

PRACTICE: Recognizing Values

- Read the story assigned to your group
 - o You can find these stories and more on the website: Humans of New York <https://www.humansofnewyork.com/>
- Describe the values presented by the narrator in the story

- Create one follow up question that invites more exploration of one value that stood out

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Story 1

“I called our neighborhood ‘The Bermuda Triangle.’ A lot of talented people never made it out. All three of my older siblings dropped out of school. I really wanted to graduate from college, but I wasn’t the best student. And my parents didn’t speak English so they couldn’t help me with applications. Only one college even accepted me, and I missed the deadline for the interview. A few weeks later our assistant principal Ms. Effinger stopped me in the hallway. She asked me where I was going to school. I explained that I’d been accepted to SUNY Purchase but had missed the deadline. That’s when she grabbed me by the arm and said: ‘Come to my office.’ She called the admissions office and asked them to give me another opportunity. But she didn’t stop there. She asked my mom for permission to let me sleep at her house. Then the next morning she drove me to SUNY Purchase. The interviewer said that I must be special if my principal would go through all that effort, and I ended up getting accepted. But the story didn’t end well. I just wasn’t ready. And after a year, my GPA fell so low that I was dismissed. I felt horrible. I asked the school if I could come speak to new students, and inspire them to make better choices than I did. I still do that today. But I felt most badly about Ms. Effinger. I never spoke to her again. I couldn’t face her. This woman had gone out of her way to do something for me, and I’d ruined it. But she still changed my life. Even though I didn’t graduate, I never moved back to Harlem. I ended up finding a good job at a wholesale center, and my children were given opportunities that I never had. A few years ago I enrolled in night courses at SUNY Purchase. My boss couldn’t understand why I was going back to school, but I was carrying such a huge burden. I felt like I owed something to Ms. Effinger. I finally graduated this year, and I found her on Facebook. I gave her a call. I told her everything that happened over the years. I said: ‘You changed my life. And I don’t understand why you did it. I don’t understand what you saw in me.’ She replied: ‘I did it because you had potential. And I couldn’t understand why you didn’t see that in yourself.’”

<https://www.humansofnewyork.com/post/626536765200711700/i-called-our-neighborhood-the-bermuda-triangle>

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Story 2

“We were together for three years. He wasn’t a bad person. He worked hard. He was charismatic. But he was hiding a major drug problem from me. There were violent episodes. He once choked me in a hotel room while we were on vacation. He broke my phone. He tried to rip up my passport. Then on the way home, he dropped to one knee in the airport and asked me to marry him. That was the pattern. We’d get in a huge fight, then after a few days he’d ‘love bomb’ me. He’d say that he needed me. And that he’d never get better without me. So I’d take him back, and the cycle would begin all over again. One Monday morning there was a knock on our door. It was my mother, and she told me that my sister had been pulled over by the police. She was battling a drug addiction of her own. They found empty needles all over her car, and my two-year-old nephew Robert was placed into foster care. From that moment on, all I could think about was getting him back. But it was nearly impossible. I had to complete an eight-week certification course. I had to rent a two-bedroom apartment in San Francisco, which I couldn’t even afford. And everyone living with me had to pass a background check. I knew that my boyfriend had a misdemeanor for domestic violence. So I had to make a decision: him or Robert. And I chose Robert. I officially became his foster parent in October of 2018. Ever since then I’ve been focused on his healing. He can’t verbalize yet. Sometimes he has tantrums and I just need to hold him tight. He’s been through a lot of trauma, so he needs me. But I needed him too. I’d still be stuck in the cycle if it wasn’t for Robert. I didn’t know who I was anymore. I needed to learn to be alone. I needed to learn that chaos wasn’t normal. The last two years haven’t been easy. The whole family is chipping in. My mom is working two jobs to help with rent. Everyone is under a lot of stress. But it’s a lot of peace too. I’m not walking around on eggshells anymore. I’m not terrified of being alone. I’m enjoying my solitude. Last June I got baptized, and I feel like I’m becoming a new person. My life has a purpose now. Robert’s adoption went through on March 10th. So I’m officially his mother.”

<https://www.humansofnewyork.com/post/625187858816417800/we-were-together-for-three-years-he-wasnt-a-bad>

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Story 3

“We met in the sixth grade. She was such a positive person, the opposite of me. When you’ve gone your whole life without hearing ‘good job’ or ‘I’m proud of you,’ it sort of leaves an empty space in your mind. And you fill in the blanks with your own guesses about what people think of you. For me it was always something negative. But Makenzie was the opposite. I called her my bush baby because she had these bright eyes and would always be smiling. And I still see her that way. She’s a little more drained now that we have kids, but she’s always been a constant source of positivity. Even as my depression got worse and worse. People say: ‘It’s so selfish what you did. You have this great family. Why wouldn’t you want to be a part of it?’ But that’s the thing. I never felt like I deserved to be a part of it. And it got to the point where I thought everyone’s life would be better if I removed myself from the equation. Makenzie freaked out when I came home from the hospital. There was a lot of crying and hugging. A few months later, when the dust had settled, we were sitting at the kitchen table. And I asked her: ‘Were you upset with me that day?’ She looked at me with tears in her eyes. And she said: ‘I need you.’ She told me that without me she wouldn’t have her best friend. And that going to bed at night would be harder. Something about that moment made it easy to believe her. It wasn’t some planned speech. She just said it. And that’s my goal in therapy right now. To believe what people say about me. It’s really hard for me to say good things about myself, so that’s the best I can do right now. If you ask my kids, they’ll tell you they have a great Daddy. They’ll say he’s really nice. I know their problems can seem immeasurable to them. So if they’re crying, even if it seems like there’s no reason, I’ll sit with them as long as they need. Am I a good husband? That one is harder to answer. I’m afraid that I take more than I give. And I never want Makenzie to feel like I’m her fourth kid. I want to be a team. But I’ve gotten to the point where I can trust her to tell me. And she says I mean a lot to this family. She says we’re a team. So that means we’re a team.”

<https://www.humansofnewyork.com/post/625105514589765600/we-met-in-the-sixth-grade-she-was-such-a>