

**The A, B, Cs of
Career Exploration and Planning
for Elementary Grade Students (Grades 3-5)**

Developed by

Junior Achievement (JA)

&

The National Career Development Association (NCDA)

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The Picnic Basket

Three children, a boy age 10 and his 12-year-old twin sisters, were walking through their neighborhood park one sunny August day. In only a week, they would be back at school. The children were sad because summer was ending, but they were excited about seeing their teachers again and hearing their friends' adventure stories.

At the park, they saw a picnic basket sitting on a table by the swing set. Inside the basket were four sealed envelopes. A note on the outside of one envelope read, "Open this first. Whoever finds this basket can have the special gifts I left inside." The other envelopes were marked "A", "B", and "C"—the letters of each of the children's first names! Anne, Beth, and Chris thought this was very strange. The note ended with the instruction, "Make sure you first check with your parents before opening these envelopes."

The children took the basket to their parents, who said they were right to bring it home. Being wise parents, they also told their children they would make sure the envelopes were safe to open. After supper that evening, the Mother and Father sat down in the living room and handed each child an envelope. They gave the envelope marked "A" to Anne, the envelope marked "B" to Beth, and, of course, the envelope marked "C" went to Chris. They told the children that the gifts inside were indeed special.

"What could this be?" asked Chris. "Why did someone leave the basket in the park?" asked Beth. Anne just rolled her eyes around in a big circle and said, "Who marked the envelopes with letters that match our names?"

The children talked about this for a few minutes until finally Chris said, "I want to open my envelope now." Their Mother said to wait, it was important to read what was in the envelope marked "Open this first." She pulled out the letter and began to read it aloud.

To My Dear Anne, Beth, and Chris:

By the time you receive these envelopes, I already will have said goodbye to you. The last time I saw you three, you were visiting Gramma and me in New Hampshire for the Fourth of July celebration. You were sitting at the old picnic table beneath the big Maple tree in my backyard where we all enjoyed the fresh fruit we picked earlier that day from our apple and pear trees. (You know how Gramma is always reminding us to eat healthy foods!) I built that rope swing you loved to play on. We've had so many wonderful times together over the years.

You are my favorite young people in the whole wide world! I always looked forward to your visits, and because we lived so close to your home in Boston, we were fortunate to see each other often.

As you know, I have a little trouble breathing. The doctors tell me I am going to be fine, but it would be best if Gramma and I moved to a place where the air is warmer and dryer. By the time you get this letter, we will be living in Arizona. It's a long way from Boston, but we will be able to visit you in a few months, and you can come see us next summer.

We sure have had lots of laughs and we've made enough memories to last many lifetimes! Do you remember "Steady Bessie", my old rowboat that didn't leak until we were in the middle of the duck pond? I rowed back to shore so fast I lost both oars. We had to use our hands as paddles! Do you remember how we kept going in circles until finally we all worked as a team to get back safely? The water was only three feet deep, so I could have hopped out of the boat and pulled you back to shore, but I wanted to make our adventure more exciting for all of us.

Well, I'm disappointed and sad that we have to move so far away. Of course, we can talk on the phone and send e-mails to each other, but I always enjoy seeing all of you. When I realized that I wasn't going to see you as much, I started to think about what I could give you that would show you how much I love you. I thought and thought and thought. Finally, I came up with an idea. I decided to give you important bits of wisdom that you could share with each other and use throughout your lives.

Your Gramma loved my idea, so I arranged with your Mom and Dad to put the picnic basket where you might discover it. I'm not sure how they did it, but it must have worked well if you are reading this letter from me!

My dear grandchildren, Anne, Beth, and Chris, I always will love you. Even though we live far apart, I will be with you in spirit and guide you with wisdom. The gifts in these envelopes will help each of you as you journey through the wonderful life that awaits you. Read the letters when you're together so each of you can hear what the envelopes contain. Discover your own gifts and talents, and what you can do to make this a better world.

How would you feel if it were easy to figure out your life, your friends, your parents? Sometimes, life is hard to understand; yet it is so simple in some ways. When things become difficult and you feel you have no control over anything, don't forget you can always choose to be calm and figure out how best to respond to your situation with a positive attitude.

What if somehow you GOT IT! You instantly knew what's up and could figure out all the stuff that bothers you. Would it make a difference in your life? It probably would. But, it's unlikely that this will happen quickly.

Here are three steps that will steer you in the right direction. I call them my A, B, Cs of Life and I give them to you, my dear grandchildren. Try them out and talk about them with your friends, your parents, and your favorite school counselor or teacher. At least think about them and have a discussion with someone who cares about you and your future.

With all my love forever and ever,
Your Grampa

P.S. I am looking forward to your first visit to Arizona. After I fixed all her leaks, we decided to bring "Steady Bessie" with us!

By now, everyone in the family had tears in their eyes. The children slowly began to read their letters, starting with "A".

For Anne:

Step One: Take time to learn more about yourself, your interests, special talents, and values—the stuff in life that is most important to you. Find out what your friends enjoy doing, ask about their favorite toys and hobbies. Compare interests to see how they are the same or different than yours.

Think about what you like, the various activities you enjoy, and your special skills or talents you may be taking for granted. Think about your values and what really matters to you in life. For example, is it important that you do something to help others? Is it important that you have quiet time alone when you're reading, working on an art project, or some other activity you enjoy?

Counselors and teachers have many ways to help you learn more about yourself. Small group discussions or even class discussions about these topics also can be helpful. A good question to ask your Mom and Dad is, "What did I like to do as a young child between the ages of three and six?" Knowing this will teach you more about you.

What's great about self-knowledge is that you begin to feel better as you discover some surprising, positive things about yourself. Remember, learning more about yourself is something you can do throughout your life.

For Beth:

Step Two: Take time to learn more about the exciting opportunities in the world of work, where you can share your talents with others to make the world better for everyone. Pay attention to the jobs your Mom and Dad do. Look at all their different activities during the day and at night. When they're not working at their paid jobs, notice how your parents spend their time with your family—doing chores, playing games, and taking care of things around the house. Ask your grandparents about their hobbies and interests, too. (Older folks love to talk to younger people.) Pay attention to your friends' parents, their jobs, hobbies or interests, such as gardening, painting pictures, or spending time with pets.

Check out the different types of work people do at your school. Ask lots of questions about what they like or don't like about their jobs. Ask people how they trained for their jobs or how much education they needed to prepare for their work. So many jobs and so much information can seem like too much to think about. Just keep in mind that most young people will have several different kinds of jobs during their lifetimes. How do you choose the right ones?

You don't need all the answers right now, but this is a good time to start asking questions and noticing the work going on around you. Computers, videos, books, and, yes, even games can help you learn more about work you think is interesting, and the education or training you will need to prepare you for your favorite job! Don't forget, counselors, teachers, and parents want to help. You just need to ask.

For Chris:

Step Three: Take time to learn how to look at yourself and your choices. Think about your feelings so you can make the best decisions. Do any of the jobs or activities you see seem fun and enjoyable to you? Would you feel satisfied if you spent time doing these types of activities? How will you know for sure which jobs you would really enjoy?

At some point, you must learn how to gather information about what you like or dislike, then decide what will make you happy. This can be an enjoyable step because when you take time to do this, you will see more clearly what you like. You have within you a kind of compass to guide you through life. It helps you "feel" whether something is right or wrong. Sometimes you need quiet time by yourself to figure out what's right for you.

It would be great to be paid to do work you truly enjoy and also have time after work to do other activities, hobbies, or volunteer work. Having a well-balanced life is important.

You don't need all the answers right now. But this is a good time to notice what's happening around you. Whenever you need help, ask your counselors, teachers, and parents for their advice.

Oh, and don't forget to check your rowboat for leaks before you paddle out into the stream of life. Then, work with others to head in the right direction.

Suggested follow-up activities:

Ask students to reflect on the following topics and write down their thoughts. Students should sit in pairs and respond to any two subjects they can later share with their classmates. Bring all the students together in a large group to discuss their experiences and answer questions. It is recommended that you use these and other topics that are appropriate for your students. Above all, show your enthusiasm for this activity that focuses on self-discovery, and your enthusiasm will spread to your students.

1. My three best personal qualities or characteristics:
 2. My top three likes, hobbies, and fun activities:
 3. My top three dislikes and activities I really don't enjoy:
 4. My top three abilities, things I do very well:
 5. I think the following three things are very important in life:
 6. I think the following three things are very important in a job:
 7. When I grow up, I think I would like to do any of the following three jobs:
 8. To be a good student, I think I need to improve in the following three areas:
 9. I think the following three things would make the world a better place:
 10. I think the following three things would make me happy in life:
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