**Forgiveness: A Virtue-Building Lesson Plan**

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**By Annie Reneau**

**Materials Needed:**  
Book: *Under the Lemon Moon*, by Edith Hope Fine  
Balloon (not blown up)  
Ball  
White [8-1/2 x 11 inch] card stock—one piece for each student  
Scissors  
Markers/crayons  
Envelopes or plastic sandwich bags (one for each student)

**Introduction: What Is Forgiveness?**  
Forgiveness means letting go of hard feelings like anger, sadness, or frustration that happen when you or someone else makes a mistake. It’s saying “Thank you” or “That’s okay” when someone apologizes and not staying upset about what they did. It’s having patience with yourself and others, and recognizing that no one is perfect—everyone makes mistakes.  It’s letting go of hurt feelings, and moving ahead, ready to do things.

It doesn’t mean that all of a sudden what someone did doesn’t hurt or isn’t wrong. It means that you find it in your heart to give the person another chance.

**Balloon Analogy: Why Forgiveness Is Important**  
What are some of the feelings that you have when someone hurts you or breaks something of yours? (Invite answers from kids: angry, sad, frustrated, helpless, etc.) Part of forgiving someone is recognizing those feelings, letting them happen, and then letting them pass so that you can move on. One way to help your feelings move on is to let them out—in a healthy way.

* What happens if you hold all of those feelings inside and stay sad or angry, or if you tuck those feelings away somewhere inside your heart? (Blow some air into a balloon.) This air is like anger or sadness that comes into us.
* If we let it out each time we feel angry or sad, it’s not such a big deal—just a little air comes out and we’re back to normal. (Let air out of balloon.)
* But if we keep it inside, and keep adding to it each time we get upset and hold it in (blow into balloon several more times) then what happens? What will the balloon do if we keep blowing into it?
* And watch what happens when I let it go. (Balloon deflates and flies all over room.)
* It’s pretty out of control. If you hold all your anger inside for a long time, it might all come out at once sometime, and you could have a much bigger reaction than the situation calls for.

**Song: “If You’re Angry and You Know It”**

When you feel angry, and you want to let it out, you can do that in a healthy way. Kicking or punching things or people aren’t healthy ways to get your anger out. There are more peaceful ways. This song will help you learn some of those ways, so you can get your anger out of the way and move on to forgiveness.

(To the tune of “If You’re Happy and You Know it”)

If you’re angry and you know it, blow it out [blow]  
If you’re angry and you know it, blow it out [blow]  
If you’re angry and you know it,  
Don’t let it grow and grow  
If you’re angry and you know it, blow it out [blow]

If you’re angry and you know it, walk away—keep your cool [walk a bit, and move your hand in a sliding motion, like a wave coming into shore]. . .

If you’re angry and you know it, tell someone, “I feel ANGRY” [say, “I feel ANGRY” all together]

**Game: “Hot Feeling” (like Hot Potato)**  
What are some of the things your body feels when you feel angry or frustrated? One thing is that you might get really hot. I call those feelings “hot feelings” because sometimes your face can get red, you might feel a burning feeling in your stomach, and you might even feel like a volcano full of hot lava! When you touch something hot, do you want to hold onto it? No! You want to let it go as quickly as you can.

* In this game, the ball is a “hot feeling.” Pass it around the circle while the music plays, letting it go as quickly as you can.
* When the music stops, whoever is holding the hot feeling has to keep holding it until the rest of the group says, “We’re sorry.”
* The person holding the ball puts it down and says, “That’s okay.”
* Then that person is out, and the game continues until only one player is left.

**Story: *Under the Lemon Moon*, by Edith Hope Fine**  
This story is a wonderful illustration of going beyond just forgiveness and doing a service for someone who has wronged you.

**Role Play: What Forgiveness Looks Like**  
Invite kids to give responses and act them out. Ask, “What does forgiveness look like when . . .”

• Your friend accidentally broke your favorite toy  
• You did something you feel is very bad (forgiving yourself)  
• Your brother takes something of yours without asking  
• Your friend got angry and said something unkind to you and then apologized.  
• Someone keeps doing something hurtful to you over and over without being sorry\*

\*There are some times when forgiveness won’t help someone change their behavior, and it isn’t the only virtue you need to call on. While you can let go of the hot feelings, you should also stay away from that person (if you can) and stop giving him or her the chance to hurt you. In these cases, respect for yourself and justice (making sure everyone is being treated fairly, including yourself) are just as important as forgiveness.

**Craft: Broken Heart Puzzle**  
Explain that when we practice forgiveness, we allow our heart to be healed from whatever hurt us. We also help heal the hearts of people who may have hurt us unintentionally. We’re going to make a heart, “break” it, and then put it back together again to show how forgiveness helps us heal.

* Have kids cut out a large heart from the cardstock.
* Kids draw a picture of themselves or something that makes them happy on the heart.
* Next, have them cut their heart into ten or twelve randomly shaped pieces. They now have a broken heart puzzle. Explain again how forgiveness helps us heal, and put the broken heart back together.
* Then trade with another student and see if you can heal their heart, too.
* Give each student an envelope or sandwich bag to hold their puzzle pieces.