

EXERCISE Assumptions Mom and Candy Story

Purpose To give students an appreciation for how routinely they make unconscious assumptions about what they observe and believe to be true.

Recommended with: Trail 10, Feedback Phase Path

Time required 10 minutes

Key Points

A large part of what we think we know is our own assumptions, and we don't realize it.

It takes very careful attention to detail to catch those assumptions.

It's not realistic to stop making assumptions, but we need to recognize how often we do it and adjust how certain we think we are.

Have students read the following story displayed on a slide and encourage them to read it a couple of times, to be sure they understand what happened. If you like, you can also read it aloud. [You can distribute the handouts in advance, but ask students to turn them face down until you instruct them to look at them.]

A woman and a small child are seated in a dimly lit bus stop. The little girl is crying. The child asks for a piece of candy. Her mother opens her purse and the child gets some candy. The little girl stops crying.

Advance to the instructions slide that reads

Score the statements on your handout as either

- True (T)
- False (F), or
- Unknown (?)

based on the story you read.

After giving students time to complete the handout, advance to the story slide again.

A woman and a small child are seated in a dimly lit bus stop. The little girl is crying. The child asks for a piece of candy. Her mother opens her purse and the child gets some candy. The little girl stops crying.

Use the following key to review their answers with them. Have students note how many they got correct. A careful reading of the story reveals that all but a few of the items are uncertain.

DISCUSSION

Most of the time, making these kinds of assumptions is harmless even when we're wrong. But what if you got home minutes later and heard on the news that a little girl about that age had been abducted? And you thought to yourself, "Oh, it couldn't have been *that* little girl. She was with her mom."

That story is just four sentences long. If we can make that many assumptions in four sentences, do you think maybe we make a lot of assumptions? We do it constantly, and we probably couldn't function if we tried to stop. So rather than trying to avoid making assumptions, we need to be aware that we're doing that, and recognize that what we know and observe is probably a lot less certain than we think it is.

Answer Key (True = T, False = F, Not enough information = ?)

?	A mother and her daughter are waiting for a bus.	We know there's a woman and a small child, but it's not clear whether that child is her daughter, or whether the little girl that is mentioned is related to her at all. We know they are in a bus stop, but we don't know why they are there.
?	A little boy is crying.	There's no mention of a little boy crying, but there isn't enough information to rule out that possibility.
?	The little girl is carrying a purse.	"Her" purse could belong to the mother or to the child.

?	A little girl asks for a piece of candy.	We know that a child asked for candy, but not whether it was a little girl.
T	A little girl stops crying.	This is clearly stated.
?	The mom gives her daughter a piece of candy.	It's not clear whether the child who gets candy is her daughter, and it's not clear whether the candy was given or taken.
?	It's after dark.	It may be, but there isn't enough information to know.
?	There are more than two people in the bus stop.	There could be as few as two people, or any number above that.
?	The mother is seated.	It's not clear whether the woman who is seated is a mother to the child seated with her, or a mother at all. It's not clear whether the mother with the purse is seated. It's not clear whether they are the same person or two people.
T	A small child is seated.	This is clearly stated.
?	The child takes a piece of candy.	The child may have taken the candy or been given it by the mother.
F	We know there was candy in the purse but we don't know what kind.	We don't know whether the candy was in the purse, or if the child got it somewhere else.