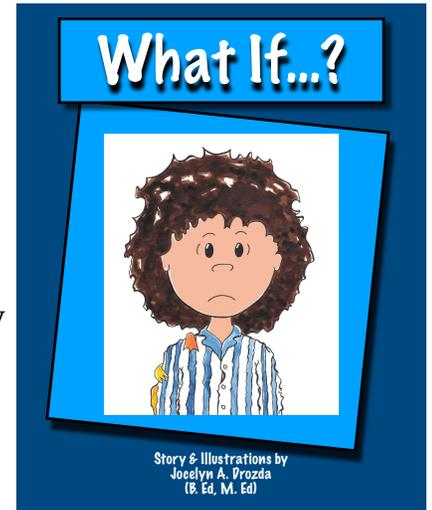


What If? - Teaching Guide

Pre-reading Activity:

Introduction - The character in this story is a boy named Xander, who is about your age. His side-kick is a duck named Alex. When Xander's friend, Billy, can no longer visit on Saturday, Xander is visibly upset. He begins to think that maybe Billy is mad at him, or worse yet, no longer considers him a friend. Then we find out that was not the case at all. What Xander imagined was happening was a lot worse than what actually happened.



Have you ever been in a situation like Xander's, where you expected bad things for yourself, and it didn't turn out that way?

Students share their experiences.

What do you think this story is going to be about?
(Read the back of the book to the students.)

Let's read to find out what happens when Xander's bad thoughts are much bigger than real life.

During Reading Possible Questions

Why do you think the illustrator chose to put the cartoon text upside down when Billy is speaking?

It was a creative, fun way to represent that fact that Billy was upside down while he was speaking.

What was the real reason Billy could not play with Xander on Saturday?
His grandparents were in town, and they were going to the zoo.

What did Xander think his teacher wanted to talk to him about?
Putting crayons in the pencil sharpener.

Why do you think Xander's tummy started to hurt?
The stress from thinking maybe he would never see his friends again.

What was the real reason the teacher wanted to talk to him?
His mom would not be able to pick him up after school.

Oh no! Xander's mom could not pick him up! Why do you think this was so?
(Students share their ideas. Note how many indicate negative things happening.)

Why do we often think things like this are for negative reasons?
*Fear. Expect bad things to happen.
Used to hearing bad things happening.
Watch scary shows on TV/scary movies.
(Keep discussions short. These ideas can be expanded upon at the end of the reading. Use discretion how deep into the "fear" discussion you go, depending on the needs of your class. You can briefly introduce optimistic versus pessimistic attitudes, looking at the good side of things instead of the negative. I.e. Glass half-full versus glass half-empty.)*

What was the real reason his mom was going to be late?
She had a dentist appointment.

Why did Alex run away?
He didn't! He was playing/hiding in the closet!

Why did Xander believe he ran away?
Alex was mad at Xander for squirting him in the eye with orange juice.

Why did Xander think perhaps his brother broke his robot?
Because Xander had broken his toy car. (See - I Don't Want To!)

Why do you think the author chose to write, “Oh no! It’s Ellie,” so big?
To show the reader Xander is really scared, worried.
To show the reader should say it really loudly.

Why do you think Ellie, his sister, called him?

Why did Xander give Ellie his toy bear?
He had eaten her cake. (See - I Don’t Want To!)
He had no self-control.

What had happened to Ellie’s bear?
His eye popped off when Xander and Alex were playing roughly with him.

What bad thing does Xander imagine happened to Ellie and her dad?
Xander imagines they both had their hands glued to the bear (because he had left the glue out and the cap off after he had used it to fix his drum that Alex broke, even though his dad had told him not to touch his glue.

What was the real reason Ellie was calling Xander?
She wanted to play a game with her dad, and they needed three people, so she wanted him to play the game with them.

What made Xander’s head hurt?
Too much thinking about bad things all day long!

Do you think Xander did study for his spelling test?
No.

What do you notice about the text when Xander is wondering about if he had done horribly on his spelling test?
It is really, really big! It shows that he said it really loudly, with lots of expression!

Had Xander studied for his test? What should he have done? What did he have control over?

No. He was worried about not doing well in his test. He did have control over studying. He should have taken the time to study instead of playing games with Alex.

Post-Reading Discussion

Alex's fear about doing poorly on his test came true. Yet even so, actually dealing with it was not as bad as he had believed it was going to be. Contrast the difference between what he thought he'd have to do and what he did actually have to do about his poor test results.

He thought he'd never learn the words.

He thought his mom and dad would be mad at him.

He thought the teacher was going to keep him after school until dark, practicing his words, so that he'd be scared walking home alone at night. These thoughts made his tummy and head hurt.

The reality was he had to stay in for one recess and practice his words, which was still a consequence of not studying, but much less drastic than he had imagined.

Do bad things **always** happen?

No.

Do they **sometimes** happen?

Yes.

What happens when you expect bad things will keep happening, even when they don't?

You feel bad when you don't have to. This makes your body sick.

Then you have no energy to deal with the times when the bad things do happen.

Is it better to expect bad things for yourself, or good things?

Good things!!!!

(Option: Make the following page into a handout for the students. Use with student response sheet.)

Adapted from:

Steinhilber, Brianna. "How to train Your Brain to Be More Optimistic." (Accessed, August 15, 2021)

Santos-Longhurst, Adrienne. "Benefits of Thinking Positively, and How to Do It." (Accessed, August 15, 2021)

What are some ways to practice expecting good things for yourself?

Watch funny videos. Laughter is good medicine!

Speak good things over yourself:

“I will get this if I keep trying!”

Start with positive affirmations each day:

“Today is a good day for having a great day!

I am strong and confident! I am loved!”

Talk and write about things you are grateful for.

Try to find all the good in hard things and bad things.

Spend time with joyful people.

Listen to happy and peaceful music.

Do nice things for others.

Say nice things to others.

Do what you can to change negative things, and practice not letting your mind keep thinking about the things you cannot change.

Keep your mind thinking about good things.

Take good care of your body: eat well, exercise, get enough sleep.

