

Voluntary and Involuntary Actions

Companion Text: I Lost My Sock, by Lin Jakary & Ryan Olson

Subject Area & Grade Level: Science, 1st Grade

Objectives

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate understanding of voluntary bodily actions
- List at least five involuntary actions or reflexes in the human body

Staging Activity

Have all students stand up and play a game of “Simon Says” until there are only a few winners standing. To play, call out physical movements that students are to make, after saying “Simon says...” A few times, skip saying “Simon says...” before you give the direction, and ask any students who move anyway to sit down. Some movements you could call out are: touch your nose, bend one knee, squat, hop on two feet, spin around once, clap twice, or sit down.

Core Activity

Have students return to their seats and ask them what all of the actions in the Simon Says game had in common. (They are all voluntary actions, but it would be surprising for students to offer this answer yet.) Take all of their suggestions, tell them you’ll give them the answer after the story, and read the story once through without stopping. Then, return to pages 9 and then 23, and ask students to describe the actions of the sock and the boy respectively. They should be able to notice that the socks are trembling in fear and the boy is shaking with anger and embarrassment. Ask students whether those actions—trembling in fear, or shaking with anger or embarrassment—are things that people do on purpose, or do they just happen. (Just happen). Explain that these actions that body takes all on its own are called “involuntary,” and that actions that people choose to do, like in the Simon Says game, are called “voluntary” actions.

Extension

Explain that reason the body does some things involuntarily, that is, without our help, is because those actions are very important to us staying alive. Voluntary actions are things that we choose to do but are not as immediately essential to staying alive. Some actions can be both voluntary and involuntary. Read through the list of bodily actions below with students, and see if they can categorize them into Voluntary, Involuntary, or Both. Explain as you go what the purpose is of any involuntary actions or reflexes.

Beating the heart
Throwing a ball
Shivering
Digesting food
Walking
Blinking eyes

Breathing
Vomiting
Repairing muscle tissue
Salivating
Brushing your teeth
Holding a pencil

Blushing
Excreting waste
Yawning
Sneezing
Swallowing
Standing

