

Picture Books: Positive Values for Young Adult Readers

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INTRODUCTION

Nineteenth century public schools recognized the inculcation of moral values as their mission. The most compelling reason to educate the masses was in order to enable all to read the Bible. The Bible provided the source of both academic and religious content. A modern day character education leader, Thomas Lickona, asserts that “[d]own through history, education has had two great goals: to help people become smart and to help them become good. Acting on that belief, schools in the earliest days of our republic tackled character education head on—through discipline, the teacher’s example and the daily school curriculum” (Lickona).

These moral values were apparent in the books, daily routines of school prayer and scripture reading, and in the lessons given by the teachers. Puritan society expected schools to teach students to make ethical choices and to exhibit fair and just behavior. The home was also held accountable for the transmission of a code of ethics; students arrived in the classroom receptive to the moral lessons that were presented along with the academic studies.

Moral messages were embedded throughout the *McGuffey Readers* (Huffman). William McGuffey, in 1836, offered his ‘reader’ as a substitute for the Bible in response to disagreement among the educators of the day as to whose or which Bible to use. Bible verses, prayers, and inspirational poetry were the reading material of the era. “Books such as the *New England Primer*, *The Pilgrims Progress*, and *Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes* are examples of literature used as an instrument to transmit core values to children and adolescents in the early days of education in America” (Edgington). Children learned the standard content of reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as the importance of work ethic, courage, honesty, love, and kindness.

This component of the public school agenda was undermined by the rise of the demand for separation of church and state, along with other 20th Century expressions of individual rights and freedom without responsibility. “Public schools retreated from their once central role as moral and character educators” (Lickona). Post-modernist educational leaders and philosophers rejected the direct teaching of morals and suggested that children should be free from the traditional directive indoctrination practices. Subsequent theorists espoused a self-indulgent esteem-building approach instead of supporting the imposition of morals upon students. In the 1960s the systemic transmission of morals was effectively eliminated from public school curricula.

Social issues such as drug/alcohol abuse, suicide, assault, gang warfare and teen pregnancy gave rise to public concern that the moral climate of the nation had deteriorated. The overwhelming rates of young adult homicides, teen pregnancies and abortions, and drug/alcohol abuse were evidence of a moral dilemma. A series of teen-on-teen homicides focused national attention on the problem of character, or the lack thereof. Our nation was shocked by the incomprehensible acts of violence committed by children which occurred during the latter part of the 20th century. Parents, educators, mental health professionals, and law enforcement officials sought the reasons for this negative turn of events. Destabilized families, weakened moral authority, and the lack of moral consensus are just three of the many reasons given for the decline of character in students. Lickona summarized the causes thusly: "Evidence that this hostile moral environment is taking a toll on youth character can be found in ten troubling trends: rising youth violence; increasing dishonesty (lying, cheating, and stealing); growing disrespect for authority; peer cruelty; a resurgence of bigotry on school campuses, from preschool through higher education; a decline in the work ethic; sexual precocity; a growing self-centeredness and declining civic responsibility; an increase in self-destructive behavior; and ethical illiteracy."

Schools were expected to provide the solution. Sanchez indicated that teaching and learning certain values and virtues is recommended for the systematic development of character. Character education proponents loudly trumpeted their call for schools to again accept their role in the transmission of moral values. School reform movements encouraged the inclusion of character education as an essential component of change. Drawing upon the research of Jones, Ryan, and Bohlin in 1998, Edgington stated that "[s]urveys conducted in the last few years indicate that Americans tend to place character (values) education as the highest priority in school restructuring programs." A national poll conducted in 1997 revealed that 90% of the respondents believed that public schools should teach values (Zarra). The public schools are clearly an effective forum for the transmission of character traits. A large percentage of teachers concur with this conclusion and are convinced of the effectiveness of literature and discussion in fostering commendable character traits. "Writers of literature for children and young adults have often concerned themselves with these same purposes: catching the interest of the reader, expanding awareness and knowledge of the world, and helping the reader grow and develop into a thoughtful, caring adult" (Staley).

The results of integrating character education into the regular school curriculum are generally anecdotal. Measurable and definitive changes are difficult to pinpoint. Hall (2002) reported the results of a 1992 study of 176 schools with a values curriculum. These schools experienced a 77% drop in discipline problems and a decrease in vandalism by 68%. The schools also indicated that they experienced a significant gain in attendance (a 68% increase) and that all standardized test scores improved.

LITERATURE AND VALUES

Books have positive qualities that make them perfect tools for teaching fundamental values. “Actually, teachers in the United States have been transmitting values to children as long as there have been schools in this country. The method has been a very simple one—through literature” (Edgington). In the same article Edgington continues: “Used to transmit values in this country for well over two hundred years, literature provides an important component to education ...” (Edgington).

Moral lessons are prevalent throughout literature from Aesop to Mark Twain. While some of the morals are clearly delineated in literature such as in fables and fairy tales, other examples of moral issues are less obvious as in *A Separate Peace* (Knowles). Whether fiction or non-fiction, every genre of literature can be useful when coupled with instruction in character education. Literature enables students to explore the moral convictions expressed through fictional characters. These values can then be compared to the students’ own viewpoints.

PICTURE BOOKS: THE IDEAL GENRE

The successful integration of picture books into the curriculum at the secondary level, while not a new idea, is unique. However, I believe that the use of picture books is not the exclusive domain of the elementary school, but is also appropriate for teaching character/value education to high school students. From my interactions and observations of students at Yates High School, I have been motivated to use my experience with picture books as a means of reinforcing character education in high school curriculum. I am particularly interested in utilizing the picture book to examine the positive values that can be transmitted through literature.

A secondary purpose is to encourage the selection of quality literature for personal enjoyment and to foster the love of reading. According to Jim Trelease (1993) “the ‘pleasure’ connection is essential in creating lifetime readers and of paramount importance during the difficult teen-age years, when the greatest reading attrition is likely to take place.” I believe that students who view reading as a pleasurable activity are more likely to be competent and capable readers, have better reading comprehension, score better on standardized tests, be better writers, and have a habit that will serve them well throughout their educational careers, as well as throughout life.

In my twenty-seven years experience teaching both elementary and high school students, I have observed students with increasingly unacceptable interpersonal skills. Educators and parents alike are seeking the means and methods to exemplify positive character traits. The skills of communicating and socializing appropriately in public schools should be taught by teachers at all levels. Nowhere should these skills be more evident than in the library. As the librarian -- and an adult role model -- at Jack Yates High School, my expectations for student behavior in the library are the motivating factor

in the development of this curriculum unit. Additionally, it is my intent with this unit to use picture books as a springboard for self-reflection and social action. Students will be encouraged to verbalize their ideas, reactions, opinions, and interpretations of the characters' situations in each book. They will be urged to make connections between the text and their personal life situations. The ultimate aim is to move students to be proactive in working to improve both themselves and their circumstances.

What is a picture book?

This curriculum unit is intended to encourage the use of picture books as plausible alternatives to some of the more difficult and complex novels that are often required reading for secondary students as part of the English language arts curriculum. Whereas the chapter books and novels frequently require the reader to understand complex thoughts, invest considerable time in the actual reading, and comprehend a high level vocabulary, the shortened text and limited number of pages in a picture book allows for the completion of the entire text in a short time period.

Picture books, by definition, are brief texts written to high literary standards (Young). The typical length of a picture book is thirty-two pages, although a picture book may contain as few as twenty-four pages and as many as forty-eight pages (Young). Well-written and illustrated picture books lend themselves to all content areas and the combination of illustrations and text can enhance both comprehension and visualization. Typically, the picture book tells a fictional story employing a dual narrative, in which both pictures and the text work "interdependently to tell the story" (Young). As such, the picture book lends itself to both the visual and auditory learner in that it is "a tale told in two media, the integration of visual and verbal art" (Young). The illustrations take up much of each single page or spread across double pages. Picture books are excellent material for book talks as well as read-alouds and tend to encourage the sharing of impressions from previous exposure to similar stories.

There are several other reasons for directing young adult readers toward picture books. Picture books provide more visual content than the standard novel, making them especially appealing to the visual learner. Quoting from the work of Huck, Kathryn Carr supports the use of picture books in classes for struggling readers and second language learners, saying: "The reading and concept load is lighter than in a textbook or novel because there is less text and the illustrations carry part of the content, while offering clues to unfamiliar vocabulary" (Carr). For students who have been conditioned to interpret visual clues because of their experience with film, television, and computers, the picture book is a powerful way of securing the students' attention.

Picture books have also evolved to reflect the sometimes grim realism that is a part of students' lives today. Besides death, divorce, disability, and drugs, topics for picture books now include war, nuclear destruction, and environmental issues (Neal 291). "These books can be used to explore serious subjects, to teach themes and literary

devices or to stimulate classroom discussions” (Perez 9). “Picture books are able to cross all genre lines” (Neal et al. 290-1). Additionally, some picture books have particular value for middle and high school teachers of linguistically and culturally diverse students and developmental readers. “Reading picture books in secondary courses increases motivation, understanding of concepts, and aesthetic appreciation, and provides easier material for less able readers” (Carr). In summary picture books can be used to build background knowledge; increase sight word recognition, promote reading engagement; encourage thoughtful, independent reading; and enhance the comprehension of difficult text.

BACKGROUND

Jack Yates High School is an inner city high school of approximately 1,400 students. It is predominately African-American with a growing population of Hispanic students. Yates High School is home to the Magnet School of Communications and enrolls just under 200 students in the magnet. The school had been designated a low performing school, but in the last two years test scores have improved and the school reached “recognized” status in 2001-2002. While student achievement levels at Yates High School have continued to rise during the past two years, student behavior continues to be a problem. Academic achievement, although critical, is merely one aspect of successful students. Negative attitudes and inappropriate interactions between students and their peers, and between students and faculty are disheartening signs of the moral problems our students exhibit. Instances of graffiti, littering, violence, profanity, and disruptive behavior result in one of two consequences: in-school suspension (ISS) or suspension from school. Faculty and staff continue to seek solutions to the rising behavior problems at Yates High School. One solution has been intense scrutiny of school reform measures as a means to bring total improvement to every aspect of the school.

Yates High School has existed in Houston’s Third Ward for seventy-five years. Yates High School is uniquely situated between two major institutions of higher learning. The school is bound on the east by the University of Houston-Central Campus, and on the southwest side by Texas Southern University. In its “hey-day” Yates High School was the school of choice for Houston’s thriving, African-American middle class. The Yates High School reputation for excellence and achievement is legendary. Numerous Yates High School graduates distinguished themselves in medicine, politics, journalism, business, sports, performing arts and law. Social and socio-economic conditions have brought the school to its current state of being, but a small schools initiative (school reform) was implemented in the 2002-2003 school year. The Ninth Grade Academy holds the promise of a return to the previous status of tradition, excellence, and achievement.

Character Education as School Reform

During the summer of 2002, a team of thirteen classroom teachers and administrators from Yates High School attended the Model Schools Conference in Washington, D.C. The conference focused on character-centered classrooms. The program, entitled “Rigor and Relevancy,” is designed to facilitate student learning in the areas of interpersonal interactions, social skills, and behavioral skills, and to promote the utilization of principles of good character. The implementation phase of the program involved determining the character traits specific to the needs of our particular school. Emphasis was to be given to the character traits that were most needed within our individual setting. Once a consensus was reached on the relevant character traits, we were advised to formalize the program by giving the program a name; one that would be reflective of the school, the student body, or the objectives we were seeking to accomplish. The team chose “**R.O.A.R.**” as the acronym for the Yates’ character education program because it related to the school’s mascot, the lion. Throughout the year the students learn social skills and engage in activities designed to promote character in four broad areas: **r**espect, **o**ptimism, **a**chievement, and **r**esponsibility. This unit will provide support and reinforcement for this effort.

The Library

As I move through the halls of Yates High School and interact with students in the library, I am often taken aback by some students’ indiscriminate use of profane language, lack of respect for authority, and disregard for public property. Although some families may not engage in activities that build values, I believe that my role as the school librarian entitles me to harbor high expectations for student behavior, and that these values are a part of what the community at large embraces. The library can set the standard for the demonstration of character as students work individually or cooperatively in small groups. Within the library, students are confronted with ethical issues inherent in research and Internet use, copyright, and plagiarism, as well as behaviors that support the common good of all parties present. Students must respect the rights of others in the group, care for the equipment (furniture, computers, cameras, etc.) in order for all students to benefit from its use, and be held accountable for the materials they borrow. These are all examples of the choices that students are called upon to make and, by implication, the actions that reveal their character.

Defining Character

Little consensus can be found among advocates of character education as to the proper definition; much debate rages about the definition as well as the most appropriate approach necessary to teach character education. Additionally, advocates are unclear as to what term should be used to label the process of character education: morals, values, moral/ethical literacy, or virtues. “As indicated by the variety of terms associated with it, character education is broad in scope and difficult to define precisely” (Otten).

Aristotle defined character as habits, rather than random acts (Lickona). Edgington indicates that “character education is to help students know the good, desire the good, and ultimately to do the good.” Loehrer states, “it is the willingness to do what you know you should do.” Many modern day proponents refer to values as something to “hold,” but William J. Bennett (14) writes of “morality and virtues not as something to be possessed, but as the central part of human nature, not as something to have, but as something to be ...” For purposes of this unit, character education is defined as reflective thinking and conscious choices that lead to actions or behaviors beneficial to the individual and the community at large. This unit will utilize literature to nurture character education and to help students become both caring and responsible individuals.

Through picture books, I intend to lead students to emphasize honesty, responsibility, respect, optimism, achievement and cooperation as methods to make daily decisions. The library, symbolic of a common forum, should be the safe haven for students to come together and learn how to be better citizens. I intend to read aloud to students of all levels and discuss the meaning of community and character.

This unit is intended to seamlessly integrate positive values into the English language arts and information literacy curricula. Various instructional strategies and procedures will be utilized, supported by a strong emphasis on multimedia instruction. Additionally, students will be encouraged to search the World Wide Web for relevant sites that support the reading and character development objectives. Post-reading activities will employ technology integration through the use of digital cameras, video production, word processing, and presentation software.

CHARACTER TRAITS

In a highly pluralistic society such as America, it may be argued that there could never be a clear selection of character traits that all students should be taught. As a matter of course, schools have student codes of conduct as well as ethical standards for teachers. These codes promote civil, orderly and compassionate coexistence for all members of the school and rarely infringe upon ethnic differences or religious beliefs. “Basic moral concepts are, indeed, universal” (Hall 2002 xxx). This unit will focus on four commendable character traits: respect, responsibility, honesty, and self-discipline. Efforts to narrow the list of selected character traits to only four proved to be a far less daunting task than I first imagined. There was considerable overlap in closely related concepts of honesty and integrity; responsibility and accountability; respect and tolerance; and self-discipline and temperance. Careful consideration of the particular traits to be explored resulted in the choice of the above-mentioned four traits. These four traits appear to me to encompass other character traits such as courtesy, trustworthiness, compassion, perseverance, justice and caring. The four traits were chosen as the umbrella principles under which the other attributes may be grouped. Within the scope of this unit, other character traits may be discussed and incorporated into both the reading and post-reading activities. While it may be difficult to reach consensus on the

appropriate definitions of the chosen character traits, for purposes of this unit the following definitions will be used;

Respect – recognition of and consideration for the worth of someone or something.

Responsibility – accountability for commitments, obligations, or goals.

Honesty – to do what you say you will do; truthfulness; trustworthiness; reliability

Self-discipline – the ability to control one’s actions, behavior, or conduct

What are the learning outcomes of character education?

This unit is intended to teach students how to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Students will be presented with opportunities to critically analyze picture book texts and decide how a particular character’s actions are either appropriate or not. Students will use examples from the story to explain how the characters communicated and how this skill enhanced their successes.

Aside from the strength of character, I intend to explore both problem solving and decision-making. Both cognitive and emotional aspects of character education are necessary in order to motivate students to recognize the morally good as well as to engage in morally sound behavior. Lickona states, “Moral education that is merely intellectual misses the crucial emotional side of character, which serves as the bridge between judgment and action.” As we read and discuss each picture storybook, I will assist students in examining right and wrong, better or worse choices, and standards of behavior that contribute to personal well being and shared benefits for all. Additionally, students will explore the relevancy of the story line to their own situations and circumstances. Students will be challenged to evaluate the story characters’ motives, behaviors, and reactions. Through comparative examination of various picture book stories, students will be urged to embrace and emulate the particular desirable character traits of honesty, self-discipline, responsibility, and respect. Ultimately, the aim is to give students both the tools and the skills necessary to respond to the daily ethical issues of right and wrong.

While educating for character is a starting point, students must recognize their power to impact society by taking action. The knowledge of *what* to do must be coupled with the *willingness* to do. Thus, the culminating activity for this unit will be student-generated service projects. Students will be guided to embark upon school- and community-wide projects designed to affect positive change. Two examples may be a campus cleanup and beautification day or a “step-up day” (high school visitation/tour) for 8th grade students. The possibility exists for numerous service learning projects to develop. These projects, however, must be designed and executed by the students.

TAKS Connection

This unit is to be used in ninth and tenth grade English classes. The reading objectives at this level include the reading of literary and expository text. The specific TAKS reading objectives for ninth grade and tenth grade English language arts are:

- Objective 1:** The student will demonstrate a basic understanding of culturally diverse written texts.
- Objective 2:** The student will demonstrate an understanding of the effects of literary elements and techniques in culturally diverse written texts.
- Objective 3:** The student will demonstrate the ability to analyze and critically evaluate culturally diverse written texts and visual representations.

Objectives 1, 2, 3, will be assessed through multiple choice items based on a set of three pieces called a “triplet,” presented for the student to read (TEA).

According to TEA, the third component of the triplet is “one page pieces with minimal text.” The inclusion of a graphic, such as a chart, photograph, or graph on a state-mandated test coincides with the shift to a visually oriented society. Every page of a picture book contains some form of viewing and representing, a photo, drawing or other graphic. This aspect of the picture book will augment the students’ understanding and ability to make connections between prior knowledge and new information.

National Library Standards Connection

The American Library Association (ALA) has published national guidelines for K-12 library standards, *Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning*. The focus of the standards is on the creation of lifelong learners. Paramount to this goal is that of sustained collaboration between teachers and librarians. “Collaboration—working with others—is a key theme in building partnerships for learning” (American Association of School Librarians). This unit is designed to utilize the resources of the library and to present the connections between content related objectives and the school library program. There are nine Information Literacy Standards, divided into three major areas: Information Literacy, Independent Learning and Social Responsibility. This unit will be conducted in conjunction with the classroom teacher to support the Information Literacy Standard in the area of social responsibility:

- Standard 8: The student who contributes positively to the learning community and to society is information literate and practices ethical behavior in regard to information and information technology.

Students who understand this standard accurately can access, evaluate, and use information. They are conscientious about proper citation and careful to avoid plagiarism and copyright infringements.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

Objectives for the students are to:

1. Explore the authors' beliefs and connect literature to personal beliefs
2. Exchange ideas through discussion
3. Develop listening skills
4. Reflect upon values such as honesty, respect, responsibility self-discipline, achievement, optimism, cooperation, and caring
5. Use books as tools to explore different attitudes and opinions
6. Name specific attributes of commendable character
7. Use critical thinking processes
8. Express personal perspectives
9. Generalize commendable character traits to decision making and personal choices
10. Engage in reading for personal enjoyment
11. Identify and apply core values to daily behavior
12. Develop a personal definition of character

The unit objectives are to be integrated throughout the four weeks of the unit. I see the objectives as a unified whole rather than as segmented aims. Each objective is one aspect of a process. Students will come to recognize that they are functioning on multi-levels of their own personal development; they are multi-tasking, as it were!

TEACHING STRATEGIES

The goal of this unit is to use picture books to enhance the students' understanding of the rules for successful living. Students will explore character traits as positive approaches to setting goals and achieving personal success. I will invite students to listen, share, reflect, and generally explore both the benefits and consequences of behavior. I am especially intent upon helping students learn to appreciate the power they have to choose to embrace positive character traits.

Ideally, to effectively develop the traits in this unit, I must begin with examples of commendable traits. These examples will be taken from the selected picture books. As the librarian I have an opportunity to work with all content areas and grade levels. This unit will involve working with English classes, giving special attention to the ninth and tenth grades. Students will come to the library for a "book talk" and a read-aloud. I will introduce the book, read the entire story, and discuss the character trait shown or demonstrated by character(s) in the book.

The landmark reading research project of the Commission on Reading, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, in 1985 recommended reading aloud as the most significant strategy for building reading success. While librarians, teachers, and parents recognized the importance of reading aloud for young children, many were surprised to find that the Commission also recommended that reading aloud “should continue throughout the grades” (Trelease 1993).

Reading aloud helps develop listening, while discussion supports the thinking process. “Reading picture books aloud is an ideal strategy . . . because of the short format, in-depth treatment of topics, and visual and content appeal of the books” (Albright). The issues put forth in the selected picture books will be explored through discussion in an effort to broaden the readers’ perspectives and opinions. Students will participate in open debate, presenting evidence of their opinions from the story. Reading aloud and guided book discussions are proven successful strategies to open students’ minds to new information, opposing viewpoints, and different attitudes. The proposed curriculum unit will utilize the picture storybook, reading aloud, guided discussion and project based learning. My position as the librarian is both a natural and comfortable combination; however, this unit can easily be integrated into the content areas and will increase the enjoyment of all participants.

The post-reading technology activities will involve multimedia instruction, giving students access to the resources of the library. Students will be guided to utilize digital still and video cameras, as well as computers to address the concepts learned in project-based assignments. There are numerous ways multimedia instruction may be incorporated into this unit. Some of the major approaches will include:

1. Photo essays
2. Short films (limited to 5 minutes)
3. PowerPoint presentations
4. CD creations
5. Bumper sticker designs
6. Brochure development
7. Poster creation
8. Service learning projects
9. Reader’s theater
10. Game development

This list is not exhaustive, and students will be encouraged to devise projects that are of particular interest to them. I will attempt to avoid the typical “read a book - write a report,” approach. Having made the previous statement, I will include some writing activities. I am optimistic that they will both excite the students and incite creative alternatives.

SELECTED TITLES

Locating, reading, and selecting the specific titles proved to be an arduous task! There was definitely no shortage of titles from which to choose. Initially, I wanted only one book choice per character trait. I actually chose four to seven books per trait because so many of the possible titles appealed to me. The suggested booklist contains titles that specifically address one or more of the four character traits chosen for this unit. Although only one book per lesson will be read, several alternative titles are available.

The titles represent a broad range of topics, media/art styles, and writing styles. As I searched anthologies, book reviews, and suggested reading lists, I looked for books of a multicultural nature, varied text length, interesting subject matter, and the possibility of more than one character trait.

Honesty

- Ernest, Lisa Campbell. *When Bluebell Sang*. New York: Bradbury Press, 1989.
Himmelman, John. *Honest Tulio*. New York: Bridge Water Books, 1997.
Hutchins, Hazel. *Believing Sophie*. Illinois: Albert Whitman, 1995.
Keller, Holly. *That's Mine, Horace*. New York: Greenswillow Books, 2000.
McKissack, Patricia. *The Honest to Goodness Truth*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2000.

Respect

- Christelow, Eileen. *The Five Dog Night*. New York: Clarion Books, 1993.
Littlesugar, Amy. *Jonkonnu: A Story from the Sketchbook of Winslow Homer*. New York: Philomel Books, 1997.
Lorbiechi, Marybeth. *Sister Anne's Hands*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1998.
Whitcomb, Mary E. *Odd Velvet*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998.

Responsibility

- Van Allsburg, Chris. *Jumanji*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981.
dePaola, Tomie. *The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*. New York: O. P. Putnam's Sons, 1988.
Bunting, Eve. *Summer Wheels*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992.
Rylant, Cynthia. *Mr. Griggs Work*. New York: Orchard Books, 1989.
Schertle, Alice. *Down the Road*. New York: Browndeer Press, 1995.
Sisulu, Elinor Batezat. *The Day Gogo Went to Vote, South Africa, April 1994*. New York: Little, Brown & Co., 1997.
Ward, Lynd, *The Biggest Bear*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1952.

Self-discipline

- Aardema, Verna. *The Lonely Lioness and the Ostrich Chicks*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996.
- Daly, Niki. *Jamela's Dress*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999.
- Henkes, Kevin. *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse*. New York: Greenwillow, 1996.
- Michelson, Richard. *Grandpa's Gamble*. New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1999.
- Van Allsburg, Chris. *The Wretch of the Zephyr*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983

The suggested age range of the title was not a primary concern for me in my selection decision. The needs of another program may mandate different titles. The substitution of titles more appropriate for specific audiences is encouraged.

CONCLUSION

There are many reasons I decided to attempt this topic in the unit. The anticipated outcomes are by far the most appealing. I envision a motivated and focused student body, orderly, active classrooms, and a clean Jack Yates High School. I wish to transmit to my students a sense of power, the recognition that they make choices and decisions that have far-reaching effects, and the idea that they can transform lives—theirs as well as the lives of others. Perhaps I am overly optimistic, but I do believe that success begets success and that if this unit is successful, our students will lead the way to true school reform. While I am not certain how I came to believe that “if it is to be, it’s up to me,” I am certain that it is a personal motto that has served me well. Today’s students have unlimited choices and options, and I am dismayed that they waste the advantages that were so hard won. It is my hope that my students will connect with a way of thinking and behaving that is as relevant and applicable today as it was in the 19th and 20th centuries.

LESSON PLANS

Day 1: Respect

Overview: Unit planning must start with measuring the students’ understanding of values and/or virtues. Students will come to a personal definition of character through discussion. Small groups will brainstorm ideas for enhancing the students’ experiences at Yates High School. A formal assessment will be administered, using the Loehrer Virtue Assessment Questionnaire^{©1}. The teacher will use this as a before and after measure of the students’ level of character awareness.

Duration: 45 minutes

Materials: overhead projector, projector pens, computers, multimedia software such as Printmaster[©], FrontPage[©], Photoshop[©], etc., Loehrer Virtue Assessment Questionnaire[©], chart paper, markers, 5 - 3 x 5 index cards (write the following terms, one to a card:

Discussion Director; Time Keeper; Task Master; Recorder; and Reporter), one picture book chosen from the suggested list

Description: This activity will introduce the students to the unit. By the end of the lesson, the students will be able to express their understanding of character, specifically respect.

Activity 1: Introduce the questionnaire and allow students the time to complete it. Collect the questionnaires to be scored later and to be re-administered at the end of the unit.

Activity 2: Brainstorm with the whole group about what “character” means? Identify some of the words that describe positive “character.” Listing some undesirable character traits may help students clarify their concepts of positive character. Encourage students to think in terms of what actions indicate character. List the words on the chart paper or overhead projector.

Activity 3: As a focus before reading the story, ask the students to listen and look for the elements of character that are present in the text. Read aloud one book from the list of suggested titles on respect.

Activity 4: Randomly sort students into groups of three to five, depending upon the total class size. Assign individual tasks to the students by having students draw one card each from the 3 x 5 “task deck.” If there are only three students to a group, one or two students may do more than one task. Group tasks will be randomly assigned each class session, but the original groups will become the “work teams” for the duration of the unit. Give each group chart paper and markers. In the small groups, students will list the ways in which the character of the story demonstrated positive character.

Activity 5: Each group must decide upon one word that describes the character trait most prevalent in the story. If students disagree, one person from the group will have 30 seconds to defend their choice and to persuade the other groups to agree. Students must come to a consensus (the whole class).

Activity 6: Students will use the library computers to visit the following interactive websites and complete the activities that interest them. Students may also conduct a web search for additional sites that deal with respect.

- Thinkquest – http://www.thinkquest.org/library/IC_index.html

- CharacterCounts – <http://www.sierracanyon.com/school/character/character.html>

- Characterworks – <http://www.characterworks.com/secondary.html#anchor511335>

Activity 7: Brainstorm the many ways to show respect. Create a poster to display in the classroom or the library.

Day 2: Responsibility

Overview: The goal of this lesson is to move the students toward realizing the importance of being a responsible student. I also hope to demonstrate the importance of reciprocity in responsibility and to show students that each party must be accountable for his/her responsibilities.

Duration: 45 minutes

Materials: selected book title, tasks deck, computers, multimedia software, chart paper, markers.

Description: This lesson will introduce the second of the four character traits. The students will develop a student code of conduct that will be presented to the administration, faculty, and students.

Activity 1: This day will start with the reading of the book. To encourage focus before reading, ask the students to listen and look for the character qualities that enabled the main character to successfully resolve his/her problem.

Activity 2: The whole group will discuss the book. Students will identify and evaluate how and where the main character displayed responsibility. Again encourage students to think in terms of the behaviors and actions that demonstrated responsibility.

Activity 3: Students return to the work teams of the week before. Again, use the task deck to randomly assign group responsibilities. Give each group chart paper. Students will answer the following questions: “What are the students’ responsibilities? What are the school’s responsibilities?” Post each chart around the room. The reporter will present each group’s list. Lists will vary from group to group. See the example below:

Students	School
attend school regularly	provide a safe environment
complete assignments	ensure each classroom is appropriately staffed with trained teachers
come to school prepared	keep parents informed
bring school communications home	provide timely progress reports
pay attention in class	set high expectations

take care of school property

encourage student success

Activity 4: Students' must condense their list of the responsibilities into one: one for the students and one for the school. Students must come to a consensus on the responsibilities of students and the school. Responsibilities that appear on all lists become a part of the final document. Responsibilities that appear on one or two lists will be removed. Each group will have two minutes to discuss and justify keeping of a "questionable" responsibility. The reporter will have 30 seconds to persuade the others that the questioned responsibility is essential. The final list will become the basis for a student-derived code of conduct.

Activity 5: Students must decide how, where and when to present the code of conduct to the administration, faculty, and student body.

Activity 6: Students will design and create a resume for the main character of the story.

Activity 7: Students will write a college letter of recommendation for the main character of the story. The letter must address the character's positive traits, particularly evidence of respect and responsibility.

Activity 8: Students will use the library computers to create a product that will promote character education. Such products may include, but are not limited to posters, brochures, stickers, buttons, banners, T-shirt designs, a CD to be played during the morning announcements, etc. The finished product will be due at the end of week 4.

Activity 9: Students will visit the following websites to explore service learning projects.

- National Service Learning Clearinghouse - <http://www.servicelearning.org/>
- The Big Dummy's Guide to Service Learning - <http://www.fiu.edu/~time4chg/Library/bigdummy.html>
- What is Service Learning? - <http://www.mssa.sailorsite.net/define.html>

Activity 10: Students will think about the kind of service project they would like to do. Students must consider real needs within the school and the community. The project must involve other classes on the campus as well as some aspect of the community at large, and must be implemented within the school year.

Day 3: Honesty

Overview: This lesson is designed to explore issues of honesty and truthfulness in research as well as in society at large. Recent events surrounding political figures and large company failures will be examined.

Duration: 45 minutes

Description: This lesson will help students focus on current events and evaluate instances in their lives when they have been less than honest.

Materials: newspaper headlines, articles on the student practice of downloading music from the internet, information on copyright infringement, and plagiarism, computers, multimedia software

Activity 1: Today's lesson begins with a discussion of the issues taken from recent headlines. Have students consider the following questions:

- Is it important for some people to be honest and for some people to be dishonest? Explain.
- What are the consequences of being dishonest? Explain.
- In what ways does dishonesty affect our society? Explain
- Do you consider people who are dishonest to be responsible? Explain.
- Can you respect a person you know is dishonest? Explain.
- Have there been instances or circumstances when you believed being honest was not the best policy?

Activity 2: To provide a focus before reading the book, ask the students to think about what honesty *feels* like? Read a book from the list of selected titles.

Activity 3: In their work teams, students will reflect upon the book and answer the following questions:

- Does the character remind you of anyone or an experience you may have had? Explain.
- What reasons can you think of to explain the characters' behavior?
- What surprised, confused, or puzzled you about the character?
- How would this story be different without illustrations?

Students will continue the discussion of real life examples of when being honest may or may not have been beneficial.

Activity 4: The remainder of the time students will work to complete their multimedia projects for presentation at the next class meeting.

Activity 5: Students may continue to research and plan the service-learning project.

Day 4: Self-discipline

Overview: Students will present their multimedia projects. The Loehrer Virtue Assessment Questionnaire© will be administered at the end of the lesson. The student-directed service projects will be discussed and implementation dates will be decided upon. Invite the administration and other classes to share in the presentations.

Duration: 45 minutes

Description: The unit will culminate with this lesson. Students will make presentations for their classmates and invited guests.

Materials: computers, video projector, multimedia software, chart paper, markers, Loehrer Virtue Assessment Questionnaire©, punch and cookies

Activity 1: Begin today's lesson by reading the book. To provide a focus before reading the book, ask the students to reflect upon any changes in their own behaviors that may have occurred during the past weeks of the unit.

Activity 2: Students will perform a reader's theater version of the selected text.

Activity 3: In their work teams students will develop a chart of the "dos" and "don'ts" of character development.

Activity 4: Allow each group time to make their presentations.

Activity 5: Administer the Loehrer Virtue Assessment Questionnaire©.

Activity 6: Students and invited guests will share refreshments at the conclusion of the presentations.

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