



Emotions, Metaphors and Gambling

Based on *The Red Tree* by Shaun Tan

Introduction

Our emotions, when unregulated, can drive what we think, say and do to places we may not really want to go or that are unhealthy for us. For some, this includes problem gambling behaviour. Recognizing and understanding the normal up-and-down nature of our emotions can help us learn how to cope with and manage our feelings so we can make healthy decisions in times of excitement, stress or sorrow.

Using metaphors to identify and explore emotions is a fun way for kids to explore their feelings and help build competency in emotional regulation. This can help them avoid risky activities such as problem gambling. This lesson uses a wonderful metaphor-laden children's story, *The Red Tree* (2001) by Shaun Tan, to begin a conversation about the depth and complexity of human emotions, and how they both influence us and give us power to act (or not act) on impulses that have the potential to both help and harm us.

The Red Tree is about a nameless, red-headed girl who passes helplessly through many dark moments. The girl ultimately finds something hopeful as she goes back to her bedroom at the end of the story. The text is minimal but the images and underlying concepts, metaphors and themes are sophisticated.

The focus of the first instructional strategy suggested below is to help students explore different emotions and they might impact our thoughts, decisions and behaviours. Helping them reflect on personal and social skills or strategies we can develop to manage our choices and decisions as our feelings go up and down is important in developing the ability to manage risk and avoid harm including that related to gambling.

The second instructional strategy looks at the use of metaphors or symbols and focuses on associating different images (including images of various ways of gambling) to our feelings of sad and/or happy. Teachers are invited to facilitate a discussion on how students associate the pictures to feelings of happy, sad, or both. In exploring these associations teachers should avoid suggesting that one thing "causes" the other or that things are good or bad based on how we feel about them.

Instructional strategies

1. **Exploring emotions:** As a class, read the *The Red Tree* or watch the video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrmMFFpKxgw) and facilitate a discussion using questions like the following.

- a. What do you think the book is about? What are your thoughts on this story?
- b. How do you think the girl feels throughout the story?
- c. Reflect on this quote from the book:

*"Sometimes the day begins with nothing to look forward to
and things go from bad to worse
darkness overcomes you
nobody understands"*

- What does "darkness overcomes you" mean to you? Have you ever felt like that? If so, what did you do about that feeling?
- d. Are there good and bad emotions? Explain.
 - e. Do you think there are any emotions that are unnecessary or harmful? Discuss.

- f. Do we want to get rid of sadness? Why or why not? Is sadness necessarily a negative feeling? Do you think sad and happy are necessarily opposite? Explain.
- g. Would life be worth living without emotions? What emotions make life worth living? Is there anything positive about the dark moments we experience in life? Explain.
- h. How might our positive and negative thoughts and feelings give us power or influence us to act or make a decision? Give examples of both.

After the class has discussed some or all of these questions, invite the students to brainstorm activities or strategies one can use when they feel “things go from bad to worse” or to cope with difficult emotions. As each strategy is suggested write it on a slip of paper. After a good range of strategies have been identified give all the slips to the students and have them arrange them from “most likely to be helpful” to “least likely to be helpful.” Then pose the question whether any of these strategies might ever be harmful and discuss students’ ideas. (Note, some activities might be helpful in some circumstances while being harmful in others.)

2. Metaphors and gambling: As a class, read the *The Red Tree* or watch the video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=PrmMFFpKxgw) and then facilitate the following activities.
 - a. Exploring metaphors
 - i. Identify metaphors: Invite the students to find terms and images from the story that could be associated with a feeling or could hold symbolic meaning (e.g., the red leaf, the pile of black leaves, the girl inside the bottle). Talk about reasons why these terms and images may have been chosen to be part of the story, what they mean, and why.
 - ii. Link metaphors to feelings: As a class, make a list of things from the book that represent happy, sad, or both feelings. In all cases, discuss their reasons for identifying something as happy or sad.
 - iii. Make your own metaphors: Ask students to think about the feelings in the book and come up with their own pictures (metaphors) to describe them (e.g., monsters, storms, sunshine, rainbow). If interested, you could also encourage them to show that feeling through body language.
 - b. Break students into groups of 4-5. Provide each group with copies of the [15 pictures](#) provided, and invite them to sort the images into three categories (happy/sad/both). After groups have sorted their pictures, select an image and ask which category they put that image in and why. Explore the differences if groups have categorized the image differently. Repeat this with several of the images. Include at least 1-2 gambling related images interspersed with other images.

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

- Recognize binary constructs (e.g., win vs lose or success vs failure) and assess their limitations 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: <http://www.uvic.ca/research/centres/cisur/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 is embedded in memory, history, and story
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity

English Language Arts 4-5

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

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