

Initial Impulse

The first branch course of Book 5

Unit 1

A Moment for Reflection

PRE-PUBLICATION EDITION
MATERIAL IN DEVELOPMENT

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Ruhi Institute

1. Reading the story aloud in pairs contributes to the ability to . . .
 - listen attentively.
 - enunciate words well and with the proper intonation.
2. Responding to comprehension questions contributes to the ability to . . .
 - focus on what is being read and to remember a sequence of ideas.
 - write clear, complete sentences.
 - draw conclusions from what is being read.
3. Choosing the proper meaning of a phrase or expression from among a number of options contributes to the ability to . . .
 - use words and phrases carefully.
 - understand the intent behind turns of phrase and idiomatic expressions.
4. Creating sentences with words from the reading contributes to the ability to . . .
 - use words properly.
 - construct simple and grammatically correct sentences that convey a noble meaning.
5. Completing sentences using the correct words from a list contributes to the ability to . . .
 - use words encountered in the reading in a different context.
6. Writing a few sentences or a paragraph about what is read in the lesson contributes to the ability to . . .
 - organize one’s thoughts.
 - express ideas clearly in one’s own words.
7. Reflecting on the meaning of a quotation and memorizing it contributes to the capacity to . . .
 - align one’s thoughts more closely with the divine teachings.

On the basis of your reflections, you may wish to write a few paragraphs in a section of your notebook that describe the advances you have observed in the language proficiency of the members of the group in the short time you have been working with them.

SECTION 16

The next topic that should be addressed in the account you are keeping of the group’s unfolding story is service, and you could dedicate a section of your notebook to this subject. To begin, write a paragraph or two about the conversations you held with the junior youth in helping them to determine how they can contribute to the well-being of the community. You could then add a few words about the service project they eventually decided to undertake as a result of these conversations.

Now let us reflect for a moment on this important topic, which you will, of course, consider often in the years to come in your capacity as an animator. Indeed, in subsequent branch courses, we will discuss the topic at length. Here we will examine only a couple of ideas in line with initial experience.

First, as you know from Book 5, during the early stages in the establishment of a group, it is natural for the youngsters to think of service in terms of simple acts of kindness and assistance performed for the benefit of members of the community. Over time, as the collective capacity of the group is developed, the acts of service it conceives will become more complex. In this regard, you need to avoid taking one or another extreme: You should not feel undue pressure to push the group to engage in service projects of increased complexity too soon, before it has the requisite capacity to succeed. Nor, however, should you allow it to be content with carrying out the occasional act of generosity and kindness and nothing more.

Second, and related to the above, it is not expected that groups would undertake a service project every week, but rather every few months, perhaps upon the completion of the study of each text. In the period between projects, time can be spent in group meetings on formulating ideas and devising plans. This will prove particularly relevant as the service projects pursued by a group become more complex. Recording in your notebook the development of ideas for each project may be helpful in following this aspect of the program.

Finally, it is important to be attentive to opportunities to foster ties of collaboration with residents, businesses, and organizations in the area through the service projects the junior youth carry out. Invariably, such ties will prove instrumental in opening up fresh possibilities for the group to contribute to the welfare of the community.

With these few thoughts in mind, read the following accounts and remarks related to the service rendered by junior youth groups in various parts of the world. Though it is not intended for the projects described below to be replicated by other groups elsewhere, the accounts will serve as a source of insight and inspiration. The first, from a junior youth gathering in Colombia, demonstrates how an animator can foster a consultative environment in which the conception of a service project can take shape.

The coordinator, with the assistance of the animators, prepared a gathering for five junior youth groups in Puerto Tejada. Service was the central theme of the gathering. The junior youth studied several quotations, which helped them reflect on the needs of their neighborhood and identify some steps that they could take in order to contribute to improving the condition of their communities. In this way, each group planned a small service project to be carried out over the following few weeks. The groups' consultations about the needs in their neighborhoods were very dynamic and purposeful, thanks to the way the animators encouraged the participation of the junior youth and guided their reflection.

The comments below from a junior youth participating in the program in Zambia show how service can raise consciousness both about the social environment and about one's capacity and aspirations.

The type of service we did was to clean the compound where the elderly live, fetch water and firewood for them, and wash their clothes. Before doing the service project, we sat and

discussed it as a group. We also prayed for the people we were going to serve. After the service, we came back together as a group. It felt good to serve, because I feel like when I help someone else it helps me to know myself better and to become more aware of those who need help.

The remarks of another junior youth, a member of the same group in Zambia, reflect an understanding of the true significance of service.

As a group we did an act of service, helping the elderly. The way we experienced that God has assisted us is that if you help someone, you can see an image of God in them. We felt that God was assisting us, because we were able to see the qualities of God in those who we helped.

In the following account written by an animator in the Middle East, we see how, as participants in the program continue to move forward in their work, carrying in their hearts a sincere desire to serve, support from the community is forthcoming and new doors open.

We started our junior youth groups in a refugee camp that is home to about 10,000 refugees. In each camp there are different centers and agencies under the umbrella of UNICEF that offer various services to the local community. We met with one of the centers and introduced the junior youth program. They assisted with inviting youth to join the program, offered us rooms and facilities in which to hold the meetings of the junior youth groups, and provided the necessary supplies and refreshments. In the first month, we formed 3 groups of 10 to 15 participants each. This number grew steadily, and there are now 8 groups with a total of 80 participants. The administration of the center is happy with our work and believes in our good intentions and our pure motive to serve. They appreciate the program and find it very special and deep.

Our junior youth groups have conducted different service projects. The degree of complexity of the projects has gradually increased over time. Since the refugee camp is located in an area with poor hygiene and weak infrastructure, the junior youth came up with many ideas for service projects. Initially, one group decided to clean a street in the camp. However, after they evaluated their project and saw that the area soon became dirty again, they printed flyers introducing their group and discussing the need for the people's support and distributed them to every house on that street. The next step the group took was inviting all the children on the street and giving them a lesson on cleanliness.

This initiative led to the children coming regularly to the center to ask for more classes. As a result, we now have approximately 30 children attending classes for their spiritual education, which are being assisted by eight junior youth participating in the program.

Another group decided to paint the school wall, which had become very dirty. After thinking more about this idea, they realized that if it was just painted white then bad words and frivolous sayings might be written on it. So they suggested that we draw something on it. With the help of an artist, the group made a beautiful mural on part of the wall, which was very appreciated by the residents of the camp, as well as by the camp officials and managers. The camp committee contacted us saying they want to offer us the materials needed to finish the entire wall with similar beautiful paintings!

The story below from Vanuatu is yet another example of how the capacity of a group to serve its community grows as its members engage in action, seize opportunities that arise, and regularly reflect on their experience.

The junior youth group of Lawital decided it was time to carry out a service project. After consulting they decided to help their community by rebuilding a foot bridge that had been washed away by recent flooding. The foot bridge connects to an area that is used daily by the entire community for washing clothes and bathing. The junior youth worked together, with the assistance of their animator, to rebuild the foot bridge. After reflecting on their work, the group identified another need and decided to build benches so that people could sit comfortably while waiting for their family members to finish bathing or washing. The group completed the project by planting flowers to beautify the area.

Encouraged by their success, the group then decided to plant trees to protect the community's fresh water source from encroachment by community vegetable gardens. Before planting the trees, the group investigated which type of tree would be most suitable.

As a result of these efforts the community members are very pleased, and the junior youth are learning that they have an important role to play in the community and have many things to contribute. The junior youth are also highly cherished by the community.

This account from Paraguay illustrates how much joy service projects can bring to the junior youth as they witness the confirmation of their efforts.

There are two junior youth groups in the school, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. The original plan of these two groups was to plant flowers in the school garden, since there were not any there. So the junior youth decided to each contribute what they could, which came to 35,000 guaranies, which is equivalent to about seven dollars. With this sum, they calculated how many flowers they could buy.

Since the mother of one of the junior youth sold plants, he explained to her the project that the junior youth in the school were planning. She was moved by what she heard and decided to offer some plants as a gift. She donated 15 little plants with pots and flowers, but more were still needed.

Opposite the school there is a nursery, where they also inquired about the number of plants that they could purchase with 35,000 guaranies. After a conversation with the business owner about the service the students were going to offer, he said that they do not sell to retailers, only to wholesalers. However, afterwards he said that an exception could be made and that, with their funds, they could purchase approximately 30 plants. Later, he decided that 50 plants could be given for that price. The next day the animator and the coordinator, together with a member of the school staff, went to the nursery and talked with the business owner. The man then lovingly said that the plants would be given as a donation and that there was no need to pay. Upon insistence by the animator that he accept the money, since the junior youth had put so much effort into raising it, the owner said that, with the amount, they could buy sodas for the youth during the service project, which would make them happy as they would have refreshments while they worked.

When they arrived at the school the junior youth were told what had happened. Everyone was happy with the news. They analyzed the developments and concluded that it all had to do with confirmation; everyone made an effort and God somehow helped them to get the plants.

All the junior youth, both the ones in the morning group and the ones in the afternoon group, learned how confirmation works in their lives. They had so much fun that day. After the things they experienced that day, they sat down to reflect. One of the junior youth said that she wished for this same activity to be done every year. Others felt the same way and also expressed that this service brought joy to them. They had cooperated, practiced patience, and respected one another. It was very nice to hear how this service project had an impact on them.

When animators such as yourself are first gaining experience, it is not uncommon for them to focus their attention on learning to guide the study of the texts, on assisting in the planning and execution of service projects, and on organizing sports events and occasional outings. While there are other kinds of activities that can be undertaken by the junior youth, these can be integrated gradually into the pursuits of the group, and we will reflect on your experience in this connection in later branch courses.

SECTION 17

It may prove worthwhile here, having thought about the primary pursuits of the group, for you to consider how your relationship with parents of the junior youth is unfolding. Let us begin by reviewing the following excerpt from the third unit of Book 5:

“An important requirement for maintaining a dynamic junior youth group is building trust and friendship with the parents. Animators need to visit parents either before or soon after the formation of groups and explain to them the purpose of the program. They should continue to visit the parents regularly thereafter; explore with them themes central to the lives of junior youth that the program tries to address, as outlined in the second unit of this book; and consult with them about the well-being and progress of their sons and daughters. Often animators will show parents one or two of the texts studied so that they are familiar with what the junior youth are learning. Though generally every animator will need to cultivate such bonds of friendship with parents over an extended period of many months, a more experienced individual may accompany him or her on the first few visits.”

Relate a brief account to your fellow animators that describes the initial interactions you have had with the parents of junior youth. Note, for example, the way you introduced the aims of the spiritual empowerment program and the concepts, such as those addressed in the second unit of Book 5, you explored with them. Did the parents express some of their aspirations for their sons and daughters and their concern about the social forces that affect the younger generations?

Besides fostering a close relationship with the parents of junior youth, have you had the opportunity to meet other members of their families—say, grandparents or older siblings, aunts and uncles or cousins—and converse with them? Were there any occasions on which a few families came together? Junior youth often decide to organize a gathering for their families upon the