



LifeQuest

Meet the Cast

STANDARD EDITION

Spark & Anvil

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This book collects 5 chapter books from the LifeQuest cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register.

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This is Volume 2 of 2 of the *LifeQuest — Meet the Cast* series; each volume is a complete standalone book you can read on its own.

For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.

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Introduction

The LifeQuest cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it. Each of the 5 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive — a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing. Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.
Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever) where you can practice what they teach.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Say

*SAY — *be clear. be kind. be specific.**



At the front of a long, echoey office, a jay-tween named Say sat across a desk from a stranger and said exactly three things.

The stranger — a bookstore manager with a clipboard and tired eyes — had asked the hardest question there is. "So. Why do you want this job?"

Say felt the flutter she always felt. She let it flutter. Then she leaned in. "I want it because I've loved bookstores since I started organizing my own shelves at home. I'm good at helping people find the thing they can't quite name. And I could start in two weeks."

That was all. She sat back.

The manager blinked, then set the clipboard down. "That's the clearest answer I've heard all week. Most people talk for five minutes and I still don't know what they're saying."

"I used to be one of those people," Say said. "I built a card." She slid a small, worn note-card across the desk. On it, in her own handwriting, three words: *Clear. Kind. Specific.* "One thing you want. Why it matters, quick. And the exact ask." She tapped each word. "Clear so they hear it. Kind so they lean in. Specific so they know what to *do*."

The manager laughed and pushed the card back. "Keep it. You've clearly earned it." A pause. "Can you start Monday?"

Say kept her voice even, but under the desk, one talon did a small, delighted tap against the chair leg.



She hadn't always been able to do that. Not even close.

When Say was small, she was the kid who *wanted* things fiercely and could never once say so. She'd stand at the edge of a group, ask burning inside her, and the words would knot up into a lump too big to swallow. When a teacher finally asked what was wrong, out it would come sideways — a long apology, then a tangle, then, "never mind, it's fine, sorry." It was never fine. She'd walk home with the ask still stuck in her throat like a stone.

The worst was the day she needed to ask her art teacher for extra time on a project. She'd rehearsed it forty times. When the moment came, she blurted a rambling, breathless mess — *sorry-I-know-you're-busy-and-it's-probably-a-dumb-question-but-maybe-if-it's-not-too-much* — until the teacher, kindly confused, said, "Say, I genuinely don't know what you're asking me."

She'd gone home and cried, not because the answer was no, but because she never even got the question *out*.

Her aunt found her at the kitchen table. She didn't say *be brave* or *just speak up*. She sat down and asked, "What did you actually want?"

"More time," Say whispered. "Just two more days."

"That's it? That's the whole thing?" Her aunt smiled, gentle. "You had it the whole time. You just wrapped it in so much *sorry* that nobody could find it." She tore a scrap of paper. "Here. Write the want. Just the want." Say wrote: *two more days*. "Now — one reason, small. Now — the exact ask." Three lines. Say stared at them. It looked so simple it almost hurt.

The next morning she read it once, folded it in her pocket, and asked. Her voice shook. But the *words* came out straight, and the teacher said yes before she'd finished. Walking to class, Say felt the stone in her throat dissolve into something light and clean.



She came to LifeQuest at twelve, because a place that taught kids how to carry themselves into adulthood ought to teach the thing she'd learned at that kitchen table.

Steward, the old mentor who ran the workshops, met her at the door and asked no test question at all. He just said, "Tell me one thing you want. Right now."

Say looked at him. "I want to teach here. I'm good at helping scared kids find their words. And I'd like to start with your youngest group, if you'll have me."

Steward's eyebrows went up, slow. Then a smile spread across his weathered face. "Clear. Kind. Specific." He counted them on his fingers. "You just did the whole thing standing in my doorway." He stepped aside. "You belong here."



Say's workshop was full of kids with stones in their throats.

A boy came in one afternoon, arms crossed, jaw tight. His voice teacher kept handing him solos and he hated them, and he'd been sitting on it for a month. "I have to ask her to stop," he said, "but she'll think I'm ungrateful. So I just — don't."

Say knew that exact knot. "What do you actually want? Not the feelings around it. The want."

He thought. "To sing in the group. Not alone."

"Good. That's your *clear*. Now — one reason, quick. Why?"

"...Because alone I freeze up. In the group I'm actually good."

"That's *true* and it's *kind* — you're not blaming her, you're telling her about you." Say leaned in. "Now the *specific* ask. Not 'maybe sometime.' The exact thing."

The boy uncrossed his arms. "Could you put me back in the group numbers?"

"Say the whole thing. All three. Out loud, to me."

He took a breath. "I'd rather sing in the group than solo — I freeze up alone but I'm strong with everyone else. Could you move me back to the group numbers?"

It came out level. Clean. He looked almost startled by his own voice.

"That," Say said quietly, "is the most-portable thing you will ever learn. It's not just for voice teachers. Same three parts get you a repair from a landlord, a clearer answer from a doctor, extra help from a teacher who thinks you're doing fine." She smiled. "And notice — you never once had to be rude. Clear isn't loud. Kind gets you *further* than loud ever will."



Later, when the room had emptied, the boy came back to the door. Quieter now.

"When I said it just now," he said, "it felt — I don't know. Weird. Good-weird."

Say nodded slowly. She remembered the kitchen table, the torn scrap, the stone dissolving.

"That good-weird feeling is you being *heard*," she said. "For a lot of us, the ask lives stuck in our throat for so long we forget it's allowed out. And then one day you set it down in front of somebody — clear, kind, specific — and they actually hear it. And this warm, light, unknotted feeling floods in where the stone used to be." She looked at him, warm and certain. "You'll want it again once you've felt it. Most people go their whole lives never learning they were allowed to just — say the thing."

The boy grinned, that light-and-clean grin, and Say watched the tightness lift right off his shoulders — the same way, years ago, hers had.

Sort

*COMPARISON-SHOPPING — *line them up before you pick*. The flashy one or the first one isn't always the best value. You compare what you actually get for what you actually pay — the size, the amount, the thing you truly need — and then choose on purpose.*



At the LifeQuest workshop, where kids learned the real-world skills grown-ups use every day, Sort was a calm, methodical kid who never grabbed the first thing on the shelf. She lined choices up — side by side — and figured out which one was actually the best value before she picked.

When someone reached for the biggest box or the flashiest label, Sort would gently slow them down. "Wait — line them up first," she'd say. She'd compare what you actually *got* for what you actually *paid*: the amount inside, the thing you truly needed, the price per piece. Sometimes the flashy one won. Often it didn't. Either way, you chose on purpose, with your eyes open.



"You figured out the smaller one was actually the better deal — I never would've checked!" a young learner said.

"Most people don't, and that's exactly why it's a skill," Sort said, lining up three imaginary boxes. "I'm Sort. I keep the comparison-shopping — *line them up before you pick*." She tapped each one. "The flashy one or the first one isn't always the best value. You compare what you *get* for what you *pay* — the size, the amount, the thing you really need. Then you choose on purpose."

Steward, the workshop's warm mentor, said, "Show them how the eye gets fooled."



Sort demonstrated: she held up a big, bright package and a plain small one. "The big bright one *feels* like more," she said. "But look closer." She compared the amount inside against the price — and the plain small one was actually a better value per piece. "The label is loud. The value is quiet. You have to do the comparing yourself, because nobody selling it will do it for you."

A young learner looked uncertain. "So I should always buy the cheapest thing?"

"Not at all," Sort said warmly. "Comparing isn't a race to the cheapest. Sometimes the pricier one lasts longer, or it's the thing you actually need and the cheap one isn't. Comparing means getting *what you need* for a *fair price* — not less than you need, just because it's cheap, and not more than you need, just because it's shiny. You decide what 'best' means for *you*."



Steward asked Sort to teach the workshop before a big planning project. "Save is wonderful at budgeting the money," Steward said, "but a good budget still gets wasted if you don't compare before you spend. Will you teach them to line things up?"

Sort was glad to. When she teaches, she gives one rule: "Before you pick, line up your options side by side. Ask three things: How much do I actually get? How much does it actually cost? Is this the thing I actually need? Compare those — not the labels — and then choose. Slow looks beat fast grabs."

Save, who could budget beautifully but tended to grab and go, tried it. Lining up two options, she found the one she'd have grabbed was the worse value. "I budgeted so carefully," Save said, "and then I almost wasted it on the first thing I saw. Comparing first makes my whole budget go further." The two skills clicked together — plan the money, *then* compare before you spend it.



After the session, Sort sat lining up small pebbles in neat rows, the way she always did when her mind was at rest.

For a long time, Sort had carried a quiet worry. Comparing took *time*, and she'd watched people roll their eyes at the kid who stood in the aisle checking which option was really better. She'd wondered if being careful made her fussy or slow — if everyone else just grabbed and got on with their lives while she fretted over which was the better deal.

But sitting there lining up her pebbles, remembering Save's relief that comparing made a careful budget stretch even further, Sort felt the worry settle into a quiet, sturdy pride. Taking a moment to compare wasn't fussy — it was a way of respecting your own effort, making sure what you worked for actually got you what you needed. Everyone deserves to get fair value, and slowing down to find it was a kindness she gave herself. A warm, settled steadiness filled her, and she lined up one more pebble, content, ready to help someone choose well tomorrow.

Borrow

*BORROWING HAS A COST — *borrowed money isn't free money*. When you borrow, you pay back more than you took — that extra is interest. Borrowing can be a useful tool when you understand it: borrow on purpose, know the cost, and have a plan to pay it back. It's a number with rules, not a judgment about you.*



At the LifeQuest workshop, where kids learned the real-world skills grown-ups use, Borrow was a steady, honest kid who carried a small set of weights — because she knew a secret that surprises a lot of people: borrowed money is never quite free. When you borrow, you pay back a little more than you took.

When someone imagined borrowing was a magic way to get something for nothing, Borrow would gently set them straight. "Borrowed money comes with a cost," she'd say, adding a tiny extra weight to the pile. "That extra is called *interest*. It's the price of using money that isn't yours yet." She never made borrowing sound scary or shameful — just *real*. A tool with rules. And the way you stay in charge of a tool is by understanding it.



"So if I borrow ten, I might pay back eleven?" a young learner asked.

"Now you see it," Borrow said, nodding at the extra weight. "I'm Borrow. I keep the credit-and-debt basics — *borrowed money isn't free money*." She balanced the weights. "When you borrow, you pay back more than you took. That extra is interest. Borrowing can be a *useful* tool — but only when you borrow on purpose, know the cost, and have a plan to pay it back. It's a number with rules. It's not a judgment about you."

Steward, the workshop's warm mentor, said, "Show them how the small extra adds up."



Borrow demonstrated: she borrowed a little, paid it back quickly, and the extra weight was tiny. "Borrow small, pay back soon — small cost." Then she showed borrowing a lot and paying it back very slowly: the extra weights piled up and up. "The longer you take, the more the extra grows. That's the part that surprises people." She set the weights down gently. "Knowing this isn't scary. It's *power*. Once you can see the cost, you can decide if the borrowing is worth it."

A young learner looked worried. "Is it bad to owe money?"

"Owing money isn't bad, and it doesn't make *you* bad," Borrow said warmly and firmly. "Sometimes life means a person needs to borrow — for something important, or just to get by — and that's not a failing. What helps is understanding the rules: what you'll owe, by when, and what the cost is. Understanding keeps you steady. The worry shrinks when you can *see* the numbers instead of guessing at them."



Steward asked Borrow to teach the workshop before a money-planning project. "Save plans what they have," Steward said, "but someday they'll meet borrowing — and I'd rather they meet it understanding it than fearing it. Will you teach them the rules?"

Borrow was glad to. When she teaches, she gives one rule: "Before you borrow, ask three things: How much extra will I pay? By when do I have to pay it back? And do I have a real plan to do that? If the answers feel okay, borrowing can be a fine tool. If you can't answer them, slow down. And whenever money feels heavy, talk it through with a grown-up you trust — you don't have to carry it alone."

Save, who planned carefully but had always treated borrowing as something to fear, tried it. She worked out the cost of a small borrow and a clear payback plan. "I was so scared of the whole idea," Save said, "but seeing the actual numbers made it calm instead of scary. Now it's just a tool I understand." Fear became understanding — and understanding became steadiness.



After the session, Borrow sat balancing her small weights, letting them settle level, the way she did when she was thinking.

For a long time, Borrow had carried a heavy worry of her own. Her whole subject was the one that made people anxious — money owed, costs, the extra that piles up. She'd wondered if teaching about debt just made kids feel scared or ashamed, and whether she was the bearer of the workshop's most stressful lesson, the one nobody really wanted to hear.

But sitting there letting her weights find their balance, remembering Save's relief at turning fear into calm understanding, Borrow felt her worry settle into a warm, grounded steadiness. Her lesson wasn't the scary one — it was the one that *removed* fear, by replacing guessing with knowing. A kid who understands what borrowing costs, and who knows owing money isn't shameful, walks into the grown-up world steadier and braver than one who was just told to be afraid. That understanding was a gift, and a kind one. A calm, settled warmth filled her, and she let the weights rest level, content, ready to make the heavy subject feel light tomorrow.

Vault

*GUARD YOUR INFO — *some things stay in the vault.* Your personal information — full name, address, passwords, where you'll be — is valuable, so you keep it locked unless there's a real reason to share it. Strong, separate passwords; think before you post; know who's actually asking.*



At the LifeQuest workshop, where kids learned the real-world skills grown-ups use, Vault was a watchful, easygoing kid who carried a small locked box — and who treated her personal information the way she treated anything valuable: she kept it safe, and only took it out when there was a real reason.

When someone was about to type their full name, their address, or where they'd be on Saturday into some random box online, Vault would gently raise a hand. "Hold on — does this really need to go in the vault-out pile?" she'd ask. She wasn't scared of the world; she was just *in charge* of her own information. Some things stay locked. Some things you share. The skill is knowing which is which, and deciding on purpose instead of by accident.



"You stopped me before I typed my home address into that thing — I didn't even think about it!" a young learner said.

"Almost nobody does, and that's the whole point," Vault said, patting her little locked box. "I'm Vault. I keep the digital privacy — *some things stay in the vault.*" She tapped the lock. "Your personal info — full name, address, passwords, where you'll be — is *valuable*. So you keep it locked unless there's a real reason to share. Strong, separate passwords. Think before you post. And always know who's actually asking."

Steward, the workshop's warm mentor, said, "Show them the password trick."



Vault demonstrated: she made one easy password and used it for everything. "If someone learns this one, they have *all* my doors," she said, frowning. Then she showed strong, *separate* passwords — different keys for different locks. "Now one lost key doesn't open everything." She also showed a "who's asking?" check: a message demanding her info *right now* with lots of pressure. "Real requests don't usually rush you and scare you. Pressure is a clue to slow down and check who's really on the other side."

A young learner asked, "But isn't the internet just dangerous?"

"It's not about being afraid of everything," Vault said warmly. "Fear makes you freeze. *Being in charge* keeps you calm. Most of the internet is fine. You just keep your valuable things in the vault, use strong separate keys, and pause when something pressures you. That's not living scared — that's living *steady*. And if anything online ever makes you uneasy, tell a grown-up you trust; that's a smart move, not a babyish one."



Steward asked Vault to teach the workshop before a project that used online tools. "Spot is brilliant at catching scams," Steward said, "but the kids also just *hand out* their information without realizing it's worth guarding. Will you teach them to keep the vault locked?"

Vault was glad to. When she teaches, she gives one rule: "Before you share personal information, ask: Who's asking? Why do they need it? And is this a safe place to put it? Use strong, separate passwords so one lost key doesn't open every door. Think before you post — things online can travel further than you expect. And when something pressures you to share *right now*, that's exactly when to slow down."

Spot, who could smell a scam a mile away but overshared personal details without a thought, tried it. She caught herself about to post exactly where she'd be that weekend. "I can spot a fake prize," Spot laughed, "but I was about to tell the whole world my schedule! Guarding the info I *give away* is a different skill from spotting the tricks people *send*." Two halves of staying safe, clicking together.



After the session, Vault sat turning her small key over in her fingers, the way she did when she was thinking.

For a long time, Vault had carried a quiet worry. She taught caution, and she'd wondered if that made her the workshop's worrywart — the one who made the bright, exciting online world sound full of dangers, who told everyone to lock things up and trust no one. She didn't want to be the kid who made others afraid.

But sitting there turning her little key, remembering Spot's laughing realization, Vault felt the worry ease into a calm, warm confidence. She wasn't teaching fear — she was teaching *power*. A kid who knows what to guard and what to share, who uses strong keys and pauses under pressure, isn't scared of the online world; she's *steady* in it, free to explore because she's in charge of what's hers. That steadiness was the opposite of fear, and giving it to others was a real gift. A settled, easy warmth filled her, and she slipped her key back into her pocket, content, ready to help someone feel in charge tomorrow.

Dial

*SHARE OUT YOUR TIME — *the day is a pie; you decide the slices*. Time-management isn't cramming more in — it's choosing what each part of your time is for. Pick what matters, give it a slice, break big things into smaller pieces, and protect a little rest. You can't make more hours, but you can aim the ones you have.*



- beat-after: 4
prompt: "Dial learns that managing time isn't about cramming in more or never resting — it's about aiming your hours at what matters to YOU, rest included. When has breaking a big scary task into smaller slices made it feel possible instead of overwhelming?"



When someone reached the end of a day groaning "where did all my time GO?", Dial would pull out her dial and show them. "Time doesn't disappear," she'd say. "It gets *spent* — you just didn't decide on what." She'd help them cut the day into slices: a slice for the big thing, a slice for the small things, a slice — always — for rest. You can't make more hours. But you can *aim* the ones you have.

"You made my huge impossible day feel like it actually had room in it!" a young learner said.

"Because it did — you just couldn't see the slices yet," Dial said, turning her round dial. "I'm Dial. I keep the time-management — *the day is a pie; you decide the slices.*" She marked a few wedges. "It isn't about cramming more in. It's about choosing what each part of your time is *for*. Pick what matters, give it a slice, break big things into smaller pieces, and protect a little rest."



Steward, the workshop's warm mentor, said, "Show them the trap of the giant task."

Dial demonstrated: she put one enormous, scary task — "finish the whole project!" — into a single huge slice. "Looks impossible. So you avoid it, and the time leaks away." Then she cut that giant into smaller wedges: gather, draft, fix, done. "Same task. But now each slice is small enough to actually start." She smiled. "A big thing isn't one big slice. It's a few small ones, and you only ever have to do the next slice."



Steward asked Dial to teach the workshop before a big multi-step project. "Save shares out money," Steward said, "and you share out time — the other thing nobody ever taught them to budget. Will you teach them the slices?"



After the session, Dial sat slowly turning her round dial, watching the slices come round again, the way she did when she was thinking.

About Spark & Anvil

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- **ProofQuest** — formal proof techniques through Direct-Proof Dora and the Lemma Library
- **CuriosityQuest** — Texas geography exploration through Linger, Notice, and the Lantern in the Dark
- **QuillSpell** — spelling craft through the Word Wizard cast
- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

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