

## TEACHER PREPARATION

### KEY CONCEPTS

1. Habits are the results of similar choices that are repeated.
2. Some personal habits will help us to achieve our goals, and other habits prevent us from reaching our goals.
3. We have the power to influence the course of our lives by choosing which habits to cultivate and which ones to break.

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Identify habits that could imprison them and hinder them from reaching their personal life goals.
2. Identify habits that can free and enable them to reach their personal life goals.
3. Choose one positive habit to cultivate over the next month.

### MATERIALS / PREPARATION

**In the Box: Grandmothers' Story and an old door knob or door handle.**

- A strong chain. It doesn't need to be long. You will hold it up to show how difficult some habits are to break.
- A spool of sewing thread.

# LESSON

## BEGINNING THE LESSON



### STORY

ABOUT 6 MINUTES

**Last time we looked at mature and immature freedom. Today, we'll see how habits have the power either to free or imprison us.**

*[Read the story:]*

Tatyana Alexandrovna had one of those looks that said, "Today is a day you won't soon forget." Dima elbowed Sasha and nodded for him to look at Natasha. The teacher had just handed today's object to her from their grandmothers' mysterious box. It was an old-fashioned door knob.

"What's this for?" asked Natasha.

"For opening doors," smirked Sasha.

"Or closing them," added Dima.

Natasha simply frowned at her two friends and looked intently at their teacher for a more enlightening answer.

"They're absolutely right," said Tatyana Alexandrovna.

"Ah!" said the boys.

"The grandmothers wanted me to tell you about a mysterious door knob – actually two door knobs. Turn one and enter into a life of unspeakable happiness. Ah, but turn the other – well, there's the rub. Turn the other and all pleasantries will end and a terrible darkness will devour your soul."

Dima shuddered at her last words, while Sasha leaned forward and said, "Sounds like the beginning of a story!"

*"In the land of the midnight sun, far from the shores of civilization, where life is hard and death is long, lies a pit set in twilight with high unassailable stone walls. Two doors are set deep into the stone side by side, one to the left and one to the right, silent sentinels of mystery and desire, hope and despair.*

*"From time to time, the owner of the pit lowers some poor wanderer by ropes into his pit. His words to the prisoner never vary, 'Choose your fate. Behind one door lies unspeakable bliss and comfort; satisfaction beyond imagining. Behind the other lies that which will freeze your soul and make death seem sweet in comparison. Choose! Choose your fate!'*

*"The wanderer is left to make his choice. Some quickly chose one or the other door, turned the knob and faced their fate. Others put off the decision for as long as possible until hunger or thirst nearly drove them mad. In the end, everyone who was ever lowered into the pit picked one door or the other. And true as true can be, the words of the pit owner came to pass.*

*"But how to choose? Pure luck or something more? Is the wanderer abandoned to random chance? Or, can anything be gleaned from the circumstance to aid a more informed decision?"*

Tatyana Alexandrovna folded the paper containing the story and looked in turn at each of her three students. "Well?" she asked. "What now? How would you proceed in such a situation?"

"I'd pick the door on the left," shrugged Sasha.

"I'd pray," replied Natasha.

"I'd check both doorways for any sign of blood," offered Dima.

"Yeah," said Sasha. "I'd put my ear to the door and listen for any tell-tale sounds!"

"Maybe there's some smell to give a clue," added Natasha.

"Who's to say there aren't windows in the doors?" said Dima. "Maybe we could look through and see what lies inside!"

"Yes," said the teacher. "The story leaves a lot unsaid. Perhaps I'd better read on."

Tatyana Alexandrovna unfolded the paper and continued.

*"Whether sooner or later, each wanderer was met with a similar surprise. For life or death did not come at the opening of either door. For behind each door lay another door, and one after that. The decision to choose one door over the other had to be made countless times. Some chose the left or the right and stuck with their decision until the final door revealed their fate. Others flitted back and forth choosing first the left and then the right set of doors. But flit or fixed, each eventually settled on the left or right choice as one doorknob after another was turned to reveal a bit more of the mystery."*

"Dima, you were right," said the teacher. "Or almost right."

*"While there were some clues outside the first set of doors, those clues seemed vague and un compelling to the one with little experience choosing between the doors. But subtly, with each new door the evidence became clearer. The sweet smell of life or the stench of decay grew stronger the farther in one went. The sounds of wonder or wailing grew more distinct. But that was exactly the danger! For the scent of each was all but imperceptible to the senses. And the clarion sounds of warning or hope resided in the background noise of most of the wanderers. Each choice strengthened the next choice, until little choice was left. And so it was that each one's fate was settled through not one choice, but a long series of choices."*

*"And what lay behind each of the doors? Oh, that depends on who tells the story. One ancient tale has it that a beautiful maiden waits behind one door and a ravenous tiger is crouched behind the other. But those storytellers who craft their words closer to reality speak of different dangers and delights. One tells of the mind-numbing effects of drugs; another recounts the scars of past illicit relationships that leave one an empty shell."*

*"One reflects on the rewards of a clear conscience and another celebrates the satisfaction of a life well-lived. All tell of how no single choice binds one to his final fate, but each also tells of the cumulative effect each choice has for good or ill. And all affirm that each of us is a wanderer subject to the pit of choices."*

Tatyana Alexandrovna folded the story and looked in turn at each of her students. Each was near the beginning of a lifetime of choices. Where would their choices lead them? How would they choose?

 = 6 minutes



## STORY DISCUSSION

ABOUT 4 MINUTES

Have students turn to the section in their Personal Journals to look at their life goals.

Some liberating habits you might mention include:

### Skill-building habits:

- Practice
- Submitting to a coach or teacher
- Planning
- Nutritious eating
- Rest

### Thinking habits:

- Questioning
- Comparing
- Analyzing
- Synthesizing

If none of your students is proficient with the piano, ask about playing the guitar, dance, art, or athletics.

If the skill your student has is something other than playing the piano, focus on his or her skill.

Just as the peasant knew which outcome he wanted, so you have thoughts about what kind of life you want to live. Remember that you have already listed your life goals on the first page of your Personal Journals.

In this lesson, you will start choosing the first door of many doors that leads to achieving your life goals.

Most of the single choices you will make in life are not as immediately rewarding or disastrous as the choice in the grandmothers' story, although there are a few that are. But a chain of similar choices that seems not to be very important can turn out to be rewarding or disastrous.

The point is that habits are the results of repeated similar choices. This is true whether the habit is brushing one's teeth, choosing nutritious food, making fun of people you disagree with, or practicing a musical instrument.

Habits can be liberating. Maybe you've never thought about it before, but can you think of a habit that is liberating? One that results in more freedom?

*[Encourage students to think of examples of habits that are liberating until you have three or four.]*

**How many of you are proficient with a skill?**

*[Ask one who is proficient to raise his or her hand.]*

**Did you enjoy this skill from the very beginning? Were there days when practice was boring and tedious?**

*[More than likely, your young musician will recall the drudgery and tedium of those early days. If you know that this student is skilled and enjoys playing piano, ask one more question:]*

**When did playing the piano become enjoyable? How many years did you have to persevere before you began to enjoy making music?**

In the case of a musician, increasing skill is a matter of building habits that liberate musicianship. A skilled musician (or athlete or craftsman or dancer or artist) is bound for a while by the necessity of practicing for hours to build skill, but the skilled person is liberated by those same hard-won skills.



= 10 minutes

## EXPLORING THE LESSON



### RECALL AND PREDICT

ABOUT 8 MINUTES

Some other limiting habits you might mention:

- Expecting others to befriend you
- Neglecting personal hygiene
- Doing only what you feel like doing
- Making fun of people you disagree with

Habits can also be limiting.

*[Recall with the class:]*

**Remember the list we made in our groups in Lesson 2? Some of the obstacles you listed in Lesson 2 were habits. What are some negative habits that keep people from achieving their goals?**

*[Write answers on the board as the students suggest them. Your students will probably come up with a list that looks something like those shown below.]*

*They will probably come up with more than these four items, but be sure that the list compiled by the class includes at least these four:*

- *Procrastination.*
- *Lying.*
- *Sleeping too late in the morning.*
- *Staying out too late at night.*

*Now ask your students:]*

**What are some of the excuses people make for their bad habits?**

*[To help them get started, suggest one or two, as shown below:]*

- **Procrastination: “I work best under pressure.”**
- **Staying out too late at night: “I’m not sleepy yet.”**



**= 18 minutes**



### DEMONSTRATION

ABOUT 5 MINUTES

NOTE:

If you have enough spools of thread, you can make this a small-group activity with one spool for each group. In this way, you can let each student personally experience the power of repeated habits.

*[To illustrate the power of habits, ask one of the biggest, strongest boys in the class to stand in front of the class with his arms to his side. Wrap a single thread around his arms (just above his elbows), and tie it off in a knot. Then instruct him:]*

**Now, break the thread by spreading your arms away from your body.**

*[This he will do easily. Next, wrap the thread around his arms three times, tie it off and ask him to break it. He will probably be able to do it again, but with a little more effort.]*

*Pause in the demonstration to give this instruction:]*

**Research has shown that many common habits can be established**

in three weeks. If you do the same thing for 21 consecutive days, you will have built quite a strong habit. Some examples are:

- Getting up at the same time each morning
- Bringing your notebook to school every day

*[Now wrap the thread around the arms of the boy 21 times with the class counting aloud to help you keep track of the times the thread is wound around the arms of the boy. Be sure to overlap the threads so that they create a strong cord.*

*When you have finished wrapping the thread and tying it off, ask the boy to spread his arms away from his body to break the thread. He probably will not be able to break it at all. Even if he does, he will have to struggle mightily to get free.]*

 = 23 minutes



## PREDICT

ABOUT 7 MINUTES

*[Show the spool of thread to your students as you tell them:]*

Five-hundred years ago, the German humanist Erasmus said, “We sow our thoughts, and we reap our actions; we sow our actions, and we reap our characters; we sow our characters, and we reap our destiny.”

You can choose your own destiny by choosing which habits to cultivate and which ones to break. We have identified habits that hold people back, and we have seen that habits can be powerful. Some young people are bound by habits like these.

*[Point to the list of negative habits.]*

By excusing their bad habits rather than changing them, they have selected their future. What are some careers and futures that would be closed to someone bound by the bad habits we have discussed?

*[Samples are shown in the sample list below:]*

### Future Not Available:

- Airline pilot
- Scientist
- Top-level executive
- World-class athlete
- Successful entrepreneur
- College professor
- Priest/Pastor

At the top of the board write:

“Future Not Available”

List answers as students brainstorm.

 = 30 minutes



## LIST POSITIVE HABITS

ABOUT 8 MINUTES

You probably can come up with similar lists of positive habits no matter which field you choose, so it doesn't matter which career option the class selects.

*[Finally, choose one of the career options that seems especially interesting to the class. Ask:]*

**What are the habits necessary to succeed in this field of work?**

*[Remind your students that positive habits are like negative habits in that, like the thread wrapped around the arms of the boy, they are difficult to break. Successful people are as bound by their positive habits as unsuccessful people are bound by their negative habits; only the outcome is different.]*

*If time allows, ask your students whether they know anyone – perhaps a relative or friend of the family – who has achieved professional success by cultivating good habits. Ask students to share what they know of that person's positive habits.]*



= 38 minutes

## ENDING THE LESSON



## CULTIVATE POSITIVE HABITS

ABOUT 7 MINUTES

*[Have your students survey the list of positive habits that you have written on the board. Have them also refer to the life goals they listed earlier in their Personal Journals. Ask them to identify one of those habits that they would like to cultivate over the next 21 days – a habit that would enable them to reach their life goal – and write it in their notebook. Then have them write in their notebooks the answer to this question:]*

**What specific changes can I make in my daily schedule over the next 21 days to cultivate this positive habit?**

*[Tell them you will ask them to report on the results of their habit formation after three weeks.]*

**In this lesson, we've been talking about positive and negative habits that are developed by repetition over time. However, there are some things we do that can hurt us much more quickly. We are going to look at some of these in the next unit.**

**Some of these things (for example, some drugs) can imprison us after just one or two experiences. These "habits" are less like thread and more like a chain. Who would volunteer to repeat our demonstration with this chain?**

*[Hold up a strong chain. Remind the students that they will need to bring their Personal Journals to class next lesson. It is very important.]*

**Today, we saw how habits can chain us or can free us. Next session, we'll look at something else that will have a huge influence on whether we reach our dreams. Next time, we'll look at the power of community.**

Before dismissing your students, remember to dictate the Parent-Teacher questions to them.



= 45 minutes

## RESOURCES

### GOING DEEPER

Today, we learned about the power that habits have to either help us toward our goals and dreams or drag us down and keep us from reaching them. There is a passage in the Bible that further explains how this works.

*[Read Galatians 6:7 and 9 from your Bible or read the following paraphrase to your students:]*

**“You cannot fool God, so don’t make a fool of yourself! You will harvest what you plant. So, let’s not allow ourselves to get tired of doing good things. At the right time, we will harvest a good crop if we don’t give up or quit.”**

The Bible is comparing our development of habits to gardening. How many of you have planted something to eat in a garden? Can you raise your hands? If you have, then you may have already noticed the three laws of planting and harvesting.

The three laws are:

1. You harvest the same thing you plant.
2. You harvest later than you plant.
3. You harvest more than you plant.

Those of you who have planted gardens, did you ever plant tomato seeds and have cucumbers grow up instead? Or did you plant onions and harvest carrots? No – unless you made a mistake and were confused about what you planted!

That is LAW No. 1. “You always harvest the same thing you plant.” If you plant tomatoes, you harvest tomatoes.

And let me ask you this: Did you ever plant carrot seeds, then come out the next day and harvest full grown carrots? Of course not.

LAW No. 2 states, “You harvest later than you plant, usually weeks or even months later.”

A crop takes time to grow.

One last question: What would you think if you planted a bunch of seeds, waited a month or two, and then dug where you planted the seeds and all you found were the same seeds – the same tiny seeds you planted? You’d be disappointed, maybe even shocked. When we plant things, we expect them to grow



– a lot. How much bigger is a full-grown carrot than a tiny carrot seed? A hundred times bigger. Maybe even a thousand times bigger.

LAW No. 3 is, “You harvest more than you plant, usually a lot more.”

The verses we read reinforce those same three laws that apply to habits. If you want people to be nice to you and encourage you, what habits do you need to practice? Should you laugh at others and always criticize them? What kind of crop could you expect to harvest if you plant seeds of criticism. Remember the laws of planting and harvesting?

- You will harvest the same thing you plant – people will criticize you.
- You will harvest later than you plant – people may put up with your criticism for a while, but eventually they’ll get tired of your nasty habit and start responding.
- You will harvest more than you plant – if you plant a little criticism, you’ll eventually get back a lot. If you plant many destructive seeds, eventually they will return in a flood and overwhelm you.

Fortunately, the three laws also work with good habits. If you are friendly, even a little, people will begin to be friendly in return.

You may have to wait awhile, but if you continue to be friendly, soon you’ll have many friends. Planting a little friendship now will likely reap a huge harvest of close friendships for the rest of your life.

## LIFE-GOAL DRAWING ACTIVITY

Now we’re going to play a game called “Habit Charades”.

*[Lead your class in a game with similar organization and rules to the drawing game described in Lesson 2, GOING DEEPER.*

*The difference is that this time you will provide the team representatives with slips of paper with a habit written on each. Prepare a mix of good and bad habits. Some examples might be “laziness”, “cheerfulness”, “compassion”, “arrogance”, etc.*

*Instead of drawing on the board, the team representatives must silently act out the habit while the rest of the team tries to guess. In this game, they may not write or draw anything or make motions that represent numbers or letters.]*

**FOCUS POINT**

Be sure to leave time for discussion at the end of the learning activity so your students can discuss the connection between the learning activity and the lesson. Listen to see whether they seemed to understand the key points listed. If you sense that one or more of these points may have been lost, be sure to guide the discussion to make sure they get these main ideas.

1. **We are responsible for the habits we cultivate.**
2. **We are likely to harvest a bigger “crop” of success in life if we start cultivating positive habits and rooting out negative ones now, while we are still young.**

## PARENT-TEACHER CONNECTION

### **For Family Discussion:**

1. Please share with your adolescent what habits you (father or mother) have worked to develop and habits you've struggled to break.
2. What positive habit has your adolescent chosen to cultivate over the next three weeks? Ask how you can help.

