

Learning Scenario

What's the point of being useless?

BASIC EDUCATION

15-20 PARTICIPANTS

20-30 MINUTES

BASIC EDUCATION LEARNERS

INFORMAL SETTING

OBJECTIVES:

- To think about concepts such as usefulness or uselessness in our society
- To recognize relativity of usefulness and uselessness
- To express a well-founded opinion

PURPOSE

Processing
Knowledge



LOCATION

Inside or outside,
participants are seated in a
circle and feel comfortable

STORY

The useless tree

PREPARATION

- The teacher has to prepare the material.

MATERIAL

- One sheet of paper with illustrations of a lonely twisted tree, the attributes of a woodcutter, a logger and a carver and a lonely tree with people gathered around it. One can use the illustrations as well to help explain difficult words. The illustrations with or without the words, depending of the level, help the learners to tell the story.
- One sheet of paper with philosophical questions about “useful” and “uselessness” to help the learners to talk about the story and learn them to formulate a personal opinion in a foreign language. The teacher chooses the domain to reflect on.

Learning Scenario

What's the point of being useless?

DESCRIPTION

- The teacher tells the story and uses the illustrations to make the story easier to understand
- The teacher asks the learners to think of one thing they find particularly useful in their life. The learners then work in pairs and tell each other why this thing is useful.
- The teacher shows some images of art, theatre, candy, a car, sports, clothes, ... and asks the learners to put them in the category useful or useless. Each learner will explain why something is useful for her/him or not.

TIPS & TRICKS FOR THE TEACHERS

Make sure the learners have enough skills to express their opinion. You can provide some sentence starters to help them.

ALTERNATIVE IMPLEMENTATIONS / POSSIBLE ADAPTATIONS

Show the learners an image of something useless you're fond of and tell them why. Do they have something similar? Organize a market of useless things where the learners play the role of market vendors and promote their useless objects.

YOUR COMMENTS & ADDITIONS

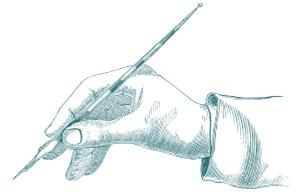


The useless tree



China

Chuang TZU



Purpose(s)



Processing
Knowledge



Identity &
Recognition

Once upon the time, a great grove of trees stood on the hill where just one gnarled tree now stands. "We will never cut a good straight board from that twisted tree." So they let it be and cut another and another.

Then the loggers came after logs to sell and said, "The twisted tree will burn with a foul smell." So hey let it be and cut another and another.

Then the carvers came after soft-grained wood and said, "This twisted tree won't do us any good. It is a knotty old tree." So they, too, let it be and cut another and another.

In time, the large, gnarled tree stood alone on the hill. Now during the day, the children come and play in its shade. In the evening, the old men gather about its huge trunk. They sigh and talk about their lives.



“Oh, what is the use of being useless?” one elderly man said. Another pointed up and replied, “Just look above your head! An entire grove of trees once stood on this hill. Now only one crooked tree still stands, thick with greenery. Had this useless old tree been useful, my friend, it would not have grown ancient with fine spreading limbs.”

Source/Link:

Heather Forest, *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*, August House, page 34, 1996.

