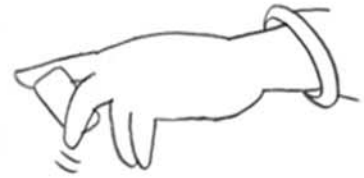


TEO AND...

THE CHOICE



Suzanne Palermo

„It's not right. I can't do it!“ muttered Teo. Three of his classmates had drawn lots to see who would enter Mr. Bell's stationary shop with one sole intention ... to swipe the first small object they could get their hands on... an eraser, a pencil sharpener, or whatever... and shove it into their pocket.

“It's your turn! You can't pull back now!” A strong sturdy boy was pointing at him. “Com'on!” You don't know how head spinning it is to get.. a five finger discount!” he sneered. Teo felt awkward. He didn't get the meaning of it.

“I don't follow you!” he said. “Why get all excited about playing a hoax on Mr. Bell?!”

“OOF! You're always so boring, Teo.” Answered a skinny red haired boy.

“What do you care about an eraser?!”

“It's not the eraser... I just don't feel like it guys!” retorted Teo, shaking his head in dissent. “Don't ask me to do it.. I can't.”

“Bwak bwak bwak...!” Teased the sturdy looking boy. “You're a real chicken! I knew it!” he snapped, jeering with disgust.

Teo felt confused and humiliated. He knew the price he would have to pay for not following the group rules but had to stand up for himself.

“I'm sorry guys.” He asserted. “I told you, I can't do it. It's stronger than me... I got this feeling ... I don't know how to explain it.. but I have to listen to it.”

“You're only afraid Teo! You're afraid not to make it and to be chewed out by Mr. Bell or by your parents! You're a real zero!” mocked another boy.

“That's not it. I'm not afraid of not being able to swipe something from the shop!” piped Teo. “But sure, if mom and dad would find out about it they would be real disappointed in me”, he added, hanging his head.

“Baby! Baby!” cried the three boys while Teo walked silently away.

Back home it didn't take long for his parents to understand that something was wrong.

“You look worried Teo. Did something happen at school today?”

cont.

"I don't know if I should tell you, dad", said Teo. "You wouldn't be very happy..."

"Don't keep it all in, sweetheart", said his mother. "You trust us, don't you?"

"Sure mom", sighed the boy who hesitantly began his story. "Walking home from school today we went to get an ice-cream, the boys and me, so... you know where Mr. Bell's stationary shop is, don't you?" he asked.

His parents nodded their heads, listening with care. "Well Jim and the others drew lots. They decided that one of us would have gone into the shop to swipe some kind of object... for fun..." Said Teo.

"You mean steal?" A dark frown clouded his father's face. "I hope you didn't..."

"I couldn't do it Dad! They called me names and told me that I'm not even worth a zero! But something inside told me not to!" cried Teo.

"I bet so! Stealing is something horrible, wrong and unethical", grumbled his father. "I'm glad that you listened to your conscience, it was the right thing to do."

"But now I'm out! They threw me out of the group, dad!"

"Do you really want to be part of a group that takes its members off track like that, making you do something so bad?" asked his mother.

"They don't realize what they're doing!" rebuked his father. "It's a dangerous game! You steal something small and insignificant like a pencil or an eraser and get away with it, and then you do it again and again, and it becomes a habit. A bad habit! And the the temptation to steal bigger, more voluminous and more expensive items sets in, and..."

"I know, dad. That's how you become a thief."

"You will find new friends, sweetheart, friends that are in line with your way of thinking and being." Teo's mom's voice was gentle.

"Kidsd like you who can walk head up high not because they are proud of their misdeeds but because they are honest people".

Teo's dad picked up the matter again.

"Society is upheld by the feelings you sensed within you, Teo. Feelings like that give life to what we call 'morality'. It's thanks to certain principles and values that reside within us that people build righteous behavior and are civilized and respectful towards one another. Unfortunately there are cases in which this 'moral duty' is not perceived, and that's when you step out of line! But whoever sows wind will reap whirlwind...because you reap what you sow! It's a law!"

The boys parents hugged their son, relieved that he hadn't fallen prey to the rules of bad company and told him how happy and proud they were.

The following day Teo went to school feeling more mature and self-confident. When he got to class he found out that the sturdy boy named Jim had been stopped by Mr. Bell the day before because he had seen him steal a leather pencil case.

"I hope his bad tendency of shoplifting will change now...", thought Teo, "... so he won't turn into a real thief one day!" Then, turning to the girl sitting next to him he whispered: "Who knows how badly his parents must of felt when they found out!"

THE END

Don't miss
the worksheet!

WORKSHEET

TEO AND THE CHOICE

How did Teo feel when his friends wanted him to do something he didn't want to do?

What made him act the way he did and say 'no' to his friends?

Is a friend someone who encourages you to do something wrong?

Why is it wrong to steal?

What is a bad habit?

What does the saying: "you reap what you sow", mean?

Why were Teo's parents proud of their son?

Why did Teo feel more self-confident when he when back to school?



TELL THE STORY IN YOUR OWN WORDS. WHAT IMPRESSED YOU THE MOST?