Steps in Designing a Self-Image Thinking Metaphor

Chapter One: A Regular Day

Mila is a 9 year old, girl with curly hair and loves drawing. Sometimes she feels quiet around other kids, but inside she reminds herself, “I’m kind, I have good ideas, and people like me when they get to know me.” At recess, her friend Luna sits beside her on the court.

“I like how you explain things,” Luna says.

Mila smiles and thinks, “I don’t have to be loud to matter.” She shares her basketball and feels proud of herself.

Chapter Two: A Tricky Moment

Later, Mila wants to join a game but feels nervous. Her heart beats fast, and she thinks, “Being brave doesn’t mean not being scared—it means trying.”

Luna whispers, “Let’s ask together.”

Mila takes a breath and says, “Can we play too?”

When she’s included, Mila thinks, “I can handle new friendships. I believe in myself.”

Steps in Designing a Affect Metaphor:

Lily and the New Mat

Lily is a 10 year old who loves gymnastics. Walking into the gym after tryouts, her shoulders slump and her eyes feel watery. Her stomach feels tight as she looks at the mat where she used to laugh with her teammates. “I really wanted to be on their team,” she thinks, her face warm and cheeks heavy with sadness.

Then Lily notices something change. She takes a deep breath and feels her shoulders slowly relax. Her heart doesn’t feel like it’s racing anymore. “I’m sad I won’t be with them,” she tells herself, “but I also feel relieved I don’t have to move up yet.”

Lily pauses and thinks, “It feels strange to feel sad and relieved at the same time, but both feelings make sense.” Her breathing steadies, her face softens, and she feels calmer—ready to keep doing the gymnastics she loves.

Steps in Constructing a Behavior Metaphor:

Sophie and the Listening Ears

Sophie is a 5 year old girl in kindergarten. She has bouncy curls, loves colors, and is very excited about everything around her. Sometimes in class, Sophie gets so busy thinking about fun ideas that she forgets to listen to directions.

First Time:

During circle time, Sophie's teacher says, "Please sit on your carpet square." Sophie wiggles, then tells herself, "I can stop my body and turn on my listening ears." She sits down and thinks, "When I listen, I know what to do." Her body feels calm and ready.

Another Time:

Later, it's time to clean up. Sophie hears, "Put the blocks in the bin." She takes a breath and thinks, "Follow directions first, then I can play again." Sophie puts the blocks away all by herself.

One More Time:

At the art table, the teacher says, "Color, then line up." Sophie smiles and thinks, "I can listen and follow along." She finishes her picture and lines up proudly, feeling happy that her body followed the words.

Steps in Constructing an Attitude Metaphor:

Two Ways to Stand on the Playground

On the playground, there are two 8 year old girls who feel lonely.

One girl, Emma, thinks, “No one wants to play with me.” It seems like the right thought—after all, she hasn’t been asked to join a game. So Emma stands by the fence and waits, believing that if someone wanted her, they would come over first. As recess goes on, kids keep playing, and Emma feels more alone and invisible.

Nearby is another girl, Sofia, who also feels lonely—but she thinks differently. Sofia tells herself, “I might feel lonely, but that doesn’t mean I don’t belong.” She feels nervous, but she walks toward a group and asks, “Can I play too?” Some kids smile and make room.

Emma notices that Sofia didn’t wait to be chosen—she chose herself. Emma realizes the waiting thought kept her stuck, while the trying thought led to connection. The next day, Emma thinks, “Even if I’m scared, I can take one small step.” And the playground feels a little less lonely.