

Home School Group Study Questions

BY CHAPTER:

1. Curiosity

- A. Mario begins the chapter with a story of a rivalry in the 3rd grade. Why do you think the kids were laughing at Mario? Have you ever been made fun of for something you couldn't help? How do you think this made Mario feel?
- B. How did Mario's experiences on the playground help or hurt him in successfully working through his childhood? How did he respond to the laughter?
- C. Mario says he never heard anyone refer to him as a "cripple" until he was school-age. Is this term the same as calling someone a racial slur? Why or why not?
- A. In the first paragraph of the book, Mario describes how he felt when he was first exposed to the "cripple" bias from kids at school. How did Mario come to terms with this, as he had not been previously exposed to this term at home?
- B. How did Mario's schoolmates' behavior affect his self-esteem and how do you think this played in his struggle to find identity and acceptance?
- C. Have you ever been curious about someone's physical disability when you first meet them? Is it okay to ask someone about their disability, as long as you're just curious? What are appropriate questions to ask? Please list at least five questions.
- D. What kinds of questions are not okay to ask a physically challenged person? List five inappropriate questions that were asked to Mario. List next to each question how it made Mario feel, as described in this chapter.
- E. What is the difference between discrimination and bias beliefs?
- F. Please list examples of discrimination Mario experiences in chapter 1 (direct and indirect).
- G. Please list examples of biased beliefs Mario experienced in chapter 1.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Separate into groups of 3-4 and pretend you're all new students at a new school and you don't know anyone. Within groups, have the teacher choose one person to play the "Mario" character, and make him noticeably different in appearance. Practice appropriate questions and behavior when "meeting" Mario for the first time and then discuss what was good and what may have hurt Mario's feelings. You may also choose one person in the group to be the "bully" and who will say things that are not appropriate. Then practice different responses from the others until their interactions are acceptable by the teacher. Students may switch roles and practice in rounds of 2-3 minutes each. When teacher blows the whistle, the roles switch.

2. Rolling

- A. Psychology states that people need certain things in a certain order, to find happiness and full self-actualization in life. First, they need physical needs such as food, water and rest. Second, they need to feel safe in their environment. Third, they need to feel love and acceptance and belonging. Fourthly, they need self esteem, and the fifth stage is self-actualization. The last stage can only be reached if all 4 of the other ones are taken care of first. Which stage is Mario in according to chapter 2, in your opinion, and why?
- B. In this chapter, Mario expressed being placed in physical harm due to an airline attendant's behavior. How would experiences like this affect Mario's ability to reach the higher level of needs in Maslow's Hierarchy? What other experiences does Mario describe similar to this one?
- C. In this chapter, Mario describes a time when he was almost kidnapped at a carnival and wheeled away by a stranger who grabbed his handlebars. How do you think this affected his sense of Safety, based on Maslow's Hierarchy? How did he overcome this fear, or did he?
- D. In this chapter Mario says that "rolling" can be an advantage for him over others. Describe incidences where this happens.
- E. What is social class? Does Mario's physical condition affect his social class? Where do the disabled fit in society?
- F. Do you think Mario's physical struggles make him an easy victim to kidnappers or others who want to do harm? Why or why not?
- G. Even though Mario is physically muscular, he is still picked on at school and in public. How is his strength an advantage for him and when?
- H. Do you think Mario's friends, family and classmates all thought he would be poor and alone because of his physical disability? How did this affect his self-esteem?

- I. Mario says he has to compete with baby strollers for “rolling space,” as he calls it. Why do you think this competition occurs? Who wins most of the time in this chapter?
- J. Do you think Mario wouldn’t have defended himself if he wasn’t muscularly built? Would he have stood a chance against the kidnapper? How do physically challenged people defend themselves?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: Bring Your Wheelchair to School Day

Borrow a wheelchair for an afternoon and take turns riding it around the classroom, going to the bathroom, eating, playing at recess, participating in sports, getting into a car, etc. No cheating or standing is allowed, even for a second. After you are done, please write a 1-2 page essay on your experiences. How did people treat you? Did they look at you differently? Were day-to-day activities harder than normal? Explain in detail.

3. Vegetables

- A. What do you think Mario means by “vegetable?” How did Mario cope with this stereotype?
- B. Mario likes to go along with people’s initial bias of him, in order to expose their own bias and let them see it, and add humor to the situation. Does Mario use humor as a way of dealing with his disability in your opinion? How would you deal with it emotionally? (angry, sad, bitter, happy, poor attitude)
- C. Mario explains at the glove-shopping incident, that when people don’t look him in the eye, it’s his “internal” signal that they are uncomfortable with him and it doesn’t bother him, as he has experienced it often enough. How do you think this affects his thoughts and emotions? How would you feel if the same thing always happened to you?
- D. How did the young clerk at the Big N’ Tall store treat Mario? Do you think she treats all her customers that way? Have you ever been treated differently for no reason other than your appearance?
- E. Do you know any kids your age who have physical disabilities? Are you friends with them? Would you be? Would you do activities with them, or would you rather not include them? Why or why not?
- F. Do you think it’s “normal” to see physically disabled people day-to-day, or is it rare to see one out in public? How about an unassisted disabled person? Do the physically challenged make you feel uncomfortable? If so, why?

- G. What is the difference between physically disabled people and mentally disabled? Do you think they have the same problems?
- H. Do you think the physically disabled are just like everyone else, or should they have to go to separate schools, etc?
- I. Why do you think the sales clerk would not look at Mario in the eye, or help him directly while shopping at the store?
- J. Do you know what Groupthink is? What does this have to do with Mario?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Take a moment to reflect on someone you know who is physically less mobile than you. Close your eyes and imagine for a few minutes that you are that person (it could be Mario, or someone else you know), and their daily struggles are yours now. Write a 1-2 page essay on the life of a person less physically fortunate, or with disability issues. Write from the viewpoint of that person.

4. Jokesters

- A. Sigmund Freud's Childhood Stages are commonly discussed in Psychology. Define the four childhood stages he invented? (Oral, Anal, Oedipal, Adolescent)
- B. What stages does Mario describe in this chapter, and please explain how you know he was in that particular stage.
- C. Mario describes "sick minds" in this chapter, or people who enjoy picking on handicapped people. Why do you think people enjoy picking on others, what made Mario an easy mark for jokesters?
- D. How does Mario deal with being the butt of the joke? How does he cope with this on a daily basis?
- E. Mario mentions overhearing his parents discuss how another handicapped man was attacked in a park in New York, and then quickly agreed "not to tell Mario so he doesn't worry." How do you think this made him feel? Do you think this made Mario fear others in society more so than other kids his age? Why or why not?
- F. Mario states he was 8 to 10 years old when he became "fully cognizant of his vulnerability as a handicapped child." Which stage out of Freud's 4 stages do you think Mario was in at that time?

- G. How did Mario deal with being a young “vulnerable” handicapped child? Give examples from this chapter.
- H. As the object or participant of so many pranks and young jokesters, Mario mentions that often “others included me in the planning, which made me feel socially accepted even more.” Please explain how this experience caused Mario to feel even more socially accepted.
- I. Have you ever participated in a prank to feel more socially accepted? Please explain in detail.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Divide the classroom into groups of 4 students. Assign one person in each group to demonstrate the behaviors of each of Freud’s 4 Childhood Stages: Oral, Anal, Oedipal and Adolescent. Make up a short skit in each of your groups, demonstrating these four different stages.

5. PLAN B

- A. Alfred Adler’s “Individual Psychology” often emphasizes how individuals have an internal strive for superiority and strong motivations to adapt, improve, and master the environment. How do you see Mario reflecting this perspective within Plan B?
- B. How does Mario cope with his feelings of loneliness and depression when he can’t participate? Was this just a childhood thing, or do you think he could experience it as an adult?
 - A. Does he use outlets to channel this? If so, what are they?
 - B. Have you ever felt left out in other activities that you can’t participate in? What were the reasons?
- C. Mario describes an incident where he was nearly attacked in the park, near his home, while being left alone briefly. How did Mario use his knowledge of his safety-needs to avoid danger in this situation?
- D. How do you think Mario felt about going to parks after this incident?
- E. Would you say that Mario belongs to the “outcast” group in society? Why or why not?
- F. Do you think Mario is seen as a target or victim? Why or why not?

- G. Are there a lot of crimes reported that are committed against the physically disabled, that you know of?
- H. How does this compare to other crimes? What is different about Mario being a target, vs. a female victim or vagrant?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Interview a person with a physical disability. The interview needs to be about 20 minutes long and you must ask them the following questions:

1. Have you ever felt left out in certain activities due to your disability? If so, what were they?
2. What is the hardest thing about being physically disabled?
3. Did you develop solitary hobbies in order to cope with not being able to participate in all physical activities? If so, what are they?
4. Have you ever struggled with feelings of loneliness or depression? If so, how did you cope with this?
5. Have you ever felt less safe in certain situations, than others, due to your disability? Please describe the situation.

6. Competition

- A. Mario describes a situation which he believed his boss was subconsciously competing against him by raising to the tops of his toes when he spoke to Mario. Why do you think his boss did this? Explain.
- B. Mario always wanted to be a baseball player. Growing up with a very athletic family, this was especially painful for him to watch second hand as his brothers competed in organized sports leagues. How did Mario deal with this love for the sport, knowing he could never participate in it?
- C. Do you think Mario has as fair of a chance at getting a job as anyone else? Why or why not?
- D. Mario talks about discrimination he receives in the workplace. Describe 2 incidences from the chapter.
- E. Consider Mario's education, work ethic, business skills, etc. Why do you think he had problems getting certain jobs or promotions he thought he was qualified for?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Ivan Petrovich Pavlov was a famous Russian psychologist, who created the concept of Classical Conditioning, using the Unconditioned Stimulus and Unconditioned Response and Conditioned Response. Combined with other experiences, Mario states that when he interacts with tall Caucasian males, he immediately feels threatened. Please review Pavlov's experiment with the salivating dogs, and define these terms. Review with discussion in class.

Reflect upon Mario's experience utilizing Pavlov's concept of Classical Conditioning with the Unconditioned Stimulus, Unconditioned Response, and Conditioned Response.

Write a 1-2 page essay on your reflections as to why this happens to Mario when dealing with tall Caucasian males.

7. Mishaps

- A. Define "bystander intervention."
Most studies on "bystander intervention" show that people are reluctant to help strangers, yet Mario seems to have no trouble asking and receiving assistance?
 - 1. Why are people willing to help him?
 - 2. Why do some people seem to get more help from strangers than others?
 - 3. How has Mario overcome the fear of asking for help from strangers?
- B. What does "alienation" from society mean? Do you think Mario feels alienated sometimes? Why or why not?
- A. Define "Acceptance" and "Oppression" as it relates to one's status in society.
Do you think Mario feels more Acceptance, or more Oppression from society?
- B. Does anything separate Mario from the rest of his social group? Would this add or detract from a place of Acceptance?
- C. Do you think Mario's mishaps made him stronger or just plain frustrated?
Why or why not? Explain.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Pretend that you are Mario in this chapter. Make a daily log of all you do and what could potentially go wrong for you (based on Mario's recollections in this chapter). Start with simple tasks like getting out of bed, putting on your clothes, taking a shower, getting in the car, etc. Also include going to school, the store, a friend's house, or other activities. Write 1-2 pages in your journal describing your day.

8. Naysayers

- A. In “Naysayers” (as well as in the forward), Mario briefly discusses his stay at a children’s hospital. How old was he when he was admitted? How long was he there? How often did he see his family? What happened while he was there?
- B. Compare Mario’s experience of hospitalization as a young child to John Bowlby’s research on “attachment” with young children in hospitals. How do you think this hospitalization affected Mario while growing up, or even as an adult? Explain specific areas in Mario’s life that may have been affected.
- C. What is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder? Do you think Mario shows any signs of Post-Traumatic Stress, due to incidences in early childhood? If so, what would be the signs and psychological reasoning behind his behavior?
- D. What socio-economic status did Mario and his family occupy in the early 50’s (born in 1952) in Cleveland Ohio?
- E. When did Mario begin to develop his social identity and how was he influenced?
- F. When Mario was 8 months old he was diagnosed with polio, which he describes as the most dreaded disease of the age. What were the social stigmas attached to individuals with polio during the 50’s?
- G. What sort of social stereotype did Mario face constantly and how did he still manage to claim a positive social identity and determination?
- H. How did certain social settings (being left in the church basement) affect Mario’s psychological functioning? This is a direct example of social psychology and how it affects the individual.
- I. Mario did not have a wheelchair until around age 8. This is his primary means of physical mobility. How did this affect his sense of Social Identity as seen in this chapter?
- J. Did this help or hinder Social Cohesion (feeling needed, a sense of belonging to a group)? Examples: Boy Scout Trip, singing at the hospital, etc.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Write a 1-2 page research paper on the disease “polio.” In what year was it identified and how many suffered from it? When did Dr. Salk invent the “polio vaccine” that every baby is given shortly after birth? What is the quality of life a person with this disease is likely to experience? What is the average lifespan? Do people with this disease usually work, have families, etc?

9. NUMBERS

- A. How does Mario’s ability to store data in his mind by using numbers, help him cope with his daily struggles?
- B. What discrimination did Mario face at the DMV? How does Mario deal psychologically with this incident? Which coping mechanisms do you see present?
- A. How did Mario fight the stereotypes and discrimination he saw from the DMV toward his aging father?
- B. How are the numbers Mario talks about in this chapter associated with the law? (Example; certain height regulations, etc.)
- C. What is the definition of Social Oppression? Have you ever experiences this?
- D. Did you see any incidences where Mario and perhaps his father experienced any Social Oppression in this chapter? (DMV Incident, at the Bank, trips to the grocery store, or simply using the restroom)
- E. Was Mario mistreated or exploited at any of these places due to his social status?
- F. Have you ever seen a stranger mistreated or exploited in public due to his/her social status? What did you do, or how did you respond?
- G. Please define the major sections of the ADA Laws. When was the law passed? Who is affected by the law?
- J. What changes did businesses have to make after the act became law?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Write a 1-2 page research paper on the Americans with Disabilities Act. Explain how this came to be national law and what changes it invoked on small and big businesses. Also describe what it did for the disabled community in America.

10. FATHERING

- A. In this chapter, Mario alludes to his parenting/discipline style with his two children. How would you describe Mario's parenting style and what evidence do you have to support this (e.g. authoritarian, authoritative, permissive)?
- B. Reflect upon how Mario's medical condition may have affected his parenting style.
- A. How did Mario overcome his fear of being a good father?
- B. Mario describes an accident that occurs with his first newborn son that leads him to the hospital, only to be questioned for child abuse. How do you think this made Mario feel?
- C. How do Mario's physical limitations naturally cause extra suspicion and possible legal consequences in this situation? Does this further marginalize the physically disabled fathers?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Reflect for a few moments on your own fathers, or stepfathers or "father figures." Please write a 1-2 page essay on what would have been different had your own father been physically disabled. What activities would have been different? (Family vacations, house, sports, etc.) Would you have felt any differently about him? Please explain.

11. AWKWARDNESS

- A. How does Mario tend to cope with the constant awkwardness he faces? Does his coping mechanism help or hurt the situation?
- B. In a few cases Mario is greeted with blatant discrimination and obvious lack of care for his wellbeing and comfort (restaurant incident). What are some examples of discrimination in this story?
- C. What are his natural responses in this situation? What would your response be?
- D. How does he plan for these occurrences? What types of things does he think about that other people wouldn't have to?
- E. What is a "norm?"
- F. What norms did Mario violate when trying to eat dinner at a restaurant?
- G. What is "Conformity?" What is a violation of norms?

- H. Due to Mario not fitting in with the hostess' norms, was his lack of conformity causing the hostess' to discriminate blatantly against him or did he just violate her norms? Please explain.
- I. What is the ADA Law? Who did it affect?
- J. The ADA Law was passed in 1990, yet so many public places such as restaurants do not feel they have to comply with the disability laws. Do you think this is due to blatant discrimination or simply ignorance? Explain.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Write a 1-2 page paper on the subject of "conformity" and "social norms." Define these terms as well as dig deeper into how these issues affect the disabled community. What social norms do people with disabilities seem to violate naturally? Why do these norms exist if they eliminate certain social groups? Discuss in your essay.

12. PRETENDERS

- A. According to Freud, individuals utilize defense mechanisms in order to navigate difficult aspects of life. What is the definition of a "defense mechanism?"
- B. There are many different defense mechanisms. Which defense mechanisms do you see Mario implementing within this chapter?
- C. What defense mechanisms do you see yourself using? Others you know?
- D. What does Mario mean in this chapter by "pretender?" Please define this term according to him. How would a "pretender" be defined psychologically speaking?
- E. Mario mentions how disappointed he was when he was replaced by the Crippled Children's Society as the poster child by a boy who broke his leg sledding. What social term does this incident describe?
- F. How are "pretenders" automatically given a higher status than a "real" disabled person, in societal standards? What benefits and advantages are they given over someone like Mario?
- G. Do you think that people who have temporary injuries, e.g. a broken leg, arm, etc., have the same rights as someone who is disabled for life? Why or why not? How do some people take advantage of "the system" in that way?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Divide the classroom into two groups. You will prepare for a classroom debate. One side will be the “pretenders,” or those with temporary disabilities or minor injuries; they will receive the “red handicapped passes.” The other group is the lifelong physically disabled people who have constant disability needs; they receive the “blue handicapped passes.” Spend 20 minutes in your groups preparing your argument on why you should be the only ones to have the “real” handicapped parking pass.

13. BOXES

- A. Adler described “compensation” as an individual’s attempt to overcome imagined or real inferiorities or weaknesses by developing one’s abilities, and overcompensation as an individual’s attempt to deny rather than acknowledge a real situation, or the exaggerated effort to conceal a weakness (inferiority, superiority). Identify possible incidents of compensation and overcompensation Mario exhibits within this chapter.
- B. Have you ever “overcompensated” for something? Please explain.
- C. What is the definition of the “boxes” Mario talks about in this chapter?
- D. Mario states, “The more one is able to identify when ‘boxes’ are being used, and stereotypical thinking is running wild, the easier it becomes to design a plan to dispel it.” What are some ways to identify when someone is giving way to stereotypical thinking?
- E. In boxes, Mario describes the stereotype he is faced with daily about disabled individuals; “*a disabled person is mentally limited, or worse, mentally incapacitated.*” What does this mean, in your own words?
- F. How is this stereotype manifested into discrimination Mario encountered directly? Please give Examples.
- G. Where would you think the mentally and physically challenged individuals fit in society?
- H. Do you think they are more or less discriminated against compared to racial/ethnic minorities, women or children? Why or why not?
- I. Which view do you think Mario has of society, one of a society of community or a society of conflict? What experiences caused him to develop this viewpoint, in your own opinion?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Reflect quietly on people who don't "fit in" with "normal" people in society. Imagine for a few minutes that you are one of them. What would be different about your life? Would you have as many friends, interests, activities? Write a 1-2 page narrative on your life, either as either a disabled person, a different race or gender, or someone less fortunate than yourself.

14. HANDICAPPED HEROES

- A. Has Mario's list of "heroes" affected him psychologically as a child and as an adult? How so?
- B. Do you think if he didn't have these people in his life, the outcome would have been different for him?
- C. What is the definition of "intrinsic" vs. "extrinsic?"
- D. Do you think the motivation for others to help Mario is intrinsic or extrinsic factors?
- E. What is the definition of "social class?"
- F. What was the social class of most of Mario's heroes, as far as you can tell?
- G. How much influence did Mario's heroes have on him, in your opinion?
- H. Do you think these people showed a deviation from the norm in society and went above and beyond to help Mario's quality of life?
- I. What societal factors led to these heroes in Mario's life?
- J. Do you have any heroes? If so who are they? How do you define a hero in your own life?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Have a group classroom discussion on Handicapped Heroes in today's society. Who would be considered heroes? What is the definition of a hero? Is this the same kind of hero Mario is talking about in this chapter? Sum up all the qualities these Handicapped Heroes had for Mario's life and decide as a class how you can help become someone's hero.