INTRODUCING PSY 150 STUDENTS TO THE STORYLINE COURSE

“This class was designed as a storyline course. This course follows the story of four Wake Tech students, just like you, who are trying to get to graduation, and it is your job to help them do that!  For each weekly module, each character has a folder with a different story and a different homework assignment. You may choose which character's folder you want to complete for your weekly assignments. It’s your choice, a different character or the same character; however, you are only allowed to complete one story each week.”

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**MEET GILBERT: Veteran, returning student, PTSD symptoms, quick to offer help to others, psychology major**

**EXAMPLE STORYLINE: “Who Let the Dogs Out?”**

Gilbert had an appointment after the food truck incident (chapter 2) to explore his extreme emotional response. Although he had seen live combat during his time in Afghanistan, he’d not experienced what he thought were the “classic” signs of PTSD. He’d been debriefed upon coming home, and everything had seemed fine. But he’d developed some odd and uncomfortable feelings of anxiety lately, and when panic set in at the food truck, Gilbert thought that was the final straw. He needed to get some help, so he made an appointment with the VA to see a counselor or psychologist. Now, he was sitting in Dr. Fitzgerald’s office on his third visit.

“Gilbert, I’d like to continue explore your feelings of fear. We can continue our discussion of your feelings of panic by the food truck on campus, unless there is something new you’d like to address.”

Gilbert shifted uncomfortably in his chair. He was still new to talking about his inner-most feelings with a psychologist, but after all, he was seeking help for something that was affecting his life.

“Gilbert, it’s up to you. Have you had any other feelings of fear or panic lately?” Dr. Fitzgerald made a brief note on his legal pad as Gilbert began to talk.

“I’ve never been afraid of dogs, but I was out at Lake Benson Park on Saturday, and something happened. I’d just finished running the 3.5-mile trail they have, and I was sitting near the fenced-in dog park they had over there. There was a guy, playing with his German Shepard in the fenced in area; I remember thinking how well-behaved the dog was as the owner walked the dog into the fenced area. I was just sitting there, watching the dog, relaxing, and everything was fine."

Gilbert continued, "All of a sudden, the hair on my arms began to stand up, and my heart started beating faster. I began to hyperventilate, and I had this realization that I was afraid of the dog. Suddenly, I couldn’t stand it any longer, so I took off to my car. I literally ran to my car like I was going to die!” Gilbert had become visibly emotional even as he recounted the event.

Dr. Fitzgerald was making notes on as he was listening. He asked Gilbert, “Had you ever been afraid of dogs before, ever had a bad experience?” Gilbert shook his head.

“No, never. My family had dogs growing up. I didn’t even know I was afraid of them until I freaked out at the park the other day. I’m still not sure what happened, or why it happened at that time.” Dr. Fitzgerald wrote for a moment or two on his pad, then put the pad down.

“I’m not sure where these feelings are coming from, Gilbert, but we’ll have to explore things in more detail. However, I can tell you the emotional response you had fits in with what we know about how emotions work. I can explain how the emotional response works if you want to know the ‘nuts and bolts’ of it. We have time. Shall we start there?”

Gilbert sat up a little taller and said, “Of course, doc. Maybe this will even help me on my psychology final!”

**ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY FOR GILBERT’S STORY** In a short essay, identify the three major theories of explanation described in your textbook. Describe the theory that supports Gilbert’s experience of emotion, and provide evidence from his narrative.

**MEET MARIA: Latina heritage, close and extended family are important, accounting major**

**EXAMPLE STORYLINE: “El Romance Se Ha Ido” (“The Romance is Gone”)**

Maria can’t put her finger on it, but Amalia, her mother, had seemed down, or blue, or even depressed for a few months at least. Maria and her mom are pretty close and since Amaila was typically the most upbeat person in the family, Maria wanted to chat with her mother to see what’s up.

Maria questioned her mother about her apparent mood change over a fresh-baked perla, her favorite concha.

Amalia told her daughter, “I don’t want to say too much because I don’t want you thinking your father and I are having serious problems. But yes, I’m feeling a little ‘blah’ and I hope this feeling goes away soon. I’m sure it will. Don’t worry.”

Maria responded, “Mom, if you’re worried or unhappy, then I’m going to worry. Does dad know? Have you talked to him?”

Amalia paused and said, “With our work shifts being different, we’re like two ships that pass in the night. We never seem to have time to sit and talk or visit like we used to before I got this job. I don’t know when the last time was that we went out for a nice dinner together. Or even went to mass at the same time.”

“Mama, I didn’t know. By the way, I love that about you two - getting dressed up for church or going out to dinner and a movie. It’s always been obvious you two enjoy being together.”

“That’s nice to hear, Maria, but we haven’t done that in ages. Or anything, come to think of it. I suppose it’s not uncommon that we've lost some of the spark in our marriage after so many years under the same roof. Your dad may or not feel the same way. I wouldn't know because if we do have a minute to talk we’re either busy or tired or both.”

Amalia could tell her daughter was troubled by the conversation, and borderline uneasy, so she shook her head, “Maria, my dear, this situation is nothing for you to be concerned with and I’m afraid if I say any more, you’ll wish I was confiding in Aunt Luz rather than you. Mothers and daughters don’t need to share everything!”

Maria slid her mother’s mobile phone across the table. “Here, Madre,” she said laughing with an obvious eye roll. “Call Aunt Luz right now and set up an urgent lunch date!”

**ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY FOR MARIA’S STORY** In a short essay, explain the difference between companionate and passionate love. How does love change for partners over time? Suggest some strategies to Maria’s mother for maintaining a happy marriage.

**MEET ANISH: His parents are still in India, he feels pressure to be a high achiever, has test anxiety, engineer goals)**

**EXAMPLE STORYLINE: “Everything is Plastic”**

Maria and Gilbert were just sitting down at their usual table in Howell Library on Main campus when they heard the familiar voice.

“Darn it, I’ll never figure this out!” Anish stood up from a study carrel and slammed the chair against the desk. He walked in a slow lazy circle, rubbing the sides of his head. He noticed Maria and Gilbert and walked over to their table. “I’m never going to figure calculus out. I’m just too stupid, I can’t do it!” Anish sat down at the table. “I’ll never pass this class, I’ll never get into State and my dad will be so disappointed.” He put his head on the table.

“We’re only two weeks into the semester. How do you already know you can’t do it?” asked Maria. “You haven’t even given yourself a chance!”

“Oh, I know…I’m dead. There’s no way I’m going to pass Math 271!” Anish began to gently bang his head on the table. Gilbert, who hadn’t said a word yet, reached down into his book bag and brought out his psychology text, Psychology in Your Life. He began thumbing through the book. Anish continued, “My dad sent me across the world to have the chance to go to the best universities, and I am already a failure! My family will be so ashamed…” Anish was absolutely beside himself with anxiety.

Gilbert pointed at a page in his book and said, “Hey, here in my textbook it says something about the brain and learning…I think it’s called plasticity. Learning makes the brain change somehow, but I’ll bet it takes time. Let me look it up and see what it says. Maybe we can get some insight on why learning takes so long. Maybe we can find out what part of your brain is changing when you learn math.”

“In the meantime,” said Maria, “you need to get to the ILC to get some help with your math class. They do tutoring to support almost every class.”

Anish looked up from the table. “I thought they only did tutoring for writing.” Maria smiled, “No, they do tutoring for almost every subject: foreign languages, science...They even helped me with the accounting class I had last year."  Maria opened her laptop and turned it on. “There’s an ILC on every campus; let me show you how to search for one on the Wake Tech website.”

**ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY FOR ANISH’S STORY** Anish struggles with learning calculus this week and Gilbert explains neuroplasticity to him. In a short essay, describe neuroplasticity and explain how it relates to learning and experience.

**MEET DAPHNE: First generation college student, with an independent and focused personality, culinary arts major)**

**EXAMPLE STORYLINE: “On the Knife’s Edge”**

When Anish got home from his Tuesday evening shift at Subway, Daphne was sitting on the couch with a sour look and a big, blood stained bandage on her thumb.

“What in the world happened to you?” Anish threw his backpack on the kitchen table and came over to where Daphne was sitting. There were bandages and a glass of water on the coffee table, along with a small prescription bottle.

“I cut myself in class today, slicing vegetables.” Daphne moved her hand gingerly. “I cut it pretty bad too… had to get 4 stitches.”

“Youch, I’ll bet it really did hurt,” said Anish. “Did you cry?”

“Shut up!” Daphne hit Anish with her good arm. “You know I didn’t cry! It’s funny, though. When it happened, my first emotion was numbness. I didn’t feel a bit of pain, even though I saw all the blood. It took a few minutes before it started hurting. But it hurts now.” Daphne winced, but lifted her arm cheerfully, extending her oversized thumb bandage at Anish.

“Where’d you go to get stitches?” asked Maria, who just walked in.

“At Urgent Care. The teacher let me leave class early, of course.” Daphne reached for the water with her good hand. “I have to take these antibiotics; you never know what kind of bacteria you’ll find in a kitchen. Can you open the bottle for me?” Maria opened the bottle and gave two pills to Daphne, who quickly swallowed them with a sip of water. “The strange thing is that I was more scared at Urgent Care. I couldn’t believe how frightened I was while I was there. My heart was beating really fast, and I was about to hyperventilate. I am SO scared of needles.”

Anish commented from across the room. “That’s weird how you were calm and didn’t feel any pain when you first cut your finger, but you freaked out when you were at the doctor’s office. What's up with that?!” He shrugged his shoulders as he walked toward the kitchen.

Maria got up and walked into the kitchen where Anish was standing. He looked at Maria, then Daphne. He grinned and said, “Well, I guess since you’re on the injured list, we’ll have to do the cooking tonight. So, Daphne, what do you want to eat?”

**ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY FOR DAPHNE’S STORY** Daphne seemed to experience a delayed response to cutting her finger this week in the storyline. In a short essay, explain what neurotransmitters do. Also, based on her stated emotional experience, what two neurotransmitters must have been working during Daphne’s accident?