

12 Motivational Stories

Motivational Stories

Student handouts, with questions for discussion or writing at the end of each story

Motivational stories have the ability to lift us up, make us smile, encourage, motivate, and teach us valuable life lessons. Here are some motivating stories that will maybe help you spark that motivational feeling. They give us an empowering sense of hope: “if he or she can do it, then so can I!”

People have used inspirational stories to teach, encourage, and inspire for a long time. The teacher, reader, or the listener can use the story as a stepping stone, or as an example to live a better life. Some stories will make you think, and some stories might make you cry. Hopefully, some stories will give you the motivation to go for your dreams.

Remember this when reading inspiring stories: when you get that feeling of motivation, where you want to do something, do something! Nothing is more of a waste than to be inspired and motivated, and NOT take any action.

Your life will only change as a result of taking focused action.

An inspirational story is nothing if it doesn't cause you to **do something**, or at least help you believe in yourself a little bit more. Maybe one of these inspiring stories can help you change your life in some way!

TEACHER NOTE: Stories and questions for discussion and writing are designed to be separate pages, so that you can choose easily how and when to use them with students. Suggestion: There are a total of 12 stories, so these could all be used with pairs of students reading and writing or sharing together, then reporting to the group.

Story titles: Story of the Butterfly; Untitled; Boy Giving Blood; Get Up; Hospital Windows; This Is Good; The Fence; Shake It Off and Step Up; How Rich Are We?; Puppies For Sale; How Much Do You Make an Hour?, and A Special Teacher

The Story of the Butterfly

A man found a cocoon of a butterfly.
One day a small opening appeared.
He sat and watched the butterfly for several hours
as it struggled to squeeze its body through the tiny hole.
Then it stopped, as if it couldn't go further.

So the man decided to help the butterfly.
He took a pair of scissors and
snipped off the remaining bits of cocoon.
The butterfly emerged easily, but
it had a swollen body and shriveled wings.

The man continued to watch it,
expecting that any minute the wings would enlarge
and expand enough to support the body,
Neither happened!
In fact the butterfly spent the rest of its life
crawling around.
It was never able to fly.

What the man in his kindness
and haste did not understand:
The restricting cocoon and the struggle
required by the butterfly to get through the opening
was a way of forcing the fluid from the body
into the wings so that it would be ready
for flight once that was achieved.

Sometimes struggles are exactly
what we need in our lives.
Going through life with no obstacles would cripple us.
We will not be as strong as we could have been
and we would never fly.

For Discussion or Writing:

1. What would you have done, seeing a butterfly struggling to get out of the cocoon?
2. How do you feel about what this man did? Was he “doing the best that he could, given what he knew, or didn't know”? Do you see this action as a mistake?
3. Give the meaning of these lines: “Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our lives. Going through life with no obstacles would cripple us.” Explain these two statements in your own words, and give examples from real peoples' lives of each, your own, or a family member's, or someone else you know well.



Untitled

This is from an old story, back in the '30s, in the days when an ice cream sundae cost much less. A 10 year-old boy entered a hotel coffee shop and sat at a table. A waitress put a glass of water in front of him.

"How much is an ice cream sundae?" the little boy asked.

"Fifty cents," replied the waitress.

The little boy pulled his hand out of his pocket and studied the coins he had. "Well, how much is a plain dish of ice cream?" he then asked.

By now, more people were waiting for a table and the waitress was growing very impatient. "Thirty-five cents," she snapped.

The little boy again counted his coins. "I'll have the plain ice cream," he said.

The waitress brought the ice cream, put the bill on the table and walked away. The boy finished the ice cream, paid the cashier, and left the coffee shop.

When the waitress came back, she began to cry. As she wiped down the table, there placed neatly beside the empty dish were two nickels and five pennies. The boy couldn't have the sundae because he had to have enough money to leave her a tip.



For Discussion or Writing

1. What is the main idea of this short story? Why would the waitress cry when she returned to the table to clean it? What are her feelings?
2. Describe the attributes that you think this young boy has. What is the value of having one or more of the traits that you have just named?
3. Describe a time that might have been somewhat like this, where an unexpected, but nice, event took place in your life.

Boy Giving Blood

There was a little girl named Liza who was suffering from a disease and needed blood from her five-year-old brother, who had miraculously survived the same disease and had developed the antibodies needed to combat the illness.

The doctor explained the situation to her little brother, and asked the boy if he would be willing to give his blood to his sister. I saw him hesitate for only a moment before taking a deep breath and saying,

"Yes, I'll do it if it will save my sister Liza."

As the transfusion took place, he lay in the bed next to his sister and smiled, as we all did, seeing the color return to her cheeks.

Then his face grew pale and his smile faded. He looked up at the doctor and asked with a trembling voice, "Will I start to die right away?" Being so young, the boy had misunderstood the doctor. He thought he was going to give his sister all of his blood, then die.

For Discussion or Writing

1. Can you see how the young boy would truly believe that by giving blood to his sister, he was helping her to stay alive, and that he would die?
2. Have you ever had the feeling that you wanted to help someone else so much that you might die in the process of helping them?
3. Why is it that people, both young and old, often fear death?

Get Up

Bringing a giraffe into the world is a tall order. A baby giraffe falls 10 feet from its mother's womb and usually lands on its back. Within seconds it rolls over and tucks its legs under its body. From this position it considers the world for the first time and shakes off the last vestiges of the birthing fluid from its eyes and ears. Then the mother giraffe rudely introduces its offspring to the reality of life.

In this book, "A View from the Zoo", Gary Richmond describes how a newborn giraffe learns its first lesson.

The mother giraffe lowers her head long enough to take a quick look. Then she positions herself directly over her calf. She waits for about a minute, and then she does the most unreasonable thing. She swings her long, pendulous leg outward and kicks her baby, so that the baby is sent sprawling head over heels.



When the baby doesn't get up, the violent process is repeated over and over again. The struggle to get up is huge. As the baby calf grows tired, the mother kicks it again to stimulate its efforts. At last, the baby giraffe stands for the first time on its wobbly legs.

Then the mother giraffe does the most remarkable thing. She kicks it off its feet again. Why? She wants it to remember how it got up. In the wild, baby giraffes must be able to get up as quickly as possible to stay with the herd. There is safety by staying with the herd. Lions, hyenas, leopards, and wild hunting dogs all enjoy preying on young giraffes, and they'd get the baby, if the mother didn't teach her calf to get up quickly and stay with the herd.

The late Irving Stone understood this too. He spent a lifetime studying greatness, writing biographies of such men as Michelangelo, Vincent van Gogh, Sigmund Freud, and Charles Darwin.

Stone was once asked if he had found a thread that runs through the lives of all these exceptional people. He said, "I write about people who sometime in their life had a dream of something that should be accomplished, then they go to work."

"They are beaten over the head, knocked down, vilified, and for years they get nowhere. But every time they're knocked down they stand up. You cannot destroy these people. And at the end of their lives they've accomplished some modest part of what they set out to do."

For Discussion or Writing

1. Do you feel that the mother giraffe is being cruel? If not, defend what she is doing as right.
2. Why does the story tell us about the late author Irving Stone in the middle of a story of developing giraffes? Compare mother giraffes and Irving Stone as an author.

Hospital Windows

Two men, both seriously ill, occupied the same hospital room. One man was allowed to sit up in his bed for an hour each afternoon to help drain the fluid from his lungs. His bed was next to the room's only window. The other man had to spend all of his time flat on his back.

The men talked for hours on end. They spoke of their wives and families, their homes, their jobs, their involvement in the military service, and where they had been on vacation.

And every afternoon when the man in the bed by the window could sit up, he would pass the time by describing to his roommate all the things he could see outside the window. The man in the other bed began to live for those one-hour periods where his world would be broadened and enlivened by all the activity and color of the world outside the hospital window.

The window overlooked a park with a lovely lake. Ducks and swans played on the water while children sailed their model boats. Young lovers walked arm in arm through flowers of every color of the rainbow. Grand old trees graced the landscape, and a fine view of the city skyline could be seen in the distance.

As the man by the window described all this in excellent detail, the man on the other side of the room would close his eyes and imagine the beautiful scene.

One warm afternoon, the man by the window described a parade passing by below. Although the other man couldn't hear the band - he could see it in his mind as the gentleman by the window described it.

Weeks went by. One morning, a nurse arrived to bring water for their baths and found the lifeless body of the man by the window, who had died peacefully in his sleep. She was saddened, and called the hospital attendants to take the body away.

As soon as it seemed appropriate in a few days, the other man asked if he could be moved next to the window. The nurse was happy to make the switch, and after making sure he was comfortable, she left him alone. Slowly, painfully, he propped himself up on one elbow to take his first look at the world outside. Finally, he would have the joy of seeing it for himself.

He moved slowly to turn and look out the window beside the bed. The window faced a blank wall. The man asked the nurse what could have caused his deceased roommate to describe such wonderful things outside this window. The nurse answered that the man was blind, and could not even see the wall. She replied, "Maybe he just wanted to encourage you."



For Discussion or Writing

1. What were your feelings after reading this story? Describe.
2. Why do you think that the man who died described with such detail what was really not there?

This Is Good

An old story is told of a king in Africa who had a close friend with whom he grew up. The friend had a habit of looking at every situation that ever occurred in his life (positive or negative) and remarking, "This is good!"

One day the king and his friend were out on a hunting expedition. The friend would load and prepare the guns for the king. The friend had apparently done something wrong in preparing one of the guns. After taking the gun from his friend, the king fired it, and his thumb was blown off. Examining the situation the friend remarked as usual, "This is good!" To which the king replied, "No, this is NOT good!" and immediately sent his friend to jail.

About a year later, the king was hunting in an area that he should have known to avoid. Cannibals captured him and took him to their village. They tied his hands, stacked some wood, set up a stake, and bound him to the stake. As they came close to set fire to the wood, they noticed that the king was missing a thumb. Being superstitious cannibals, they never ate anyone that was less than whole. So the cannibals untied the king, and sent him on his way.

As he returned home, he was reminded of the incident that had blown off his thumb and felt sadness for his treatment of his friend. The king went immediately to the jail to speak with his friend. "You were right," he said, "it was good that my thumb was blown off." And he proceeded to tell the friend all that had just happened. "And so I am very sorry for sending you to jail for so long. It was bad for me to do this."

"No," his friend replied, "This is good!" "What do you mean, 'This is good'? said the king.

"How could it be good that I sent my friend to jail for a year?" questioned the king.

"If I had NOT been in jail, I would have been with you." said his friend.

For Discussion or Writing

1. Tell the advantages of the habit of stating, "**This is good**". What were the disadvantages of using this comment?
2. Why do you think the king's friend will probably continue to say it forever?
3. There is also a children's book about a grandpa who always stated from habit, "**Could be worse!**" What do you think are the advantages of having one of these two phrases in your skill set?
4. Which phrase do you like better, and why? How about using both of them? Would that work for you, or for others? Why or why not?

The Fence

There once was a little boy who had a bad temper. His father gave him a bag of nails and told him that every time he lost his temper, he must hammer a nail into the fence. The first day the boy had driven 37 nails into the fence. Over the next few weeks as he learned to control his anger, the number of nails hammered daily, gradually dwindled down. He discovered it was easier to hold his temper than to hammer those nails into the fence.

Finally the day came when the boy didn't lose his temper at all. He told his father about it and the father suggested that the boy now pull out one nail for each day that he was able to hold his temper. The days passed and the young boy was finally able to tell his father that all the nails were gone.

The father took his son by the hand and led him to the fence. He said "You have done well, my son, but look at the holes in the fence. The fence will never be the same. When you say things in anger, they leave a scar just like this one."

You can put a knife in a man and draw it out. It won't matter how many times you say I'm sorry, the wound is still there.

For Discussion or Writing

1. Do you like the consequence here for the boy losing his temper? Is it fair?
2. What about the temper or anger being compared to the scars on the fence from all the nail holes? Is that really going too far, or is it the perfect consequence? Defend the stand that you take.
3. The last statement...."You can put a knife in a man and draw it out....but the wound is still there, no matter how many times you say I'm sorry." Comment on the value of this story. Agree or disagree and tell us why.

Shake It Off and Step Up

A parable is told of a farmer who owned an old mule. The mule fell into the farmer's well. The farmer heard the mule braying. After carefully checking the situation, the farmer felt sorry for the mule, but decided that neither the mule nor the well was worth saving. Instead, he called his neighbors and friends together and told them what had happened. The farmer asked them to help haul dirt to bury the old mule in the well and put him out of his misery.

At first, the old mule was hysterically braying, very upset! But as the farmer and his neighbors continued shoveling the dirt into the well, the dirt would hit his back, and a thought came to the donkey. It suddenly dawned on him that every time a shovel load of dirt landed on his back: he should shake it off and step up! This is what the old mule did, shovel after shovel. "Shake it off and step up... shake it off and step up... shake it off and step up!" he repeated to encourage himself.

No matter how painful the dirt, or how distressing the situation seemed, the old mule fought "panic" and just kept right on shaking it off and stepping up! You guessed it! It wasn't long before the old mule, battered and exhausted, stepped triumphantly right over the wall of that well! What seemed like it would bury him, actually end up blessing him. All because of the manner in which he handled his adversity.

For Discussion or Writing

1. Can mules be problem-solvers like this mule? Can mules outsmart humans?
2. Think of other ways that would have been kinder to save the mule from the well without burying him alive. Share with the class.
3. "Handling adversity" is the main idea here. Describe a situation that you are aware of, yours or someone else's, in which they "handled adversity" in a very good way. Share with your group.

How Rich Are We?

One day a father and his rich family took his son on a trip to the country with the firm purpose to show him how poor people can be. They spent a day and a night on the farm of a very poor family. When they got back from their trip, the father asked his son, "How was the trip?" "Very good Dad!" "Did you see how poor people can be?" the father asked. "Yeah!" exclaimed the son. "And what did you learn?" asked the father.

The son answered, "I saw that we have a dog at home, and they have four. We have a pool that reaches to the middle of the garden; they have a creek that has no end. We have imported lamps in the garden; they have the stars. Our patio reaches to the front yard; they have a whole horizon." When the little boy was finished, his father was speechless. His son added, "Thanks, Dad, for showing me how 'poor' we are!"

Isn't it true that it all depends on the way you look at things? If you have love, friends, family, health, good humor and a positive attitude towards life -- you've got everything! You can't buy any of these things. You may have all the material possessions you can imagine, provisions for the future, etc.; but if you are poor of spirit, you have nothing!

For Discussion or Writing

1. "If you are poor of spirit, you have nothing." Explain the meaning within this story.
2. "It all depends on how you look at things...." What does that mean in this story? Give an example from your life of this.
3. Who are the "poor people" in this story? Why?

Puppies for Sale

A store owner was tacking a sign above his door that read "Puppies For Sale." Signs like that have a way of attracting small children and sure enough, a little boy appeared by the store owner's sign. "How much are you going to sell the puppies for?" he asked. The store owner replied, "Anywhere from \$30-\$50."

The little boy reached in his pocket and pulled out some change. "I have \$2.37," he said. "May I please look at them?" The store owner smiled and whistled, out of the kennel came Lady, who ran down the aisle of his store followed by five teeny, tiny balls of fur. One puppy was lagging considerably behind.

Immediately the little boy singled out the lagging, limping puppy and said, "What's wrong with that little dog?" The store owner explained that the veterinarian had examined the little puppy and had discovered it didn't have a hip socket. It would always limp. It would always be lame. The little boy became excited. "That is the little puppy that I want to buy." The store owner said, "No, you don't want to buy that little dog. If you really want him, I'll just give him to you."

The little boy got quite upset. He looked into the store owner's eyes, pointing his finger, and said, "I don't want you to give him to me. That dog is worth every bit as much as all the other dogs and I'll pay full price. In fact, I'll give you \$2.37 now, and 50 cents a month until I have him paid for."

The store owner countered, "You really don't want to buy this little dog. He is never going to be able to run and jump and play with you like the other puppies."

To this, the little boy reached down and rolled up his pant leg to reveal a badly twisted, crippled left leg supported by a big metal brace. He looked up at the store owner and softly replied, "Well, I don't run so good myself, and the little puppy will need someone who understands!"

For Discussion or Writing

1. What do you think is the message of this story?
2. How did you feel about the boy's choice of puppy? Would you have wanted to do the same, do you think? Are runts usually the most popular of the litter? Why or why not?
3. The boy makes a proposal to the store owner. Describe the proposal, and tell whether or not it is a reasonable request of the dog owner.
4. If you were blind, would you want a blind pet? Why?

How Much Do You Make An Hour?

With a timid voice and idolizing eyes, the little boy greeted his father as he returned from work, "Daddy, how much do you make an hour?" Greatly surprised, but giving his boy a glaring look, the father said: "Look, son, not even your mother knows that. Don't bother me now, I'm tired." "But Daddy, just tell me please!? How much do you make an hour?" the boy insisted.

The father, finally giving up, replied: "Twenty dollars per hour." "Okay, Daddy. Could you loan me ten dollars?" the boy asked. Showing restlessness and positively disturbed, the father yelled: "So that was the reason you asked how much I earn, right?? Go to sleep and don't bother me anymore!"

It was already dark and the father was thinking about what he had said, and was feeling guilty. Maybe he thought, his son wanted to buy something. Finally, trying to ease his mind, the father went back to his son's room.

"Are you asleep son?" asked the father. "No, Daddy. Why?" replied the boy partially asleep. "Here's the money you asked for earlier," the father said. "Thanks, Daddy!" rejoiced the son, while putting his hand under his pillow and removing some money. "Now I have enough! Now I have twenty dollars!" the boy said to his father, who was gazing at his son, confused at what his son just said. "Daddy could you sell me one hour of your time?"

For Discussion or Writing

1. Do you get this? Describe what you think is going on here.
2. What did the money question have to do with the son's request?
3. Why did attention have to be tied to dollars, do you think?
4. Can you guess how this request made the dad feel? What would you feel in this situation? As the son? As the dad?

A Special Teacher

Years ago a John Hopkins University professor gave a group of graduate students this assignment:

Go to the slums. Take 200 boys, between the ages of 12 and 16, and investigate their background and environment. Then predict their chances for the future. The students, after consulting social statistics, talking to the boys, and compiling much data and information, concluded that 90 percent of the boys would spend some time in jail.

Twenty-five years later, another group of graduate students was given the job of testing that prediction. They went back to the same area. Some of the boys - by then men - were still there, a few had died, some had moved away, but they got in touch with 180 of the original 200. They found that only four of the group had ever been sent to jail.

Why was it that these men, who had lived in a breeding place of crime, had such a surprisingly good record? The researchers were continually told by the boys who were now men: "Well, there was a teacher..." They pressed further, and found that in 75 percent of the cases it was the same female teacher.

The researchers went to this teacher, now living in a retirement home. How had she managed this remarkable influence over that group of boys? Could she give any reason why these boys should have remembered her?

"No," she said, "no, I really can't think of any reason that they would remember me." And then, thinking back over the years, she reflected, more to herself than her questioners: "I loved those boys..."

For Discussion or Writing

1. Is "love" all it takes to be a good teacher? Would you imagine that she did something more than just "love" these boys in her class?
2. Exactly what qualities would you think this teacher had to be remembered, and to keep these at-risk boys from going to jail when they grew up? List and describe the qualities that made this teacher memorable.
3. Review and describe the statistics for this group of 200 males.

Stories adapted from <http://www.motivational-well-being.com/motivational-stories-9.html>)