



1. There are times when society closes their eyes to kids “with troubles” (anger issues, completely withdrawn etc). Later those kids grow up to be troubled teens and then troubled adults. What are some of the dangers of closing our eyes to troubled kids?

2. Do you know anyone who grew up in a tough neighbourhood and lived a tough life? Talk about them.

3. Do you think it's possible to rehabilitate a person who is troubled and has lived a tough life? Is it possible for a person with a prison for killing others to change?



a bully: a person who causes trouble for other people. Often the word bully is used to talk about a child in school that bothers the other children and sometimes threatens them or even beats them up.

a thug: usually refers to a tough, street-smart person who is always beating up other people. Many thugs belong to gangs and harass people for no real reason.

nerves of steel: because steel is such a hard metal and cannot be broken, a person with nerves of steel means the person doesn't get nervous, anxious or upset or show their emotions easily.

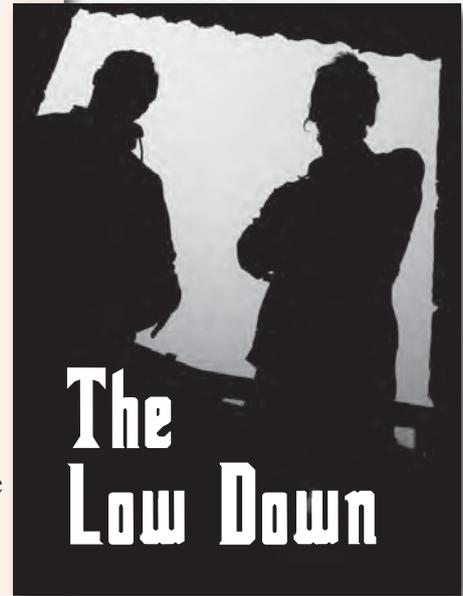
weak in the knees: this is the opposite of nerves of steel. It literally means a situation makes you feel like your legs won't hold you up any more. Getting weak in the knees can be caused by fear, by anxiety or by something physical like the sight of blood.

a cut: a percentage of the profits

Meet the Under Boss

Johnny “Sonny” Franzese was the son of an Italian immigrant baker. He grew up in one of the toughest neighbourhoods in New York. He learned how to take care of himself on the streets and soon he had the reputation for being a brutal, ruthless, bloodthirsty bully. He was just the kind of guy the Mafia was looking for to build their armies. Sonny became a “made man” at a young age and quickly worked his way up the ladder of one of the original 5 La Cosa Nostra families started in the 1930’s: the Colombo family.

People called Sonny Franzese a chameleon. Everything about him changed to match his environment. He could look like the mean, tough street thug that he started out to be or he could look like the sophisticated wealthy businessman of Manhattan. The US Army saw the psychological problems Sonny had and discharged him from the army. They said his homicidal actions were too dangerous for the army—so they released him for society to deal with instead. Sonny found his place to belong in the Mafia and, the rest is history.



1. Why is finding ‘a place to belong’ important?
2. Do you think that a person could ever really relax around someone like Sonny?
3. What do you think it would be like to be Sonny’s friend?

Friends of the Family

How you felt about Sonny depended on the relationship you had with him. Phil Steinberg was a young record producer who was being bullied by a different Mafia family. The family wanted their cut of the top selling records. Sonny always liked Phil and asked Phil if he needed help. Phil knew better than to ask for help, because if you ask for help from the mob, you pay for the rest of your life.

Sonny told Phil this was a ‘friend to friend’ situation and ‘took care’ of the problem. Phil and Sonny were good friends all their lives and Phil never felt he owed Sonny anything.

At the same time, Sonny would sit in his famous nightclub, the Orchid Room, and conduct business with some of the most

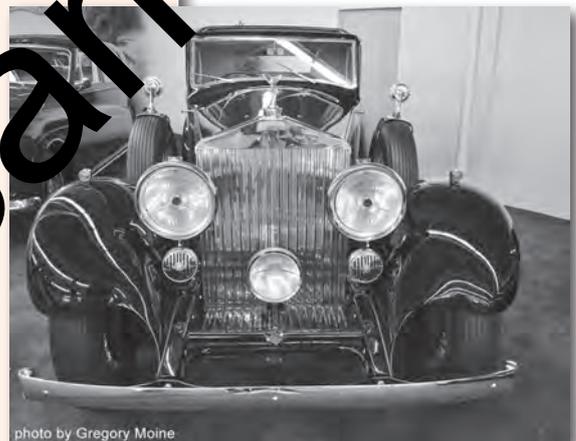
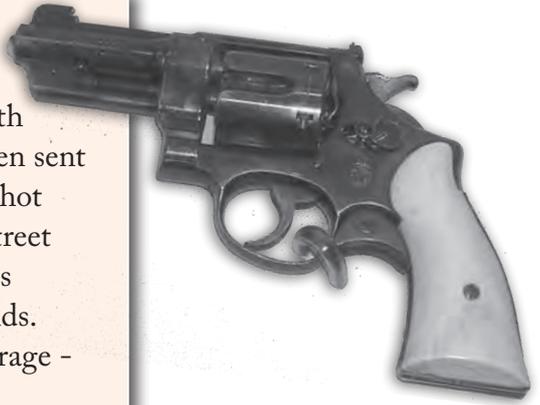


photo by Gregory Moine

violent people in town. One night he was sitting drinking with a guy and laughing. They'd been there a couple of hours when suddenly a gunshot was heard and the guy with Sonny dropped dead with his gun in his hand. He had been sent to assassinate Sonny, but Sonny was too fast for him and shot him first. He had his soldiers carry the guy out onto the street a block away. By the time the guys returned, the blood was cleaned up and Sonny was sitting drinking with new friends. People say he had nerves of steel but it was more than courage - it was a complete fearlessness.



4. Do you think it would be an advantage or disadvantage to be completely fearless? Why or why not?
5. What do you think happened to the people who were bothering Phil?
6. What do you think motivates a man like Sonny?

Sonny in Love

Sonny fell in love with a blonde German named Ann Schiller. They were married.

1. Imagine Sonny's marriage to Ann, what do you think it might have been like?

After a few years of marriage it was obvious that Ann Schiller wasn't easily controlled. Sonny was given the message "from above" that if he wanted to see his career move upwards, he would leave Ann and find a good Italian wife. Remember, he was now the Under-Boss, the next step would be to take over the Colombo family as Boss. So, Sonny left Ann, his devotion to La Cosa Nostra being even greater than his love for his wife.



Sonny met the gorgeous Christina Copabianco and had a whirlwind romance and married her one day after her 18th birthday. She had been married before and had a son Michael. Sonny brought his 3 children from his marriage with Ann into the family. Then they had 3 more children of their own.

2. Thinking about your childhood, did you have a better relationship with your mother or father? What made the relationships different from each other?
3. Has that relationship stayed the same way into adulthood? What changes if any, have occurred in your relationship with your parents?
4. If you were the son of a Mafia Boss, what do you think your home life would be like?

Meet the Dad

Sonny was a devoted father and husband. He took Michael as his own son and loved him as much as his other children. Sonny Franzese raised his kids to be sensible, honest and careful. He would tell the teenage kids terrible stories about motorcycle accidents to keep them from riding with friends or wanting their own motorcycles. He would give gruesome descriptions of successful people becoming like animals because they used drugs.

Sonny's kids grew up to be good kids. They were successful in school and never did drugs. The children fondly remember the time dad would give mom the night off and cook dinner; he would make elaborate and delicious pizzas that the kids talked about all their lives.

When Michael would ask his mom about the stories he was hearing about his father, she would get very serious and tell him, "The newspapers have it all wrong. Sonny couldn't kill anyone. When one of you kids cuts yourself, he gets weep on the knees and asks me to take care of it. The papers talk about his 'family'—we're his family. He doesn't have any other family. My husband is a gentle lover, a devoted father and a guardian angel to his friends. He's no killer."

Later Christina was feeling overwhelmed by the size of the family and asked Sonny to send the children from his first marriage to be with their mother Ann. He refused and told her that no children of his would EVER be without a home, food and security, and he would provide it.

And that was the confusing challenge for Michael; reading about his father's exploits in the papers, seeing who he was at home and hearing what his mom had to say about his father. Who was Sonny Franzese really? And would Michael "grow up to be just like his dad"?



Photo by Rick Prokosch

1. Is it possible that Christina didn't know what her husband did for a living?
2. Do you think that such a violent man could really be so gentle and loving at home?
How do you think he closed his mind to his violent nature when he was with his family?
3. If the kids were raised to be such honest citizens, what do you think their adult lives would look like?



1. What is the difference between immigrate and emigrate?
Use each one in a sentence:

2. What is a chameleon?
Why is it used to describe people?

3. Use the word reputation:

in a positive context _____

in a negative context _____

4. Use the word overwhelmed:

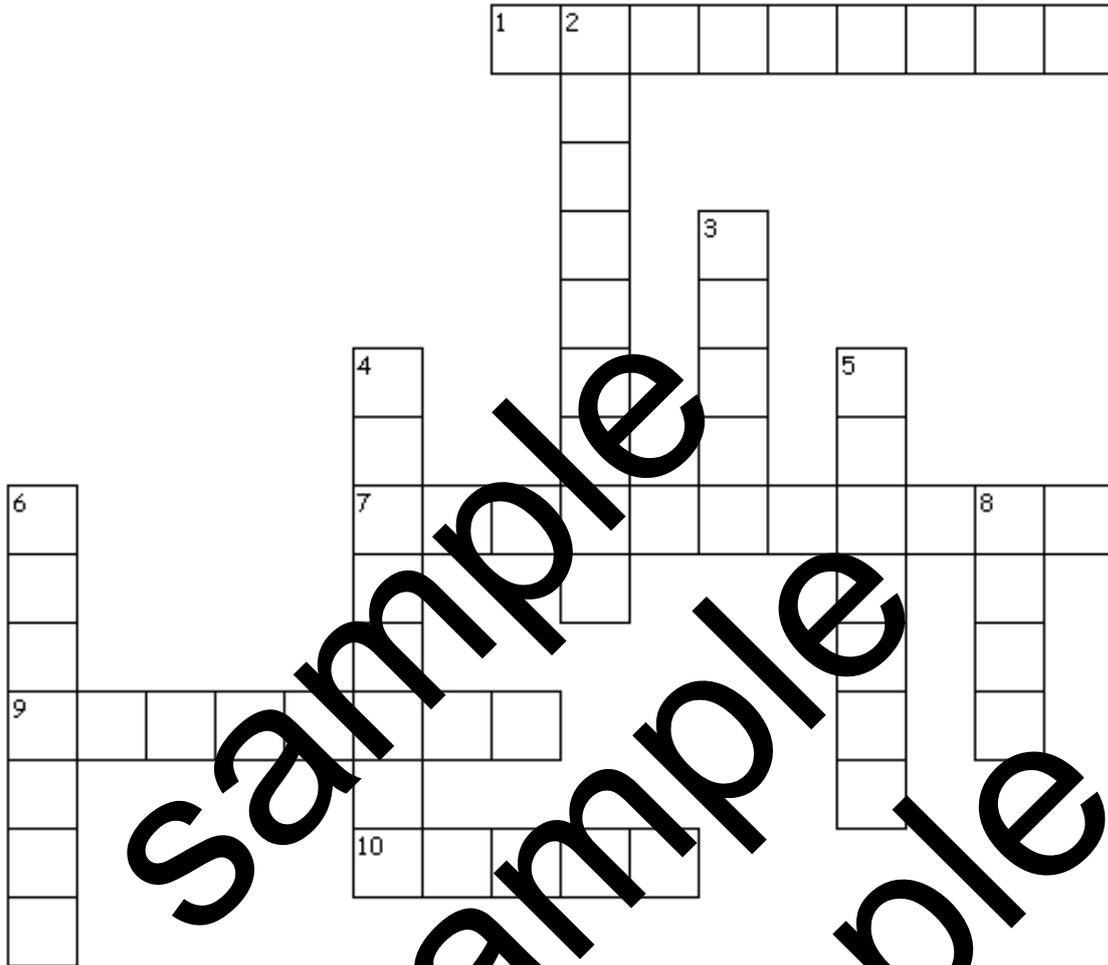
in a positive context _____

in a negative context _____

5. We often use an adjective with the word 'nature' to express the way a person behaves.
eg. Sonny had a violent nature.

Write 3 sentences describing people you know with this structure: adjective + nature.

Crossword Puzzle



Across

1. something that happens very quickly and feels like a tornado passing by
7. the act of killing a person for money
9. an adjective describing a person who will do anything to achieve their goal even if it is hurtful or damaging to others
10. when a person doesn't show worry or anxiety easily we say they have nerves of _____

Down

2. an adjective describing a person who wants to kill people
3. if a person cannot handle a situation or stress very well we say they are weak in this place
4. an adjective describing a person who isn't afraid of anything
5. the sound you hear when a gun is fired
6. the opposite of fear
8. a person who behaves like a bully

Sample
Sample
Sample
Three



the cops: the police

the feds: the FBI

a brawl: a fistfight usually involving more than 2 people

Off the Record

1. Can you remember your first encounter with a police officer? Was it a positive one or a negative one?
2. What were you taught about the police as you were growing up (by parents, at school, by friends)?
3. Have you ever had a negative encounter with the police?



Michael Meets the Cops

Michael Franzese's first memory of the police was not positive. It was 1961 when Michael was only 10 years old. He was playing catch with a friend and the ball got away from him. He chased it down the street and found it under the shoe of very big man with an old looking face. The frightening looking man opened his coat and flashed his badge and then pulled his gun out of its holster. "See this gun?" he said, pushing it into Michael's face, "This is your father. Bang! Bang! He's dead!"

And that was his first encounter with the feds.

Michael was paralyzed with fear, fear of the large man with the gun, fear that his father might be killed and fear that someone else he might be killed too.

This was the beginning of Michael's hatred of anyone and everyone connected to law enforcement; cops, feds even security guards. He grew to hate them all. This growing hatred of cops also helped to cement what was already a strong father-son bond between Michael and Sonny. Michael would do anything to make sure his father was safe.



photo by Valerie Everett

1. What do you think was going through the FBI agent's mind when he put the gun into Michael's face, a 10-year-old child?
2. What would happen today if a police officer did something like that to a child?
3. Was there rivalry at your primary school? What did it look like?
4. Do you think it's healthy for kids to be competitive in school? What are the pros and cons of competition?

His Upbringing

Michael had seen his share of fights at the Catholic School he attended. It was mostly Irish kids and about 10 Italian kids. The Irish and the Italians didn't mix well and there was always some kind of brawl in the schoolyard or on the ball field. The coaches were also Irish, so that meant Michael had to work harder than everyone to be the best on the team, and he did.

His Catholic School upbringing, his success in athletics, and his desire to please his father gave Michael the solid foundation for being a straight A's, stay out of trouble obedient, good kid.



photo by Shawn Carpenter

5. What happens when kids learn to fight at a young age? Do they “grow out of it”?
6. What are the challenges of growing up trying to please people?
Is THAT something you grow out of?
Do you know any people pleasers now as an adult? What are they like?
7. Do you ever consider that you are a role model for your kids or other kids you know?
If you think about it, does knowing you're a role model change anything about your behaviour?
If yes, what?
8. Do you think it would be possible for anyone to look to a monster as a POSITIVE role model?
How?



His Role Model

It didn't matter if it was baseball, football or bouncing a rubber ball off the chimney and catching it, Sonny spent hours coaching, encouraging, challenging and teaching Michael how to play sports. One thing Michael learned to do quickly was keep score in his head because his father loved to cheat; but would admit it when Michael caught him. Even though Michael was Sonny's stepson, he always felt like the oldest and most favoured child and Sonny encouraged Michael to pursue his dreams; especially his dream of becoming a doctor.



Michael decided at a young age that he wanted to become just like his father—his role model. Sonny rarely lost his temper at home, even when all sorts of tensions were happening in his life. He went to every sporting event that Michael played in and bragged about his son to all of his “friends”, mostly made men. But there was something else that Michael admired about Sonny—his power and his bravery. Michael saw how Sonny controlled other men, even though most of them were bigger than him and how Sonny was fearless. Michael wanted that power and fearlessness for himself.

9. Does Sonny's fatherly love surprise you at all?
10. Do you think that Michael knew about his father's “darker side”?
11. Why do you think Michael wanted his father's power and fearlessness?
12. King Solomon said:
Train a child in the way he should behave, and when he is old,
he will still behave the same way. (Proverbs 22:6)

What training has Michael received up to this point in his life?

13. Looking at Michael's childhood, what is the likely outcome of his life?
(think of teen years, college years, family and old age) Be specific.



1. The word bang sounds like the noise it makes. This is called **onomatopoeia**.

Make a list of all the words you know in English that have onomatopoeia.

2. The word bond has more than one meaning: check all the meanings you think apply.

- a) a connection between two or more people
- b) a substance like glue that holds things together
- c) 007
- d) a legal agreement that a person or organization agrees to pay an agreed sum of money at a specified time
- e) the money you pay, also known as “bail”, to get someone out of jail
- f) a British cookie
- g) a guarantee of character and responsibility of a worker in a job dealing with money, or children

3. Which of the following sentences do **NOT** make sense?

- a) She flashed him a smile.
- b) The camera flashed and the cat ran away.
- c) The information flashed across the screen so quickly that I missed it.
- d) The sun flashed very brightly.
- e) The lamp in my room flashed in my eyes.
- f) The undercover security guard flashed his identification when he entered the room.
- g) Her life flashed before her eyes.

4. What does the word model mean? (a general definition)

5. List 6 things that people brag about? What do you brag about?

6. What is another way to write this sentence: He had a very strict upbringing.
Describe your upbringing.

Scramble

Unscramble the sentence below. The letters remain in the same order in the boxes.
You must put the boxes in the correct spaces. The sentence describes Michael.

D	T	LE	EL	A	Y	KE	M	C	T	H	E	U	S	T				
H	E	W	A	C	H	E	S	A	T	A	G	E	,	I	D	E		
E	L	.	R	O	A	E	J	H	A	T	H	I	S	D	T	O	U	N
R	,	N	T	E	D	E	C	L	I	O	B	M	I					

