

The Letters in Her Mouth

Eight activities

Activity 1: The hand and the mouth

The story splits knowing into the hand and the mouth. In your own words, what does each one know at the start of the story? What does Bubby mean that the mouth learns "the way her hand once did: slowly, with practice"? Two or three sentences.

Activity 2: The three whys

List Bubby's three whys, and for each, the mechanical chain from cause to shake (angle -> drag -> wobble, and so on). Which why does Tilley's rehearsal fix first? Short answers.

Activity 3: Order the repair

Put these in the story's order, and say why the order matters: (a) the honest sentence to Morah; (b) the bluff-prep collapses at a hypothetical question; (c) the one-girl rehearsal; (d) Bubby's table; (e) the forty-minute session. One sentence on why the order matters.

Activity 4: The practice math - a made-up set of numbers

The numbers in this activity are made up for practice. A bluff-prep week is 7 hours of solo practice. Learning the why costs 3 hours at an expert's table plus 1 rehearsal hour. A session taught from recitation reaches about 4 of 12 students; a session taught from the why reaches about 9 of 12. (a) What is the cost-per-student-reached, in prep hours, each way? (b) The honest path costs 4 hours and the bluff path costs 7 - so why isn't the answer "always take the honest path because it's cheaper"? Name what the hours do not count. Show your steps.

Activity 5: "The letters are not the lesson. I am the lesson."

Nachama thinks, "I have been practicing the letters. The letters are not the lesson. I am the lesson, and I don't know how I work." What does she mean that SHE is the lesson? Why can't a stack of beautiful sheets answer "why does mine shake"? Two or three sentences.

Activity 6: Draw Bubby's table

Draw the Sunday lesson at Bubby's table: the two pens, the watch-the-hand instruction, and the three whys with their chains. Only what the story tells you. Caption it with one line from the story.

Activity 7: Michael's bike lesson - a fictional case

A boy named Michael is the best cyclist on his block and is asked to teach two younger boys to ride without training wheels. He has ridden for years and never once thought about how. Write the question that collapses his bluff, the person he learns the why from, and the sentence he says to the two boys before the first lesson. One sentence each; names or roles are fine.

Activity 8: Word grid

Find the eight words in the grid. They all go left to right, one per row.

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L E T T E R S B F Y
S T R O K E N O R S
A N G L E I Q Z X J
P R A C T I C E U P
T E A C H S T C D E
P R E S S U R E W B
B R E A T H L M N O
W O B B L E A I Q Z
X J K V W B F Y G H
U P L M N O R S T C

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The eight words: LETTERS, STROKE, ANGLE, PRACTICE, TEACH, PRESSURE, BREATH, WOBBLE. Which word names what Nachama was asked to do, and which word names the symptom that only the why could fix?