Tales of a Gambling Grandma

Introduction

"Tales of a Gambling Grandma" is a heartwarming, interesting story narrated by her grand-daughter. Grandma was from Russia, and, as the story says, she escaped to America when she was little. She met her husband in Brooklyn and that is how their family began. Grandma is nanny and best friend. They do all kinds of things together, while Grandma tells the "tales" of her life (some very tall tales). Grandma also loves to gamble, so they play cards. In fact, grandma teaches the little girl how to play poker, and they play together using real money—"to make it more interesting" as grandma suggests.

Throughout the story, the author, Dayal Kaur Khalsa, paints a beautiful image of the friendship and love between the narrator and her grandma. The story ends with Grandma's death and the little girl hugging and smelling Grandma's big dresses in the closet and eventually inheriting Grandma's prize ring she won gambling.

"Tales of a Gambling Grandma" is a great story for facilitating discussion about gambling, inviting students to think critically about why people gamble and the ways it might impact the players and others around them.

Instructional strategies

1. As a class, read *Tales of a Gambling Grandma* and facilitate a class discussion about gambling. You might use some or all of the questions below.

    a. What are your thoughts and feelings about this story?
    b. Are you familiar with gambling? What are some things you know or have heard about gambling?
    c. Why do you think Grandma liked gambling so much? What do think she got out of gambling?
    d. Do you have to play for "trifles" or for real money to make it interesting? Is winning (or the prizes you win) the only thing that is important? Do you think that was what was really important to Grandma? Why or why not?
    e. Apparently Grandma learned how to play poker in order to make extra money. Do you think Grandma made lots of money? How can you tell? Do most people make lots of money gambling?
    f. In fact, most people lose money when gambling. So, why, do you think, people like to gamble so much?
    g. In the story, Grandma exaggerates her tales. She didn't really ride across the ocean in a hay wagon! Why do you think she exaggerates when telling stories of her life or when passing on her Laws of Life? Is this "wrong"?
    h. Do you think her reports about her gambling might also be exaggerated? Do you think gambling might be a make-believe world where people can dream of being rich even if they are not?
    i. Do you think this could ever lead to problems? Explain.

2. Or, after reading *Tales of a Gambling Grandma* with the class, you might explore a specific gambling theme(s) related to the story. Or you may want to break the class into groups and have each group discuss a different theme before regrouping to follow up.

Cheating

When Grandma got married, she started playing poker to make extra money. *"She was very good—sharp-eyed and quick with her hand. She could mark a card with her fingernail, and hide aces in her sleeve."*

    a. What do you think about this quote?
    b. Do you think Grandma was cheating? When can something be called "cheating"?
    c. Do you consider cheating a skill? Why or why not?
    d. Could cheating be sometimes considered or interpreted as harmless fun? Explain.
    e. Have you ever seen someone cheating in a game you were part of? How did you feel about that? Why? What would you have done if you caught Grandma cheating?

Winning/Losing

In the story, we read, *"Wherever there was a hot card game going on in Brooklyn, my grandma was there—winning money."* (p.4) and that Grandma *"liked to win."* (p.5) and *"to make it more interesting, my grandma suggested they play for what she called 'trifles'—gold lipstick cases, compacts, pillboxes, charms, brooches, lockets—anything that was shiny and gold. My grandma won everything"* (p.18).

    a. What are your thoughts on these quotes? Is it possible that Grandma won all the time?
    b. The little girl in the story says that Grandma liked to win. Do you think liking to win means you are more likely to win? Why/Why not?
    c. Is it important to win a game? Do you think people like winning because of the rewards or prizes or could there be other reasons? Explain.
    d. Is it more fun to play a game in which there are prizes? When is playing for prizes *not* fun anymore?
    e. Imagine there is a game with a big prize—a prize that you would really, really like to win. Every time you play, you need to spend a little money. Will you play that game to win that prize? How far will you go and continue playing?
    f. While the story shows that the trifles that Grandma wins do not have great monetary value (e.g., the ring is not gold and the diamonds are only glass), she still continues to play and gamble. Why do you think Grandma continues to gamble even when the prizes do not have any real monetary value?

Managing Benefits & Harms

In the story, we read, *"Wherever there was a hot card game going on in Brooklyn, my grandma was there."* (p.4)
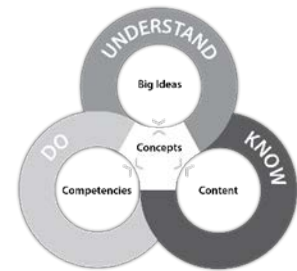
    a. What are your thoughts about this quote?
    b. Do you think Grandma really was always playing cards and gambling? Why or why not?
    c. If Grandma really was always playing cards and gambling, what problems might that have caused for her? For her grand-daughter?
    d. What are some ways to make sure gambling is only fun and not harmful? Do you think Grandma knew about these ways? Explain.

4. In the story, Grandma is always gambling and winning, and always having a wonderful time. Ask the question, "What if Grandma was not having fun when she was gambling?" Invite students to write a different version of the story in which Grandma is not having fun. Encourage them to explore why Grandma might keep gambling even if she was not having fun, how this might impact her behaviour and her relationship with her grand-daughter.

5. Reflection: Invite students to think about the following questions and record their thoughts in a notebook or a piece of paper. Ask them to share their thoughts if comfortable.

    a. What did you learn from today's story and discussion?
    b. Is there a question or a thought that is still lingering in your mind? If so, what is it?

Gambling literacy

Big ideas
- Gambling can be a fun recreational activity but can also lead to significant harm
- As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage gambling in our midst
- We can learn how to control gambling by examining the different ways people have thought about it, engaging in critical self-reflection and listening to each other

Competencies
- Assess the complex ways in which gambling is linked to human culture and impacts the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and societies
- Assess the ways in which material goods are distributed in society, how those goods are valued and how this is related to gambling policies and behaviours
- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., win vs lose or success vs failure) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like gambling
- Explore and appreciate the diverse cognitive, social, emotional and physical factors that impact gambling behaviour
- Develop personal and social skills to reflect on and manage personal behaviour and choices related to gambling

For a complete look at the gambling literacy competencies, as defined by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC, see: www.uvic.ca/research/centres/carbc/assets/docs/iminds/hs-gambling-curriculum.pdf

Links to Curriculum

First Peoples' principles of learning
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity

English Language Arts 5

Big ideas
- Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world
- Texts can be understood from different perspectives
- Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens

Competencies
- Use a variety of comprehension strategies before, during, and after reading, listening or viewing to guide inquiry and deepen understanding of text
- Synthetize ideas from a variety of sources to build understanding
- Consider different purposes, audiences and perspectives in exploring texts
- Apply a variety of thinking skills to gain meaning from texts
- Identify how differences in context, perspectives, and voice influence meaning in texts
- Use personal experience and knowledge to connect to text and develop understanding of self, community, and world
- Respond to text in personal and creative ways
- Exchange ideas and perspectives to build shared understanding