES

Ages 5-7

Jane West and Roger Hurn

Badger Publishing

15 Wedgwood Gate, Pin Green Industrial Estate, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG1 4SU

Telephone: 01438 356907 Fax: 01438 747015

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INTRODUCTION

This book contains 30 assemblies for children aged 5 to 7, covering a range of topics and issues that may be considered 'sensitive' or difficult to talk about. We sincerely hope that you never have to talk about the death of a pupil or a teacher from your school but, if you do, we have included some words and stories that are designed to help you, your colleagues and your children deal with a very difficult event.

Much as we may wish to shield our children from the sadness and horrors of the world, that is not possible. We have, therefore, addressed these difficult topics with sensitivity and empathy and have tried to find a positive note to reflect on, as much as possible.

Each assembly has been carefully researched and written to act as an introduction to a particular topic and as a stimulus for further discussion. Some assemblies require simple props, used as visual aids. These are listed at the start of each assembly.

Each assembly begins with an introduction for teachers, with some basic information. Then follows an introduction for your pupils. Many of these introductions are interactive and are written to encourage responses and engagement from pupils as well as to test understanding of a topic.

All the assemblies have also been matched to the SEAL aspects of learning (social, emotional and affective learning):

- Self-awareness
- Managing feelings
- Motivation
- Empathy
- Social skills.

The assembly 'story' uses a wide range of stimulus material:

- Original stories based on real events.
- Real stories.
- Factual information.

Follow-up

Each assembly offers a simple conclusion, plus a reflection and a prayer.

A short list of follow-up questions and/or activities are also suggested. Further information for teachers, along with suggested books and websites, are listed at the end.

Each assembly is designed to be used flexibly: choose the most appropriate follow-up activity or series of questions that suits your pupils and your school.

We have written the assemblies to be self-supporting, so you can take them straight from the shelf and use them but, if you do have the time for a little preparation first to adjust the tone and story for your school's particular situation, we would definitely recommend this approach.

Roger Hurn and Jane West

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I FAMILY: DEBT

Introduction for teachers

It's not always easy for children to understand how hard it can be to earn the money that buys their food, clothes, toys and all the extra things it takes to keep a home a nice place to live in.

Many families experience difficulties with money, whether it's paying the rent or the mortgage or paying off the credit card. And, of course, these problems are exacerbated when a parent loses their income.

It can be difficult for children when they see their parents struggling with these problems – after all, when you're very young, aren't parents always supposed to have the answers?

This assembly follows the story of Rachel, whose father has been made redundant. She has to learn that this affects the whole family and struggles to be unselfish when her pocket money is stopped and the family holiday is cancelled.

Props

A handful of loose change in a see-through plastic bag.

Introduction for children

Can everyone see what I've got here? *[Hold up the bag of money.]* Yes, it's a small bag of money. Do you think I could buy a bar of chocolate with this money? *[Encourage responses.]* Do you think I could buy a pint of milk with this money? Do you think I could buy a car with this money? Do you think I could buy a house with this money? Why not?

Do you think I could buy a holiday with this money? *[This might be a more difficult question because a holiday may not seem like a concrete object to younger children.]* Why not? Which parts of a holiday cost money? *[Cars, petrol, aeroplanes, eating out, trips, new clothes, sun cream, etc.]* Can you think of anything that you might do on holiday that is free? *[Going for a walk, swimming in the sea, making sandcastles, collecting shells and pebbles, playing with your family or friends.]*

But money isn't always easy to come by. Some of you will get pocket money – and, if you want something special, you'll have to save up your pocket money and birthday money and Christmas money until you've got enough to buy what you want.

Lots of people work to get money, like all the people who help us run this school. But sometimes somebody's job might come to an end because their place of work is closing and everybody is losing their job. This is called being made redundant.

It's a very difficult time for families when somebody is made redundant because it means that there's not as much money coming into the house and then the whole family has to learn that there's less money to spend. This might mean that, if you used to get £1 pocket money, your family might only be able to afford 50p – or perhaps nothing at all. It could mean that the bar of chocolate you used to get when your mum did the shopping costs too much money now.

Today's assembly is about a little girl called Rachel and what happened when her father was made redundant.

STORY: DEBT

It was Thursday when Rachel's life changed. In the morning, her mum drove her to school in a large, new, shiny, silver car. At going home time, she was waiting at the school gates – but there was no large, new, shiny, silver car.

“Where's the car, Mum?” asked Rachel.

Her mum pressed her lips together and said, “We're walking today. It's good for you.” Rachel didn't think walking was so great but it was a nice day and they stopped at the park on the way home.

When they got home, Rachel threw her schoolbag on her bed and went into the den to play computer games – but the desk was empty.

“Where's the computer, Mum?” she said.

Her mum didn't answer her straight away. “Come and sit next to me,” she said. “I've got something to tell you.” Rachel snuggled up next to her mum on the settee. “Since your dad lost his job – money has been a bit tight. We couldn't afford to keep the car or the computer.”

Rachel was puzzled. “When will we get them back?”

Her mum sighed. “I don't know, Rachel. First of all he has to get another job or I have to get more cleaning work – a lot more. It could be months – perhaps longer.”

Rachel stared. Months! “But how will I play my computer games?” she asked.

“Perhaps Mina will let you play on her computer,” said her mum. Mina was Rachel's best friend and they shared everything. “And I'm afraid there's something else,” said Rachel's mum. “We won't be going to Spain this summer after all. Maybe another year, when Dad gets a new job.”

“Where will we go instead?” asked Rachel.

Her mum sighed. “We can't afford a holiday this year, so we'll be staying at home.”

Rachel stared at her. “But we always go away. Everyone goes on holiday in the summer.”

“Not us and not this year,” said her mum, starting to get angry. “We'll have fun staying at home – we can do some day trips, have family days, that sort of thing. And I don't want you pestering Dad either – he feels bad enough as it is.”

Rachel thought about this. So far she'd only thought about how not having a holiday made her feel: but now she tried to think how her mum might feel, too. But it was hard and Rachel was angry with her parents; they had promised that they were going to Spain for a holiday and now they'd broken their promise. Worse still, her pocket money had been stopped so she couldn't buy any sweets.

“Why can't Dad get another job?” she asked herself. “Why do I have to lose my computer and holiday and pocket money and sweets because of him?”

For days she felt angry and upset and couldn't bear to hear any of her friends talking about what they were going to do on their holidays. Rachel also felt ashamed: ashamed that her family couldn't afford these ordinary things and ashamed of how mean and miserable she felt.

In the end, she couldn't keep it to herself anymore and she told her best friend, Mina. "I've got an idea," said Mina. She pulled Rachel to her feet and dragged her to the shed at the back of their house. "Look!" she said, smiling.

Rachel looked – a slow smile spread across her face. "Oh yes!" she said. "You're brilliant, Mina."

* * * *

"You seem to have cheered up," said Rachel's mum, looking relieved.

"I've got a surprise," said Rachel. "And Mina's going to help me – but you have to promise not to look out of the back window until I tell you. And Dad."

"What on Earth are you two up to?" said her mum.

"Please, Mum! I promise it's not anything bad." Rachel's mum looked doubtful, but in the end she agreed.

It was hard work and Rachel and Mina got rather hot and rather cross, but finally it was done. Rachel ran into the house. "Mum! Dad! You can look now! Come and see!" And what do you think they saw?

Rachel and Mina stood proudly in Rachel's back garden. Next to them was a large tent. The tent poles were wonky and the guy lines sagged dangerously. The tent smelled of old socks and leaned at a rakish angle. But it was a tent, nonetheless. Rachel's mum and dad were speechless.

"It's a tent!" said Rachel. "We don't need to go on holiday now; we can go camping – in our own back garden – and it won't cost anything. It'll be brilliant."

Rachel's dad picked her up and gave her a big hug. "I am so proud of you," he said, "and you, too, Mina. We'll go camping in the back garden – the whole family. And Mina can come for a sleep-over," he said. "We'll build a fire and toast bread and marshmallows."

"Oooh!" squealed Mina. "Marshmallows! Oh Rachel! You're so lucky!"

"We're the lucky ones," said Rachel's mum, "to have such a thoughtful daughter and a very thoughtful best friend, too."

INTERACTIVE FOLLOW-UP

Losing your job is a very hard thing for grown-ups and it can be hard for children to understand what this might mean.

Questions

1. Why do you think that Rachel was cross with her parents for breaking their promise about a holiday in Spain?
(Because it was a promise. Because she was looking forward to the holiday.)
2. Is it right to break a promise?
(We should try not to make promises we can't keep, but sometimes we have to break a promise and should always explain the reasons for doing so.)
3. How do you think Rachel's parents felt about not being able to afford to go on holiday to Spain?
(Very sad. They were looking forward to the holiday, too.)
4. Why do you think that Mina said Rachel was lucky?
(Because she liked camping. Because she recognised that Rachel's parents loved her very much.)

These days, lots of people go abroad for their holidays but there are lots of wonderful day trips that you can make in Great Britain: the amazing fossils of Lyme Regis; riding on a boat on Lake Windermere in the Lake District; learning to sail on the Norfolk Broads; mountain climbing in Wales and Scotland; many, many amazing places of natural beauty and historic interest.

Why not ask children to find out some of the fun things to do near your school? Make up a tourist brochure for someone new to your area.

These websites can help you: www.whats-on-guide.co.uk, www.24hourmuseum.org.uk

Why not come up with some ideas for games that Rachel and her family could play at their campsite in the back garden.

- Story-telling games. One person starts with a story opener, and each person takes a turn to tell the next part of the story.
- Sing campfire songs www.scoutingresources.org.uk/song_index.html (download these free resources).
- I-spy with my little eye, something beginning with 'a'...
- Make up your own games!

Conclusion

Rachel learned that holidays cost a lot of money and that her dad's redundancy meant that a lot of things that she'd taken for granted had to change. Despite her disappointment, she also learned that being together at home with her family could be just as enjoyable as going away.

NON-INTERACTIVE FOLLOW-UP

Pupils should know that:

- Money has to come from somewhere – it doesn't grow on trees!
- When people lose their jobs, there is less money to go around, especially for treats.
- Being part of a family means supporting each other when times are hard.

Something to think about

It's easy to forget sometimes that holidays are not just about going to exotic and exciting places, meeting new people, eating new food and doing new things. Holidays are about people – the people we go with and share our time with – our families. With our busy lives and hectic schedules, what makes holidays special is the extra time we have to spend together.

Reflection

Some of the best holidays are the ones we don't plan: the friends who drop in unexpectedly; the fun we have when we're trapped in a tiny caravan with the rain pouring down; and the way we can laugh about it all afterwards!

Prayer

Dear Father, thank you for the opportunity to spend time with our families on holiday. It's nice to go to new places and meet new people, but it's even nicer just to all be together, safe and happy and healthy. Amen.