

tory fish eats all of the red fish, Swimmy is devastated. Following a period of grieving, he sets out to explore the various marvels in the sea, and he finds another school of red fish. He encourages them to join in his adventures, but they decline, fearing the large predator that is still about. Swimmy conceives of a plan: the group will swim together in the pattern of a giant red fish (where Swimmy is the eye). After much practice, the group succeeds in scaring the big fish away, and thus is free to roam in formation.

After studying the 7 Habits, students can be challenged to relate those habits to character traits exhibited by Swimmy. By drawing parallels between concepts and events in a fictitious story, students might begin to see how principles and virtues can be applied to concrete problems and novel situations.

#### Habit 1: BE PROACTIVE

The first of the 7 Habits is for one to have a positive "I can!" attitude. It means having high self-esteem, recognizing one's competence, and believing that everyone is special, each possessing infinite capacities and opportunities—the birthright of being human—as well as unique combinations of qualities and experience that can be applied to promote continual improvement and growth within self or a specific group at a particular place and time. It involves the recognition that all people choose their behaviors and attitudes, so if we don't like ourselves or our present situation, we can change to become more like the selves with the future that we dream.

In the midst of grief, Swimmy decided not to be reactive and mope around feeling sorry for himself. He found a way to find joy in his life despite his grief, and he believed he had the capacity to be proactive—to think of a plan to solve the problem of how he might enroll his new friends in his explorations. Swimmy appreciated his uniqueness and used it to advantage, rather than trying to conform himself to be like his friends or act as they would expect him to behave.

**Habit 2: BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND**  
Beginning with a vision of the desired

outcome is the best motivation that humans have, whether that result is a thing or event (blueprints for a building, a meeting agenda, a shopping list, or a budget), a new behavior (jumping further, acting more kindly), or one's life's work (revealing the importance of a dream and writing a mission statement). To be successful, one must "give up" self-destructive goals such as obtaining drugs, overeating, excessive worry, and being negative or mean and strive toward positive, "go up" goals that inspire individuals to be their very best selves in all dimensions.

After defining our vision, it is necessary to set observable, measurable, attainable goals that lead to a desired end. That way, we can assess whether we are, in fact, moving in the direction of our dreams.

During his adventure, Swimmy had several long-range goals: to explore the sea, to gain a feeling of community to replace the one he had lost, and ultimately to be happy in his new life. These goals necessitated forming a more specific goal: creating a means for his new friends to feel safe enough to wander along with him.

#### Habit 3: FIRST THINGS FIRST

Managing oneself and living a self-disciplined life involves focusing on the most important things (planning, study, people, intergenerational connections). It means identifying priorities, preventing situations that continually create crisis conditions, and embodying the principles of character that promote long-term gain rather than short-term pleasure. It includes finding ways to leverage one's efforts by choosing the right things, learning to delegate and mentor others, and focusing attention on the most critical need.

Swimmy was concerned with developing positive relationships. Before his new friends would venture forth with him, a plan had to be conceived that would fulfill their needs as well as his. Even after a solution came to mind, it couldn't be implemented immediately. Rather, the school of fish had to practice its synchronized swimming to the point where the group looked like one giant fish.

#### Habit 4: THINK WIN-WIN

Thinking win-win means seeking mutual benefit rather than solutions that are good for one (some), but not for others (all). It means choosing to live out of the "abundance mentality" by recognizing that there are resources, opportunities, and rewards sufficient for all (when we creatively find or invent them) and to move beyond counterproductive either-or thinking, which creates conflict. It means finding creative "third alternatives," combining the best of opposing positions. It is striving for fairness, kindness, harmony, and justice.

The desires for safety and adventure appeared to be opposite desires, so a creative solution had to be invented that could address both legitimate needs. The solution could be implemented only when everybody cooperated.

#### Habit 5: SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND

Empathic listening is the key to mature, two-way communication. It recognizes that in interpersonal relationships conflicts inevitably arise, so to harmoniously resolve them, people need to learn techniques of conflict resolution, which include sincerely trying out a differing perspective. Viewing a problem from different angles requires courage to share oneself, one's ideas, and one's boundaries. It also means listening with compassion and kindness to a different opinion. If both parties aim to understand (rather than just to win), both might feel affirmed, validated, and appreciated. Then, win-win solutions are not so elusive.

Human relationships require constant deposits in the "emotional bank account" (one-on-one time, courtesies, respect, kindness, patience, service, honesty, and forgiveness) in order to build trust. Excessive "withdrawals" from the "bank" (over-reactions, ego-trips, absence of apologies for mistakes, and neglect of human relationships) destroy trust and can ultimately harm individuals and their relationships.

Swimmy had to listen beyond the words of his new friends to realize that they would have loved to go adventuring, but they didn't feel safe