



Forgiveness Element: 8 A Need to Forgive

Literature, Writing, Storytelling	A Need to Forgive
<p>Age Level 16 - Adulthood</p> <p>Time 50 minutes for group work Variable time for writing and presenting</p> <p>Resources Reading material Paper, pencil</p> <p>Objectives</p> <p>Students will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand the relationship between characterization and plot sequencing in literature2. See challenges as opportunities3. Understand forgiveness on both a logical and emotional level	<p>Teachers, Parents or Self-Guided Learners will</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Read the story, <i>A Need to Forgive</i>2. Write or discuss responses to the questions3. Write a fictitious story about a time you were able to forgive or to be forgiven.4. Tell the story to a group or share it online. (Do not reveal personal information about others). Include a character arc in which the events challenge the characters and help them transform over the course of the story.

Reading Literature

Read novelist Saah Millimono's short story, "A Need to Forgive."

In a region marked by a history of civil war, do you think forgiveness for acts of violence comes less easily or more easily? Discuss the reasons for your response.

What experiences and feelings occurred in the story that made it difficult for the main character to forgive?

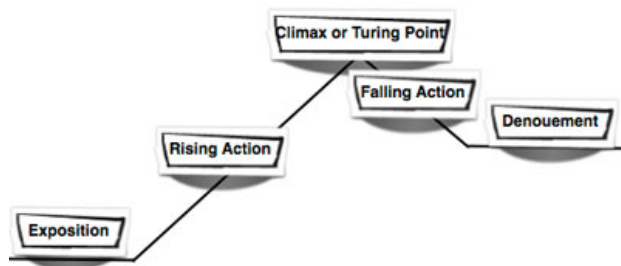
What logical factors helped him see the need to forgive?

When did something even more powerful than logic help him transcend anger and move toward forgiveness?

Writing Literature

Think of a personal experience you have had that taught you how to forgive in which you benefited from the forgiving attitude of another. Change the names and incidents enough to create a fictitious story based on the underlying truths. As you think about your story, draw a rainbow-shaped archway for the characters who changed the most in the story. Each layered hue represents an incident and a resulting layer of evolution to their thinking and color to their character. The intersecting rainbows may clash or come together at a turning point. In your story, the characters will learn something about forgiveness by the denouement, or final outcome.

After writing the story, hold a storyteller's circle, or put the story up online.



A Need to Forgive

As I stopped by the roadside, the sun, which had been shining the whole afternoon, beat down on my head while a light breeze blew. I wiped the sweat from my forehead with the back of my hand, looking left and right for approaching vehicles. This side of the street did not often have heavy traffic, but vehicle owners and motorbike riders were known to drive at breakneck speed, giving pedestrians barely enough time to cross to the other side. So I had to be careful.

Small shops stocked with dry goods and street sellers peddling anything from scratch cards to candies to peanuts to fried fish lined both sides of the street. A few yards from me, on the right stood a high-rise building that a wealthy contractor had built some months earlier. It rose above all the other houses. Rotting corrugated roofing sheets looked forlornly up the afternoon sky. A depot of the Liberia National Police (LNP) stood among the makeshift structures, housed in an unfinished building, with an office of the traffic section of the LNP directly in front of me.

Satisfied that approaching vehicles were distant enough to allow me time to cross the street, I made my way across the tarred road.

I had almost stepped onto the sidewalk on the other side of the street. I turned to see a speeding motorcycle approach. On it huddled three people. The motorcycle was about six or eight feet from me. That was enough time to step onto the sidewalk, allowing the motorcycle to pass without any incident. The whole road was free, with other vehicles too far to enter the path of the motorcycle. But the motorbike rider looked as if he had made a decision to commit an accident. I could see his face. It did not register any sign of shock or fear, and I thought, "This guy looks like he's planned to kill me today." But why? I didn't know who he was and had never met the man before. The motorcycle was speeding so hard, I could not even dare to move an eyelid and stood rooted to the spot.

In the next few seconds, the neighborhood echoed with the sound of metal and rubber, followed by the screams of passersby and pedestrians, as I was tossed into the air and the motorcycle flipped and smashed into the tarred road, sending its three riders, including the motorbike rider, into a heap. I landed about twelve feet from the scene, feeling one side of my

face smashed against the tarred road as my body was dragged further away.

A few minutes following the accident, I rose to my feet, feeling as if I would lose my senses. A huge lump rose above my right eye, from which blood poured freely. Lacerations laced my right and left hands, and from a tear in the right leg of my trousers, my knee trickled a stream of blood. I could barely move my left foot; I limped painfully. I felt I needed to call one of my relatives or a friend immediately in order to tell them about the accident; it crossed my mind that my cell phone may have gone missing during the accident. I looked about the tarred road anxiously, hoping to find the phone as more and more people crowded around, pointing accusing fingers at the motorbike rider and shouting at him at the tops of their voices. Among them I could see one or two police officers. I wondered whether they would be able to arrest the motorbike rider.

An old man, his gray beard covering half his face, came towards me, shouting. In one hand he held a towel and in the other polythene bucket. I could not make out what he was saying because everybody was speaking at the tops of their voices. But I was able to recognize him as one of those who earned a living washing cars by the roadside. I stepped toward a man in the crowd, holding out my hand. In the man's hand I could recognize a light blue cell phone like the one I had been carrying, but the man held tightly to the phone and pulled his hand away. For a moment, I thought I was mistaken and perhaps the phone could be his. Then one of the police officers approached the man. I watched as the man handed over the phone to the officer.

"That looks like my phone," I said.

The officer nodded her head. "We will take you to a clinic first," she said. "You can call your people later."

I soon found myself sitting on a chair at a clinic behind the Monrovia Central Prison, asking one of the nurses to call a friend who lived with me in an apartment house.

A few minutes later, my friend came, while I was attended by two nurses. In the yard of the clinic, I could see the motorbike rider and the two others who had been with him, collecting money among themselves. They

had been ordered by the police to make available money for my treatment. I looked at them and wondered how much they could afford to pay for an accident that could have killed me. I was so angry I decided to not speak or even look at them.

Two days later and along the very street where the accident had taken place, still suffering from my wounds, I sat in the office of the traffic section of the Liberia National Police. With me were my elder sister, a cousin, an aunt, and a friend who had joined me the following day after the accident. Among us was the motorbike rider. I had been told that he had escaped while I was being treated at the clinic. I wondered how the police happened to arrest him again.

After some talk with my relatives, the police turned to the motorbike rider. Since the accident, I had not had the privilege to look at him carefully because I had been too hurt and angry. He was a young man of about twenty or twenty-five years of age. His hair looked like it had not been given a cut for many months. On his chin was a small growth of beard. He was dressed in a pair of dirty jean trousers and an ill-fitting khaki shirt, at the front of which, written in large capitals, was the Liberia Motorcycle Union (LMU). His sneakers were so rotting that his toes looked ready to burst out of them. Looking at him, I could not help but wonder how a poor young man like him would be able to pay for my funeral expenses, leave alone a casket if I had been killed in the accident. Did he even know who I was? I had just written and completed a second novel manuscript, and this young man had decided to pay me for my efforts by killing me, for nothing.

“What do you have to say?” one of the police officers asked the motorbike rider.

“I wan call my fatha,” he said.

“Do you have a cell phone?” the officer asked.

“No, ahna geh phone,” he said.

“Do you know your father’s phone number?” the officer asked.

“No,” he said.

“So how would you be able to call your father?” the officer asked.

“I wan somebode to write letta for me so one of my fren can carry to my fatha?” the motorbike rider said.

My aunt turned to me. “Can you help him write a letter to his father, James?”

“Who - me?” I heard myself saying.

“You could help him write a letter to his father,” my aunt said. “He doesn’t seem to know how to write.”

“Of course he can ask the police?” I said.

“Will you please help him,” a second police officer said.

I looked at the officer and immediately felt like punching him, and not the motorbike rider, in the face. If I had died in that accident, I thought, this police officer would not have been able to find time to attend my funeral. Now he is pleading for a foolish and uneducated young man who may have gotten me killed.

I turned to the motorbike rider. “Did your father not send you to school? Or is riding a motorbike the only thing you’ve been taught so you can kill people for nothing?”

He said nothing. My aunt asked to talk to me. In the hallway, she looked me in the eye and whispered to me, “That police officer is no writer. Neither is the boy. *You* could help him write a letter to convince his father to pay the fee. That might teach the young man the power of writing *and* the power of forgiveness.”

I sighed a long, deep sigh and looked away from her. I needed to think about her words and about what would be best for society – a young man in prison or in school.

Moments later I found myself sitting at a table in the office of the traffic police, writing a letter to the father of the motorbike rider. I was still very much angry. But beneath the anger was a feeling that this young man, who probably had never been to school in all his life and earned a living merely from being a commercial motorbike rider, could not have meant the accident. I felt that forgiveness may be the best remedy, for him and for my hardness of heart.

As I walked out the door, on impulse, I looked at him and saw the shame on his face. I handed him my pencil. "If you want to learn to write," I said, "meet me tomorrow at the marketplace. Perhaps we will each learn something from the other."