

DISCRETION

Australian Supplement to the Character First Education Curriculum

I Will:

- Choose my words carefully
- Practice good manners
- Listen to criticism
- Not make fun of others
- Turn down any invitation to do wrong



Definition

Recognising and avoiding words, actions and attitudes that would bring undesirable consequences

Illustration

Quoll's, or tiger cats, are high on the list of marsupial carnivores. With feline stealth, they set out hunting through the bushland in the dead of night. It is only through their careful thinking and cunning wit that they are able to capture their prey – and avoid being somebody else's prey. Read the nature story as it follows a quoll's night time hunting adventure.

In 1927, John Flynn set out into the heart of the Australian outback, determined to prove that a wireless network was possible for a Flying Doctor experiment. Such a venture had never been attempted before, and he faced many trials along the way. Read the history story to learn more about how John Flynn learned the importance of bridling his tongue and choosing to do what was right.

Discretion in Nature



tree during the day, waiting for night to descend. However, before he started, he needed to scan around for any potential danger. A hungry fox or wild dog could be waiting to ambush the quoll and he

had to keep a sharp eye out for any predators.

Discretion is like that, too. Before we choose to do something, we need to “check our surroundings.” We need to respect others and make sure that what we’re doing doesn’t harm anybody else.

With the coast clear, the hungry quoll darted off into the inky darkness of the bush, watching out for his first potential meal. Bounding along the ground with an agile gait, the quoll kept to the shadows, although the white spots along his body occasionally reflected the bright moonlight.

The name *quoll* is Aboriginal for ‘tiger cat’ and indeed, quolls are about the size of cats. They also look similar to cats with their long tail, alert eyes and their slick pace when running.

As the quoll stopped for a moment behind a patch of bush, his keen sense of smell picked out a perfect meal – a sleeping crow in a tree. Quickly, he scampered up the trunk and out onto the branches. While a quoll is moderately *arboreal* – which means it can hunt in the trees – only 11% of its travelling is above ground.

The Quoll

Nevertheless, a quoll’s paws are apt for climbing. Their front paws have raised, grip-fast ridges called *striations*, and their back feet possess blunt “thumbs” known as *halluces*. These, along with its long tail for balance, enable quolls to swiftly traverse the forest canopy.

The quoll crept along the branch with feline stealth. At any moment he would pounce, knocking the unsuspecting bird to the ground before tucking into his meal.

With one swipe of its paw, the quoll sent the crow tumbling to the forest floor. However, as he hurried down the tree, he froze, still as a statue. The fur on his back bristled as out of the bush loped another male quoll. It, too, was ready to eat and was ready to nab the fallen bird.

The first quoll growled in his throat. This was his bird, the one he’d hunted. The second quoll made a hiss, and the more dominant male responded with a hiss of his own. Ridged with aggression, the two quoll’s stood in what looked like a vicious standoff.

Then, the first quoll did something unusual. He tentatively stretched his pink snout towards the second, determining to rub noses as a sign of peaceful greeting. The other

Another day had ended, and the sun was sinking low over the Australian bushland. Long shadows cast by the eucalypt trees stretched across the covering of leaf litter and undergrowth. Flocks of cockatoos and galahs settled themselves onto branches of the trees, quietly chattering goodnight to each other as the evening light faded. All seemed to be winding down as the darkness set in.

Gradually the silver moon rose into the velvet-black sky, illuminating the forest floor in splatters. A cricket chirped here and there, but everything else seemed asleep.

Suddenly, there came some movement from a fallen tree. A head with a sniffing pink nose and attentive ears appeared. A quoll jumped to the ground with a soft thump and stopped momentarily to check its surroundings. The quoll’s large, black eyes scanned the ground, and the silhouetted trees. Its ears listened for any sound of danger. Its nose sniffed the cool night air.

This quoll was ready and eager as he set out to hunt. He had been sleeping peacefully in his fallen

male accepted and, together, the two started devouring the bird.

Once it was gone, the two quolls parted. The first quoll set out further into the bushland, looking for another food source. His motley fur markings made him hard to discern amongst the low-lying bushes and bracken. However, the quoll's flighty movement didn't escape the watchful eyes of a fox. A healthy quoll would make the ideal feast for a fox that hadn't eaten in two days!

The fox set out after the quoll, making not a sound and keeping its nose alert for the quoll's scent trail.

Although the quoll was hungry himself and intent on finding his next meal, he sensed he was being followed. Stopping ever so briefly, he pricked up his ears and caught the faintest snap of a twig. It was enough to send him dashing for the nearest tree. Higher and higher he climbed. It leapt over branches and ducked under leafy boughs. Into a hollow he scrambled, then out the other side. He could hear the fox attempting to pursue, but the quoll was too fast for it. Jumping to the ground, the fox slunk off in search of easier prey.

Breathing hard from its mad dash, the quoll waited until he was certain there was no further threat, then he was ready once again to set off for food.

Presently, the quoll came upon a rocky outcrop sprinkled here and there with patches of ferns. Up towards a tall rock stood a wallaby, about a metre in height. Now, quolls are capable of taking

down small wallabies, but this one was fairly big in terms of the size wallaby.

The quoll stopped to assess the situation. He had a choice; he could attack and risk being injured by the wallaby's strong front legs, or he could keep on his quest for an easier meal.

The quoll looked at the wallaby sitting in the moonlight, licking its paws. He paused a moment longer, standing up on his hind legs and sniffing the air. Then, as though the wallaby had never been there to start with, the quoll headed back for the cover of the undergrowth.

On and on the quoll went, increasing his bound, eager to eat. Bursting through a patch of thick scrub, the quoll happened upon a dead wombat. What a find! A wombat was a brilliant discovery, since quolls aren't able to take down live ones.

The quoll dug into the wombat with relish. His stomach was only half-full from sharing its last meal of crow, so he ate heartily. Finally, he could eat no more!

The quoll spent over half an hour to itself, but all of a sudden, the quoll stopped in mid-chew and stood bolt upright on its hind legs. He had heard something in the bushes – something bigger, more fearsome.

A moment later, the black and tan bulk of a lean wild dog loomed into sight. It had smelt the wombat and intended to come in for a meal, too.

The quoll hissed at the wild dog, his front paws still holding part of the wombat. The wild dog growled

menacingly, baring its teeth at the quoll. The dog's eyes glinted in the semi-moonlight of the clearing. Tension hung in the air. Who would get the rest of the carcass? The quoll had rightfully found it first, but the wild dog was over three times the quoll's size.

The two animals looked threateningly at each other for a minute. Then, with a final hiss, the quoll backed away from the wild dog and into the bush.

The quoll had made the best decision by surrendering to the wild dog. Even though it had barged in, even though the quoll had found the dead wombat first, the quoll chose to walk away from a confrontation that could've resulted in injury or death. What could've been a nasty conflict ended peacefully because the quoll had chosen discretion.

Despite the fact that he had left his prized meal, the quoll was satisfied. He had hunted well and received a good night's food. As the first glimmer of dawn appeared to the west, the quoll settled itself back into its favourite hollow log to sleep, his stomach contented after a night's hard work.

The quoll faced choices at every turn in its night out hunting. It would have been easier to run without having to stop and survey its surroundings. It would have been right to eat the crow all by itself. It would have been fun to chase the wallaby. Yet the quoll made the right choice at every turn. We face choices every day, and our words and actions result in good or bad consequences. Remember the quoll and use discretion.

Discretion in Australian History

Experiments

“Winged pilots, flying doctors, but they alone cannot save. Is there a magic solution that can give the dumb bush its tongue? Yes! It’s the wireless!”

So began John Flynn’s determined quest to give the bush a voice.

“Mind the roo!” Alfred Traeger shouted, as John swerved to avoid hitting the large kangaroo that had stopped in the middle of the road. The laden Dodge car slid sideways and into the soft sand at the side of the road – thankfully missing the kangaroo. However, the car was stuck fast in the soft sand, no matter how much John revved the engine, it wouldn’t move.

John didn’t appear angry or frustrated as he turned the car off and hopped out. “Bogged again,” he said with a grin. “Come on, let’s dig her out!”

Did you spot the “I will”? Despite the frustration of getting dogged, John chose his words carefully and didn’t get angry.

After much digging and pushing and revving, John and Alf managed to ease the Dodge out of the sandy drift. Wiping the sweat from their brows, they continued onwards.

John and his mate Alf were making for Alice Springs in late 1926 to conduct some wireless experiments. John’s vision was to create a Flying Doctor for the

isolated pioneers of the outback. By having a wireless at each homestead, people would be able to call a flying doctor in an emergency.

The loaded Dodge rattled along the dusty road, which was littered with rocks and potholes. Several



times, the car became bogged or blew a tire, but John never became upset, he set about his

The John Flynn memorial church was built in Alice Springs to commemorate the work Flynn did in the outback.



work with a smile.

As the sun set in the west, the two men rolled into Alice Springs. They were greeted by Sisters Pope and Small at the nursing home in Todd Street. John had spent countless months helping construct the stately whitewashed building.

“You wouldn’t believe the difference the nursing home has made in Alice Springs, Mr Flynn,” Sister Pope said. She laughed. “To tell you a funny story, remember those two local men that had opposed your work on the hospital?”

“How could I forget?” John said with a smile. “They voiced their complaints in the newspaper, claiming that a hospital was far too extravagant for such a poor region.”

John knew that retaliating to their remarks was wrong, so he had listened to their comments but hadn’t responded harshly.

Did you spot the “I will”? John listened to the men’s criticism without becoming angry.

“Well,” Sister Pope continued, “those men just ‘happened’ to be our very first patients here at the

Flynn's Dodge, loaded with equipment for wireless experiments in the outback.



Pastor Albrecht said to John and Alf when they arrived. "Tell us about your progress."

John sat down at the table and began to paint a vision with his words about the difference wireless would make in the outback. He

hospital! We spoil them rotten, of course, and since leaving us they have both given large donations to the hospital. Isn't that marvellous?"

John laughed. "Certainly it is! That's the best way to get rid of enemies: turn them into friends!"

Did you spot the "I will"? Sister Pope and Sister Small didn't make fun of the two men who'd opposed the hospital.

John and Alf busily set to work establishing the new "mother" station in Alice Springs. They would set up their "daughter" station at an isolated station settlement and this would relay messages from the pioneers. They set out for Hermannsburg mission, about 80km west of Alice Springs. The mission was run by two Lutheran pastors.

"Do come inside for a cup of tea,"

Hermannsburg mission, near Alice Springs, where John Flynn conducted some of his first wireless experiments.



had a natural way with people, never trying to force his ideas upon them, but gaining their trust by sitting and yarning with them.

Did you spot the "I will"? John practised good manners by talking with the pioneers.

The next day, John and Alf tried their first experiment. They had arranged to contact Maurie Fuss, the telegraph operator in Alice Springs, on the mother station.

Alf tapped out the message in Morse code. "8AD (Hermannsburg) calling 8AB (Alice Springs). 8AD calling 8AB. 8AB come in. Over."

Nothing, not even a buzz. Just silence.

Puzzled, Alf tried again. Still nothing. The failed session left the men mystified. Why would it not have worked? It would have been easy for John to become angry. They had worked so hard and come so far! However, John

chose to be patient and wait until they went back to Alice Springs, a week later.

Did you spot the "I will"? John turned down the chance to do wrong by getting angry.

Racing back to Alice Springs, Alf discovered that Maurie

Fuss had put the wrong coil into the receiver! Swapping the cords, the delightful sounds of Morse code from Pastor Albrecht came through the speaker. The two men locked eyes. John beamed in excitement, it worked! The long-distance wireless had worked!

"This day is historic," he told Alf. "It means that the flying doctor is a real possibility."

It wasn't over yet. John toiled for many more years to bring pioneer wireless and a Flying Doctor in the outback. Those early, experimental days equipped John to spread a 'Mantle of Safety' over the isolated pioneers of Australia's interior.

"Never once did I see John Flynn angry or even frustrated," Alf Traeger recorded later. "He just set about solving the problem with good humour, hard work and infinite patience. I suspected even then that he was a great man."

References:

John Flynn: Of Flying Doctors and Frontier Faith
Ivan Rudolph
University of Central Queensland Press

Project Ideas

Language

Assign the students to read a book out loud to the class in different tones of voice – monotone, fearful, flamboyant, etc. Note the reaction of the audience in each one. Point out that the intended meaning of the story is often understood depending on how it is communicated, like our words to others.

Part of discretion is bridling our tongue from saying hurtful words. Make a puppet with a pocket in its mouth and fill it with encouraging statements written on strips of paper.

Maths

Some of the most common math mistakes can be likened to discretion – reading a problem incorrectly, using incorrect formulas, etc. Challenge your students to exercise discretion in life and maths, to avoid unnecessary mistakes.

Science and Technology

Read the story of the quoll and analyse the specific areas in which it showed discretion. Write a report to show your answers.



Society and Environment

Invite a representative from the Royal Flying Doctor Service to speak on the difference John Flynn made to the lives of people in the outback and how the RDFS is still actively helping those in need.

Health

Learn to exercise good manners on the sports field. “Good job!” “Keep going!” “Great effort!” are examples of good sportsmanship. Discuss how children can be a good winner – and a good loser.

The Arts

Do a study on good manners. Children with manners are a ‘rare breed’ in today’s society. Plan a High Tea for young ladies and gentlemen and discuss and practise manners and etiquette. Have fun with this one!



John Flynn

What was John Flynn's main goal in life?



Who was John's radio friend? _____



What was the name of the mission where John conducted radio experiments?

List two ways that John Flynn used DISCRETION during his experiments:

1. _____

2. _____

Think of a time YOU have had to use Discretion:

DISCRETION

Recognising and avoiding words, actions and attitudes that would bring undesirable consequences



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