

Reality Ride

11. Now or Later?

Spatial Requirements: Regular classroom setup: little or no space required

Activity Type: Object lesson

Grades: 2-12

Group Size: 1 or more

Time: 5-7 minutes, divided into two parts

Introduction: Is what you want now more important than what you want most? This activity helps students learn how to delay gratification, and teaches them that controlling impulses will lead to a bigger payoff in the future.

Materials:

- 1 pencil and paper per student
- 2 pennies
- 2 nickels
- 2 dimes
- 2 quarters
- a 1-dollar bill concealed in a medium-sized box (wrapped like a gift, if you wish).

Activity:

This activity can be divided into two parts (optional). For Part 1, give the students three to five minutes to write down five goals they would like to accomplish in the next ten years. Then give them about two minutes to share their goals with a partner.

Ask everyone to write down one goal that, if accomplished, would bring them maximum joy. Explain that this goal will not be shared with anyone.

Once the students have their big goal written down, ask for a volunteer.

Hold your hands out to the student with a penny in one and a nickel in the other. Ask the student which coin they would rather have, the penny or the nickel. If they choose the penny, thank them and have them sit down. Start over with another student.

If they ask for the nickel, give it to them and bring out a dime. Repeat these steps - offering the dime, then the quarter. When you give them the coin of higher value, take back the less valuable one.

Once they have the quarter, congratulate them and have them return to their seat.

Ask for a new volunteer. Make the same offers to this student, starting with the penny and substituting the box for the more valuable coin. Ask if they want the coin now or the box later. Explain if they choose the box, they will have to wait until the end of class to see what is in the box and collect their reward.

If they choose any of the coins, thank them, give them their reward, and explain that you will reveal what is in the box at the end of class. If they choose the box, they return to their seat empty handed.

Now comes Part 2. If the student refused all offers to take the money and chose the box instead, then state something like, "Because of your decisions and your patience, you are now eligible for the box. Do you wish to accept what is in the box?" Then give them the box and have them open it.

Processing the Experience:

- Ask the recipient of the box, “Are you glad you waited? Why?” Be sure to identify the increased value.
- Pull up the Reality Ride visual analogy, and discuss which track we ride on when we delay gratification.
- Ask the students if they have any stories or examples of people who either acted on impulse or delayed gratification. What were the consequences?
- Ask the students to write down the following statement: “The chief cause of unhappiness and failure is sacrificing what is wanted most for what is wanted now.”

You might also ask:

- How can a goal help you delay gratification?
- What does the statement we wrote down mean to you?
- How does this activity relate to the phrase, “Harder but worth it?”
- How can the decisions you make today affect your future?