

The Why Door

From the practice of Elliott McCray, Ed.S., The McCray Learning Lab

What this builds (transformative SEL): Curiosity (“I wonder”) with a thread of Agency (“I can do it”).

What this story teaches. June’s “The Why Door” is a curiosity story about the question *why*: what to do when a rule feels unfair and a question starts growing inside. Kids practice (1) noticing that a bother often hides a genuine question, (2) turning it into a respectful, curious ask instead of an accusation or a silence, and (3) finishing the loop with a discovery, because ideas with reasons behind them travel further. Underneath runs a thread of agency: June learns her questions can genuinely change how her small world works.

How to help at home or in class

- **Welcome the why.** When a child asks why a rule exists, it can land like a challenge. Try hearing it as thinking. A child who asks why is practicing exactly the kind of critical thinking school is supposed to build.
- **Know defiance from inquiry.** “I won’t do it” is defiance. “Why do we do it this way?” is inquiry, even when the timing is clumsy. Coach the timing and the tone, not the curiosity: “Great question. Ask me again at dinner and we will dig into it together.”
- **Say “I don’t know. Let’s find out.” out loud.** It is one of the most powerful sentences a grown-up can model. It teaches that not knowing is safe, and that finding out is something you can do together.
- **Ask for the because.** When a child wants a rule changed, invite the discovery step: “What would make it better? What did you find out?” Ideas with reasons behind them deserve real answers.
- **Audit one habit together.** Pick one family or classroom routine and ask it the why door questions: who started it, what was it for, does the reason still stand? If the reason holds up, the rule stays. If it does not, change it together.

Practice tool, not therapy. This is a practice tool for rehearsing skills, not therapy, counseling, or a clinical service. It is not a diagnosis or a treatment. If a child’s frustration with rules is constant, intense, or affecting daily life, that is a conversation for a teacher, pediatrician, or school counselor.

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