

LESSON 5-3

The Triune Brain and Survival

Overview

This lesson may be adapted to last one or two days, depending on how much time you have. The length of the lesson will depend on how many stories and how many crisis scenarios you choose. Please refer to the preparations in the unit introduction.

Students will respond to the survival stories they have read as journeywork at the end of lesson 5-2. Referring to lesson 5-2, they'll determine which parts of the brain the protagonists were probably using and whether they could have responded more effectively. Then, using the same criteria, they'll analyze crises that they might actually encounter.

Cognitive Objectives

The students will analyze actual and potential crisis situations to determine survival behaviors. They will categorize survival behaviors according to the portion of the triune brain they represent.

Affective Objective

Students will begin to build awareness of the importance of directing their own feelings and behavior with the rational neocortex rather than the less rational reptilian or mid-brain.

Interactive Objectives

Students will cooperate in reading, analyzing, and drawing conclusions regarding survival strategies and brain function. They will also produce informal skits demonstrating their information.

Preparation

- See unit introduction for advance preparation. Decide which crisis scenarios to use and assign them to appropriate groups.

Materials

1. 1 copy of Strategies for Survival from the Triune Brain chart per student
2. 1 copy of Survival Strategies—True Story per student
3. 1 copy of crisis situation scenarios per person assigned them
4. 1 extra copy per group of Survival Strategies—Crisis Situation

TEACHING THE LESSON

Day 1

Brief follow-up on community service commitments and personal challenges

Ask for quick reports on the students' contacts with their Adult Allies and progress on their challenges.

Introduction

In our last lesson we talked about your three brains in one. Do you remember what each brain does? The **reptilian** brain takes care of basic physical functions as well as fighting and fleeing. The **midbrain** is related to many emotions such as caring for others. This area contains the limbic system, which produces chemicals that help you feel good and perform better, or they can close the gate to your higher thinking abilities. The **neocortex** is the center of higher thinking functions such as analyzing, problem solving, creating, and imagining.

In this lesson, we're going to see how these different parts of the brain can help in a real life-and-death situation. We'll start by looking at some kinds of survival strategies the different parts of the brain might use. Give students copies of the list of survival strategies and go through them.

As your homework you have read some true stories about actual survival situations. It may be that your story was very practical in its approach, or it may have been quite controversial, raising many questions about survival. Now, as a group, you'll use the Strategies for Survival from the Triune Brain and the Survival Strategies—True Story charts to analyze what actions were taken, by whom, and whether each action was either helpful or harmful. Based on the information in the story, you may have to guess what certain characters did or why they did it. Depending on which story your group is reading, you may have no answer for a particular part of the chart, or you may have more than one.

Then you'll give a two-minute skit or demonstration showing what happened. Be sure your skit answers these questions:

1. What was the situation? Who were the characters?

2. What strategies were used? Which part of the brain was being used for each one?
3. Was the outcome positive (the people survived) or negative (the people died)?
4. If the people died, tell what you think would have been a better strategy for saving them. Would that better strategy have come from a different part of the brain? Which part?

Students Analyze Stories

Have the students sit in groups with the others who read the same story. Hand out the copies of the strategies and the charts. Go over the instructions and have the students read and analyze them as a group, filling out the charts.

Students Perform Skits

Keep the skits short. Point out any answers to the above questions that the students have missed.

Day 2 (if you've chosen to make this a two-day lesson)

Application to Other Crises

Note: Your area may have experienced one of these emergency situations, or it is possible that one of your students has been in a similar personal crisis. The purpose of this activity is not to trigger anxious memories, but to help students think clearly about how they might respond should such an episode occur sometime in the future. Make it clear that these are future scenarios, and that students should imagine they are at least one year older than they are now when these imaginary events take place.