

Are you YOU examples  
( Read to your class)

**Susan Carter**

*Although this story is based on real life, the name has been changed to avoid embarrassing anyone.*

Susan attended school in a relatively poor section of a large city. When she was 10 years old, the family moved to a better neighborhood, and Susan changed schools. Although all of the city schools were supposed to cover the same material, Susan found that she had little idea what was going on in class. The students at her new school were far ahead of her, and she soon was getting Fs instead of A's and B's. On top of that Susan considered herself as a little "chunky", and so did her classmates.

Unable to keep up with the other students, she began to withdraw. Somehow she managed to pass from one grade to the next. At home, she would spend time sitting under a large tree in the backyard and daydream. "I wish I was smart," "I wish I had some talent," "I wish the other kids wouldn't make fun of my weight." But the schoolmates did make fun of her weight, and called her names. Because she had withdrawn, they made fun of the fact that she wouldn't talk to them. School was now a form of torture.

At the end of junior high, the principal called in Susan's parents. They came to his office, along with Susan and one of her teachers. The principal and the teacher delivered the following message: "We have watched Susan's lack of progress, and we believe that Susan is retarded, and will not ever go beyond where she is now! We want to put her into a special education class." Susan said nothing. She just listened and added some new labels to herself. Fortunately, that summer Susan's mother remained her biggest cheer leader, telling her that she wasn't retarded, and telling the principal that Susan would attend regular senior high school classes.

*Stop the story for a moment and ask your class for their comments on the following paragraph.*

Who had put the labels on Susan? Yes, her classmates, and maybe some of her teachers. What had Susan done with those labels? She had taken ownership of them and acted as though they were indeed factual, not just labels. Do you think the principal should have handled the situation differently? What statement stands out as totally not factual? "Susan IS retarded." Do you think Susan would have been better served if she were not there to hear the principal's statement? What do you think of Susan's mother's confidence?

*Now Continue.*

On the first day of high school, Susan met her old classmates with high hopes. Their greetings ended that. “Hi fatso”. “How’s the retard?” Susan was humiliated. At the end of the day she retreated to the girls’ room, hoping everyone she knew would have gone home before she emerged. She noticed the girls’ room had good acoustics, so on a whim, since she was alone, she did something she would do at home for escape. Her father liked opera, and listened to it frequently. Susan had memorized a number of arias, so she started to sing one of them in German.

She was enjoying herself until she heard “Swoosh”. Someone had just flushed a toilet. Someone else was here! As quickly as she could, she gathered her books, but too late. The stall opened, and a teacher stepped out and looked at Susan. “Hello. What is your name?” Susan looked down and didn’t answer. The teacher, somewhat annoyed at the lack of response said, “Look at me. What is your name?” After Susan stammered her name the teacher replied, “I want you in my office tomorrow morning to try out for the chorale.” “But I can’t....” “Don’t ever let me hear you say ‘I can’t’ again!”

Susan went into the teacher’s office in the morning and was put through her paces. Susan decided that in her other life this teacher was a marine sergeant. Finally, the teacher said, “You are going to be my lead soprano.” Susan couldn’t wait to get home and tell her parents. She actually had a talent! And sing she did. At the end of six weeks, she brought her report card home with no apologies. She made honor roll.

*Now stop a moment for some reflection with your students.*

What happened to Susan? What happened to her labels? Did they miraculously go away? No. Susan realized she was not her labels, she was just herself.

And a few years later, Susan graduated with honors, and received a college scholarship for her music. And this chubby young lady, who would not look at people and speak to them, came in third out of 1300 students as “Friendliest.”

Now look at your labels. Are they getting in your way? Can you look at them and say to yourself, “Labels are not me! I am me!”

Oh, and by the way, the next time you are tempted to stick an unkind label on someone, think how you might feel if someone did that to you. Let’s watch out for the improper use of IS, which the principal did misuse. (“Susan IS retarded”) Remember, your friend might act like a jerk sometimes, but you cannot factually say he IS a jerk. He is who he is, and changing the label does not change him.