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Emotional Mental Model Story Materials

GERNSBACHER, M. A., GOLDSMITH, H. H., & ROBERTSON, R. R. W. (1992). Do readers mentally represent fictional characters' emotional states? *Cognition & Emotion*, 6, 89-111. [[View PDF](#)]

EXPERIMENTAL Context-setting Stories and Target Sentences

BOREDOM

John, who always made good grades, had just transferred to a new school. He wished he had a hobby to occupy his time, or something to keep him busy in the afternoons until he made more friends. After all, his new school was simply not very much of a challenge. And today was no different. As he walked home, he thought about another afternoon, just sitting around watching stupid reruns on TV.

It didn't take an expert to see the boredom / curiosity written all over his face. The feeling of boredom / curiosity was almost overwhelming.

CURIOSITY

Russ had just graduated with a degree in archeology. As a graduation gift, his uncle sent him on an expedition to the Yucatan. While there, he went into the jungle to examine the ancient Mayan pyramids. In one pyramid, he noticed a rock that looked strangely like a handle. It was protruding from a smooth wall. He walked toward the rock to get a closer look.

It didn't take an expert to see the curiosity / boredom written all over his face. The feeling of curiosity / boredom was almost overwhelming.

SADNESS

Pam had just returned from her regular Tuesday visit to the nursing home. Today, there had been several problems. One elderly patient had died. Another had fallen and broken her hip. And all the faces had looked wrinkled, withered, and neglected. The sheer magnitude of the problems simply overcame Pam. A tear ran slowly down her cheek.

She couldn't remember when she'd felt this much sadness / joy. It was a moment when Pam felt real sadness / joy.

JOY

At last, the semester was over. Sara's best friends were at an impromptu party at her house. It was one of those parties where everything went just right. Everybody was laughing and having fun. Sara's best friend hugged her and said how great the party was going.

Sara couldn't remember when she'd felt this much joy / sadness.
It was a moment when Sara felt real joy / sadness.

SHY

Eric really wanted to go to the Senior Prom, but he didn't have a date. He was thinking of asking Shelly, a girl in his history class. Chances are she'd actually consider going with him, but he hadn't been able to ask her. He'd talked to her once when she asked him if she could borrow a pencil. He'd been wanting to say something else to her ever since, but he had little practice talking to girls - or anyone else.

He couldn't believe how shy / confident he was feeling.
In situations like this, he was extraordinarily shy / confident.

CONFIDENT

"I just know I'll get this job," Ron said, as he walked up the stairs to the interviewer's office. "How could they not hire me? I had a 3.96 GPA and was Student Body President for two years," he thought. As he opened the door and was greeted by the interviewer, he immediately extended his hand and said, "Hello, I'm Ron Miller." He then began to take control of the conversation.

He couldn't believe how confident / shy he was.
In situations like this, he was extraordinarily confident / shy.

ENVY

"Angela always gets noticed," thought Emily to herself. "She never seems to get anything but A's in school. Class after class, I see Angela answer all the questions correctly, and she always scores highest on exams. And boyfriends! Being the best student isn't enough," thought Emily. "Angela's always goes on out dates while I just stay home."

Just thinking about Angela filled Emily with envy / sympathy.
Emily's thoughts were flooded with feelings of envy / sympathy.

SYMPATHY

Jennifer called her best friend Stacie with the terrible news. Jennifer's grandmother had just died, and she was in a state of shock. She and her grandmother had been so close. Stacie listened to Jennifer's trembling voice, and said she'd come over right away. Stacie drove to Jennifer's house immediately.

Just thinking about Jennifer filled Stacie with sympathy / envy.
Stacie's thoughts were flooded with feelings of sympathy / envy.

RESTLESS

For two days now, the snowstorm had confined Jackie to her small house. She paced from room to room. First she went into the living room and picked up a book. She read two paragraphs, and then put it down. Then she tried to find something on TV. After flipping the channels for fifteen minutes, she turned it off and wandered into the kitchen. Several times she opened the refrigerator, looked around, but then closed the door.

She couldn't remember being quite this restless / content before.
"It's days like today," she thought, "when I feel so restless / content."

CONTENT

Andrea was awakened by a ray of sunshine coming in through her window. She rose and looked out to find a beautiful day. Because last week had been so productive, she knew that there was nothing urgent that needed to be done today. She made herself a cup of herbal tea, and went out onto her back porch to simply soak in the sun. She couldn't remember being quite this content before.

She couldn't remember being quite this content / restless before.
"It's days like today," she thought, "when I feel so content / restless."

AFRAID

Alice seldom left her apartment, except to go to work. She thought the city was too unpredictable. She had heard of a mugging that took place only a block from her home. But tonight she had to go out, because she had promised to go to a play that her friend was performing in. As Alice left her apartment, it was just getting dark. Alice listened closely to make sure no one was following her. She kept thinking about the recent muggings in the neighborhood.

There could be no doubt that Alice was afraid / bold.
Alice felt afraid / bold.

BOLD

Although some women had been attacked there, Hannah frequently walked through the campus at night. After all, she was as strong as most men, and she had been trained in combat in the Israeli army. So Hannah walked wherever she pleased. And as she walked tonight, she held her head high and kept her stride sure.

There could be no doubt that Hannah was bold / afraid.
Hannah felt bold / afraid.

DEPRESSED

“How many things like this can happen in one day?” Don asked himself. First, he was beaten out of a new job by a younger man. If that wasn’t enough, on the way home, he wrecked his car. Then, when he got home, he found out his wife wanted a divorce. All he could do was sit in his living room and stare into space.

He was engulfed by depression / happiness.
He didn’t think he’d ever been this depressed / happy before.

HAPPY

For Trevor, this had to be the best week of his 18-year life. Tonight he would be graduating first in his high school class. Just yesterday he received a formal acceptance letter from Harvard. And he had just hung up the phone after talking with someone very special who had said that she’d go with him to the graduation party.

He was engulfed by happiness / depression.
He didn’t think he’d ever been this happy / depressed before.

GUILT

Joe worked at the local 7-11, to get spending money while in school. One night, his best friend, Tom, came in to buy a soda. Joe needed to go back to the storage room for a second. While he was away, Tom noticed the cash register was open. Tom couldn’t resist the open drawer and quickly took a ten dollar bill. Later that week, Tom learned that Joe had been fired from the 7-11, because his cash had been low one night.

It would be weeks before Tom’s feeling of guilt / pride would subside.
Hearing that gave Tom an incredible feeling of guilt / pride.

PRIDE

Paul had always wanted his brother, Luke, to be good in baseball. So Paul had been coaching Luke after school for almost two years. In the beginning, Luke's skills were very rough. But after hours and hours of coaching, Paul could see great improvement. In fact, the improvement had been so great that at the end of the season, at the Little League Awards Banquet, Luke's name was called out to receive the Most Valuable Player Award.

It would be weeks before Paul's feeling of pride / guilt would subside. Hearing that gave Paul an incredible feeling of pride / guilt.

DISGUST

The phone rang and Stan picked it up. It was Peter calling to brag of his latest escapade. But Peter had very different values than Stan. For instance, Peter was married to a sweet woman, who was barely eighteen, and they had a new baby. Yet he still went out to bars on Friday nights and picked up other women. "I just quit my job." Peter announced while laughing. "Too bad I've already spent all of my last paycheck." "But at least I spent it on some really good drugs," Peter told Stan.

Just listening to Peter filled Stan with disgust / admiration. Stan could barely contain his feeling of disgust / admiration.

ADMIRATION

Doug and Greg had been friends since childhood, and they shared many attitudes and beliefs. On Friday, Doug met Greg for lunch. Greg had recently joined a very prestigious brokerage company. It was Greg's first "real job" out of college. "Guess what," Greg asked Doug. "I found out our company is involved in illegal trading," Greg said. "So I quit my job and turned them in," he continued. "But," Doug interjected, "it was such a high paying job. Well, it just wasn't right, and the truth is more important than one job."

Just listening to Greg filled Doug with admiration / disgust. Doug could barely contain his feeling of admiration / disgust.

CALLOUS

The man was lying face down, probably unconscious, on the busy sidewalk. Other men and women bustled by on their way to work. Mark, who was late again, almost tripped over the man. "Why doesn't someone move this guy so people can get through," Mark yelled. He jabbed the man with his foot and then continued on his way.

It was situations like this that led people to think that Mark was callous / caring .
One could only describe Mark's behavior as extremely callous / caring.

CARING

Jeff arrived at the hospital on Saturday at 7:00 am as usual. All summer he had been a volunteer, working with hospitalized children. He began the day by bringing the patients their breakfast, and he always had a small surprise on each tray. He visited with each child as they talked about their dreams and plans. Jeff listened intently, always with a smile on his face.

It was situations like this that led people to think that Jeff was caring / callous.
One could only describe Jeff's behavior as extremely caring / callous.

DESPAIR

Ken was talking to his counselor at the Office of Academic Advising. She was reviewing with him the fact that he was on scholastic probation, and how he had to make over a 2.5 to stay in school. Ken wished his grades would have come up. But he just found out that he was going to make Fs in four of his courses, and it was too late in the quarter to do anything about it. He just couldn't pull his grades up no matter what he did. Perhaps a college degree was no longer in his reach.

At this time in his life, there was surely reason for despair / hope.
Ken was filled with despair / hope.

HOPE

Life was generally hard for Rex, a transient living in Phoenix. But a few things seemed to be changing. First, he had found a pretty cheap hotel that was quiet and clean. Second, he had qualified for food stamps and was eating well for a change. Best of all, he'd done so well at his temporary construction job, that the foreman had offered him a six-month job.

At this time in his life, there was surely reason for despair / hope.
Rex was filled with hope / despair.

ANGER

Tracy now considered Patti to be an ex-friend. She had trusted Patti with her deepest, most private, secrets, and now it seemed that everyone in the dorm knew of them. Tracy confronted Patti with her suspicions. "But they were just too funny to keep secret," Patti replied. "Tracy, you probably don't realize how dorky you are," Patti went on.

The sense of gratitude / anger inside Tracy continued to grow.
To say the least, Tracy felt a lot of gratitude / anger.

GRATTITUDE

Michelle now knew the true meaning of friendship. Her roommate, Carol, had stayed in town for two days after her own exams. Carol stayed just to help Michelle. Carol had typed Michelle's history term paper, and had cleaned Michelle's apartment while Michelle studied. And tonight after Michelle's last final Carol was making dinner, because Carol knew Michelle would be too tired to cook.

The sense of gratitude / anger inside Michelle continued to grow.
To say the least, Michelle felt a lot of gratitude / anger.

NEW ADMIRATION STORY

Doug and Greg had been friends since childhood. On Monday, Doug met Greg for lunch. Greg was a volunteer firefighter, and at lunch he told Doug about his weekend. "Guess what happened," Greg asked Doug. "Yesterday, there was an apartment fire, and I had to go in after a sleeping child. It was really scary, but seeing her come out okay was worth it," Greg told Doug.

Doug could barely contain his feeling of admiration / disgust.
Just listening to Greg filled Doug with admiration / disgust.

FILLER STORIES

(NOTE: The number, e.g., 01, 03, etc, refers to the order in which the filler story occurred. These numbers go up to 48 (24 filler stories and 24 experimental stories). The code "F1" or "F0" refers to whether the filler story was one which subjects had to continue. The person's name, e.g, Carl, Julia, James, were just our labels for each filler story. And the number on the second line refers to the number of lines that were presented for each story (our computer program needed to know this!). As you'll see, though, each line is not necessarily a complete sentence.

01 F1 Carl

9

When Carl awoke, it was a beautiful Saturday morning.
He got dressed and went to the kitchen and made some sandwiches.
These he packed into a basket along with some fruit and a jug of water.
He then went to his favorite park for a relaxing day in the sun.
He thought about his plans for tonight.
He was planning to go out to dinner with his mother.
"Maybe I should take her to that new Mexican place," he thought.

03 F0 Julia

8

Julia was hiking along a river,
and she noticed a sparkling object in the water.
She waded out in the river to retrieve the object.
A log had created a natural dam, so the water moved slowly in this area.
She retrieved the object,
but it was only a shiny rock that had been catching the light.
Julia, nevertheless, took it home and added it to her collection.

05 F0 James

6

James was writing and preparing to go on a lecture tour in the East.
He liked to take advantage of his travels,
so he planned several visits with friends and acquaintances on the way.
Since spring, preparing for this trip had consumed James' time.
The schedule he had prepared would be very busy.

07 F0 Nancy

10

Nancy was visiting San Francisco for the first time.
Today she went shopping in Chinatown.
There were many little shops filled with trinkets from the Orient.
However, Nancy was not looking for souvenirs.
She wanted to find a silk scarf.
She would have preferred a blouse,
but she had only enough money for a scarf.

11 F0 Tricia

9

Tricia stood in line to get her baggage checked.
As she waited she did a mental check to make sure she had everything.
Nothing came to mind that she might have forgotten to pack.
Her flight was to leave in 30 minutes.
When her baggage was checked, she still had time to get a cup of coffee.
She sat and read the comics until her flight number was called,
and then she boarded the plane.

13 F1 Tyler

9

Today was the day Tyler was going to plant a garden.
He put on his work clothes and went out to the shed to get the tools.
The ground was all prepared so he began planting right away.
It was a small garden, but then he didn't really need a large one.
It was large enough to plant a few of his favorite vegetables.
Maybe this year he'd plant some flowers, too.

15 F0 Jamie

9

Jamie walked outside to get the mail.

She glanced at her car and noticed how dirty it was.
Someone had even written "WASH ME" in the dirt on her rear window.
Right then she decided it was time to wash her car.
Walking back into the house, she got a rag and bucket and some soap.
Outside again she hooked up the hose and began to spray down the car.

17 F1 Stephanie

7

Stephanie had decided to take a ceramics class this term.
The class met two night a week.
She had used a potter's wheel in her ninth-grade art class, so she was a step ahead of several of her classmates.
She made a vase for her roommate the first week.
Tonight she thought she would make something for herself.

19 F0 Patrick

8

Patrick was a very tall man.
He usually had a difficult time finding clothes that fit him well.
Sometimes he would find a shirt that had long enough sleeves, but then it was too big in the waist.
Once every few months, he'd take an entire day off and drive to Portland.
Portland had a large selection of specialty stores.

21 F0 Kevin

8

Driving home, Kevin saw a garage sale sign.
On a whim, he detoured from his path and followed the sign.
He found the sale easily; it was/ spread over the entire front lawn.
They were selling a motor boat and a dining room set.
There were also tables of miscellaneous items.
After browsing a while, he found nothing that he really wanted.
So, he got in his car and went home.

23 F0 Ann

11

Ann came home from work with an empty stomach.
She had been too busy that day to even eat lunch.
It was nearly 6:00, and she was starved.
Ann peered into her refrigerator and saw little to eat.
There was half a bottle of ketchup, some limp celery, and some bologna.
She stuffed a slice of bologna in her mouth.
Ann then grabbed her coat and headed out the door. McDonalds sounded good for tonight.

25 F1 Frankie

7

Frankie woke up and looked at the clock.
It was already 10:30 a.m.
He looked in the mirror and saw how messy his hair was.
His hair tended to stick up in the back every morning when he got up.
Right away Frankie decided he would take a shower.

27 F0 Shane

8

Shane was at the local hardware store, waiting in line at the check out. The saleswoman looked up at him. She said, "That comes to \$84.75. Will it be cash or charge?" Shane checked his wallet to see how/ much cash he had. There were two twenty dollar bills and a five dollar bill. He replied, "I'll pay with a check." So Shane took out his checkbook and began to write.

29 F1 Amy

7

Amy was on her way home to visit her parents. It was about a four hour drive to her parents' ranch. They had 5 horses, 4 dogs, a cat, and a rabbit. Amy thought about her mom and how she'd make a big dinner the first night. Amy hadn't realized what a good cook her mother was until she moved out.

31 F1 Roger

10

Roger's alarm clock went off at 6:15 a.m. He immediately went down to the basement to turn on the furnace. His wife was adamant about turning it off overnight. Every morning, the temperature was about 45 degrees in the house. But he had to admit, it saved a lot of money on the gas bill. Next, Roger walked to the end of the driveway and picked up the newspaper. He always took time to read the paper before work.

33 F0 Gary

6

Gary was an American student who was spending a year studying in Italy. While he was there, he bought a leather jacket and a leather briefcase. The prices there were so much lower than what he would pay at home. Not only would he end up with a good education but also a great wardrobe.

35 F1 Bob

6

Bob gave his best friend Kyle a call early Saturday morning. "Hey Kyle, how about playing frisbee at the park?" Bob asked. Kyle replied, "Well, that'll be great, Bob. See you there in 5 minutes." Bob and Kyle often went out and played sports together. Just yesterday they challenged two guys at the YMCA to a basketball game.

37 F0 Melissa

7

Melissa was a gifted photographer. She had been taking pictures since high school, when she was the yearbook photographer. Her work was now regularly on display at different art galleries in town. Most of her pictures were of people, although she also photographed historical buildings.

39 F0 Robert

9

Robert and Sandra were having a discussion about American cuisine.
“Some chefs include a number of continental dishes in their menu.”
“Their dishes include traditional Cajun concoctions,” Robert commented.
“They also include more familiar preparations, such as prime rib.”
“Others simply prefer to emphasize ethnic foods,” Sandra added,
“For example, Tex-Mex, Mesquite, and Ozark rabbit and quail.”

41 F1 Jane

9

Jane got up at 9:00 and got ready for her class.
She took time to pet her cat on the way out the door.
The walk to school was short.
She only lived five blocks away.
Of course, she paid dearly for such a prime location.
To pass the time she thought about the story assigned for today’s class.

43 F0 Cindy

7

Cindy had just finished work and was now heading toward the gym.
She set aside this time everyday to get in a work out.
The locker room was nearly empty when she entered.
Cindy changed quickly and walked down the hall to the weight room.
The weight room was also uncrowded.
“There must be a game tonight,” Cindy thought as she stretched out.

45 F1 David

8

It was Saturday and David decided he would make chocolate chip cookies.
“I hope I have all the ingredients,” he thought.
David rummaged through the cupboards and found all that he needed.
“Maybe some peanut butter would be good in them too,” he mused.
He grabbed the peanut butter and added some to the dough.
“And oatmeal...oatmeal would be good,” he thought as he threw some in.

47 F1 Steve

6

Steve and Maggie walked down the boardwalk.
There were many shops.
They opened the front door to a place that was called Ken’s Kites.
Steve and Maggie browsed for about ten minutes and then left the store.
They continued on their walk down the long boardwalk.