

## **The Boy and the Puzzle Piece**

I have learned that a person can learn more about life through puzzles than most other things. As this is something that became true for me I would go into classrooms and give presentations using analogies of puzzles. I would tell all of the kids that every single one of them has a purpose and a place and not a single one of them is exactly alike just like a puzzle piece. A person can have a thousand piece puzzle with 999 pieces all put together but without the very last piece that puzzle would remain incomplete. Even though a person can see the entire picture know exactly what it is and it's really only one piece out of 1000 it shouldn't be a big deal right? How could one piece really make that much of a difference?

I would always bring in a picture of the latest puzzle I had just completed well not hundred percent completed as I would be sure to remove one strategic piece from a random hidden spot. I would pull the picture up on a big screen within the classroom and have the students tell me what they noticed or what they liked? What standouts the most to you? Every single class I have taught it does not take long at all for the students to begin yelling out that my puzzle isn't complete. You are missing a piece it's not done they would protest. I would ask the kids what about the trees or sunset or anything else that would be within the picture. These other depictions or things within the puzzle never really mattered as much as the one missing piece. I would ask the students even if they did see other things where would their eyes always take them back to? They would always say back to the one missing piece.

I would ask them isn't it crazy that even though there are 999 other pieces entirely put together that without that one single piece that puzzle is never ever a hundred percent complete. I tell them that each and every one of them is like a puzzle piece they all have a purpose and place and without them the puzzle is hundred percent never ever complete. While presenting each student would be given a puzzle piece to fill out and to tell everyone else who they see themselves being what purpose or place to do they see or feel. I would encourage each student to think of at least ten qualities that they could add to their puzzle.

During one of the presentations I was doing there was a student with his head down the entire time who visually looked distraught whenever he would look up. His eyes if they could speak clearly said "You are nothing but a liar you can't tell

me that I have any worth or a purpose. You don't even know me" I selected him to help me out and said can I ask you a series of questions. He reluctantly said yes.

I began by asking if I were your friend and gave you five dollars to go to the store and buy me a bag of chips would you bring me back my change. He immediately said "Yes". I said awesome so you would be someone I could Trust. I then said if I were your friend and I needed you after school because I had a horrible day and needed someone to talk to would you be there for me. He again said "YES" I said awesome so you are Loyal. I then asked if I were struggling on a homework assignment that you blew through and thought was super easier if you were my friend what would you do? He said I wouldn't do it for you but I would help you out. I said awesome so you are Helpful. I asked if I were your friend and I wanted to sign up for a class that I knew everyone else would make fun of me for what would you do? He said he would tell me to forget them and do what makes me happy. I said awesome so you are an Encouraging person. I said then would you join the class with me if I asked you to he said yea sure. I said not only are you encouraging but you are Supportive and would come with me that is AWESOME. I wrote all five of the qualities that he just told me he was and said this is who you are someone that is Trustworthy, Loyal, Helpful, Encouraging and Supportive. You just helped to tell me who you are and that is someone I would truly want to be friends with. Needless to say he left the room smiling.

The next week I was back at the same school to finish up presenting and went back to the classroom to see how the kids were doing. What I witnessed was beyond incredible the kid that once had his head on his desk and looked absolutely miserable was smiling ear to ear and was connecting with other kids and was talking to everyone. I walked up and said man you look like a whole different kid than before I asked what had changed. He had told me that he took his puzzle piece home that night with the five qualities I had helped him to come up with and he began to add more to it. He got to the point where he counted forty qualities on his puzzle he was so proud he took that piece and he tapped it up to his mirror. Every morning from that point on he said when he woke up instead of looking into the mirror and seeing himself for all the flaws he presumed he had he would read through the qualities on the puzzle piece. Each morning one of the qualities would stand out to him in a way that he would circle the

quality and say to himself this is going to be the quality I want to practice and do more of today.

The first day of reading the puzzle he came across Helpful and circled it. He said today I am going to be the most helpful kid I can be. He went above and beyond to go out of his way to help everyone and anyone he could. The kid was holding doors for others, helped pick up the classroom after class for the teacher helped buy lunch for a kid. He did so many amazing things that he went to bed that night and felt so incredibly happy. He couldn't wait for the next morning he woke up read through the puzzle piece and on day two circled Supportive. That day the boy was going to be the most supportive kid he could be. All day he was supporting kids he noticed one kid that got a bad grade and said it's okay you'll do better next time and I can help you. He noticed a kid that looked really sad and walked up to him and asked if he was okay and if there was anything he could do to support him. He sat and listened to the boy and everything he was going through. That day the boy went home and once again felt so happy he went to bed truly feeling incredible.

The third day now came and the boy couldn't wait to start the day he went straight to the mirror and began to read through the qualities. This day he circled courageous and said today I am going to be the most courageous kid I can be. He walked into school and immediately heard a kid being picked on for his shoes. The boy reminded himself that he was going to be courageous so he walked over and said seriously are you really worried that much about his shoes. What would make anyone care that much about a pair of shoes it's really quite pathetic that you care that much and would make someone else feel bad about their shoes. He would raise his hand in class knowing that he could be called out for being an idiot but it didn't matter whether he was right or wrong because he was being courageous enough to simply raise his hand. The boy went to bed again that night feeling so incredibly happy for all that he did.

That entire week went by and all of a sudden this kid had made a 360 turn around with his attitude and outlook towards life. He had noticed other kids now being willing to come and help him or say hi to him. Kids were coming over to just talk to him and he felt amazing. This entire time all it took for this change to occur was for him to get back to the amazingly incredible kid he always was but was too afraid to show.