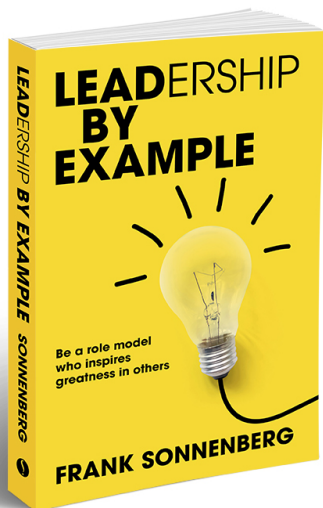


# Leadership by Example

Enjoy this excerpt from *Leadership by Example: Be a Role Model Who Inspires Greatness in Others* by our friend, Frank Sonnenberg.



## If You Believe You Can't, You Won't

What describes your way of thinking? Are you more likely to say, “Why them and not me?” or “If they can do it, so can I?” Your answer to that question will either motivate you to reach new heights or discourage you from even trying.

*When you believe that something is possible, your chances of achieving it are greatly enhanced.*

On the other hand, some people believe that success is beyond their reach and use that reasoning as an excuse not to try. Instead, they spend their valuable time pointing fingers, making excuses, and complaining that life isn't fair – because it's easy. Others are so afraid of failing that they lower expectations to shield themselves from embarrassment in case they do. Last, there are those who allow themselves to be conned into believing that people “like them” don't stand a chance. So sad!

*Your mindset determines whether you have the wind at your back or face headwinds that hold you back.*

## **The Sky Is the Limit**

We all compare ourselves to others. But the way that we compare ourselves varies wildly.

**Are you *constructive*?** Some folks say, "If they can do it, so can I." They try to emulate the behavior of successful people.

**Are you *destructive*?** Other folks say, "Why them and not me?" They let anger and resentment get the better of them. Instead of looking for ways to build themselves up, they look for ways to tear others down.

When you believe you can achieve anything you set your mind to, your faith will give you strength, hope, and confidence. You'll have confidence in your ability and remain steadfast and determined until you reach your final goal.

Conversely, when you believe that others hold an unfair advantage and that the cards are stacked against you, this belief will discourage you from making the effort. Instead of taking the bull by the horns and accepting responsibility for your destiny, you'll fail to make the personal sacrifice, put in the hard work, and make the commitment required to succeed. In fact, you may even throw in the towel before you start – and then blame others for your misfortune.

*If you fail to try, you'll succeed in failing.*

Think of the people you surround yourself with. Do they bring out the best in you or are they holding you back? Do they inspire you to achieve greatness or do they drag you down? It's one thing for *you* to decide not to try, and quite another for others to rob you of the possibility. You have the ability to achieve anything you want in life. Don't let anyone

tell you otherwise.

## **The One Who Might Be Holding You Back Is You**

You can achieve great things, but you must be willing to try. That will require hard work, sacrifice, and determination. Of course, there will be challenges and obstacles for you to overcome. But the power to achieve your goals is totally within your control. Your frame of mind can work for you or against you. Why handicap yourself and make your life more difficult than it has to be? Failing to achieve something is excusable; failing to try is not. You can blame others all you want, but the real path to success lies within yourself. Don't throw it away. The one who might be holding you back is you. If you believe you can't, you won't.

This post is excerpted from *Leadership by Example: Be a role model who inspires greatness in others* by Frank Sonnenberg © 2023 Frank Sonnenberg. All rights reserved.

# # #



**Frank Sonnenberg** is an award-winning author and a well-known advocate for moral character, personal values, and personal responsibility. He has written 10 books and has been named one of "America's Top 100 Thought Leaders." Additionally, his blog – *FrankSonnenbergOnline* – has attracted millions of readers and was recently named one of the "Top Self-Improvement and Personal Development Blogs" in the world and one of the "Best Inspirational Blogs On the Planet." Frank's newest book, *Leadership by Example: Be a role model who inspires greatness in others*, was released June 13, 2023.

---

# Character Building with the Six Pillars of Character



*This article was originally published in the February 2023 edition of **Story Monsters**.®*

For over 30 years, CHARACTER COUNTS! has worked with parents, educators, and coaches around the world to help them instill the Six Pillars of Character—trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship—in their students. These values serve as the foundation for our work, whether in kindergarten classrooms, middle schools, high school sports, or in the home.

CHARACTER COUNTS! is a values-based program because values guide our decisions, and at its core, character education is

about helping kids make good decisions. Without intentional values, human beings tend to make decisions based on what is easiest or most emotionally satisfying. In fact, one could argue that we make decisions that way because we value what is convenient and feels good. However, this isn't a good decision-making framework. If we don't want to default to impulsive values, then we must have intentional values to guide our decisions. In CHARACTER COUNTS!, we want our decisions to be trustworthy, respectful, responsible, fair, caring, and demonstrate good citizenship.

The Six Pillars of Character are not exclusive. It's OK to have other values. Nor are the Six Pillars inherently better than other values. The Six Pillars are useful because they are universal, an important factor when working with diverse stakeholders. Regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, or any other demographic factor, there are few if any people who hope their child is irresponsible.

There aren't many teachers or parents who wish they trusted their kids less. When we can align diverse stakeholders around a set of core values, then we can align our decision-making as individuals and as a collective. In other words, we can analyze whether our individual decisions and our group or organizational decisions reflect the Six Pillars.

Once the Six Pillars of Character have been identified as your values, the next step is to turn values into behaviors. Values can be vague. What is perfectly respectful to me, you might find abhorrent. We have to define what the Six Pillars actually look like for us in our specific circumstances. In some schools, responsibility might look like wearing your school uniform each day, while other schools don't have a school uniform at all. Sometimes definitions change based on age. In little league sports, fair could mean everyone plays the same amount of time. In middle school, fairness could mean everyone gets to play, but not necessarily the same amount. In high school, fairness could mean those who deserve to play the

most get to play the most. The point is, values must be defined so that we can turn stated values into operational values—what we do each day.

Many of the books featured in Story Monsters Ink provide exceptional opportunities to teach students how to use the Six Pillars to make decisions, but also define what each pillar looks like in action. For example, if a character in a book is asked to help a friend cheat on a test, how could the Six Pillars help the character determine what decision to make? Or, if a character in a story stands up for their friends, you can ask students which pillar the character is demonstrating. The same type of exercise can be done with any value you privilege in your family, school, or team.

CHARACTER COUNTS!  
is proud to partner with Story



**y**  
**Mo**  
**ns**  
**te**  
**rs**  
**In**  
**k**  
to  
br  
in  
g  
yo  
u  
mo  
re  
in  
fo  
rm  
at  
io  
n  
ab  
ou  
t  
ch  
ar  
ac  
te  
r  
de  
ve  
lo  
pm  
en  
t  
an  
d

*us  
in  
g  
re  
so  
ur  
ce  
s  
to  
te  
ac  
h  
st  
ud  
en  
ts  
cr  
it  
ic  
al  
ch  
ar  
ac  
te  
r  
co  
mp  
et  
en  
ci  
es  
. **St  
or  
y  
Mo  
ns***



*te  
rs  
,  
ho  
me  
to  
th  
e  
aw  
ar  
d-  
wi  
nn  
in  
g  
**St  
or  
y  
Mo  
ns  
te  
rs  
In  
k®**  
ma  
ga  
zi  
ne  
,  
is  
th  
e  
li  
te  
ra  
ry  
re*

so  
ur  
ce  
fo  
r  
te  
ac  
he  
rs  
an  
d  
li  
br  
ar  
ia  
ns  
an  
d  
th  
e  
ma  
rk  
et  
in  
g  
an  
d  
pr  
od  
uc  
ti  
on  
so  
lu  
ti  
on  
fo

*r  
au  
th  
or  
s  
an  
d  
pu  
bl  
is  
he  
rs  
of  
ch  
il  
dr  
en  
's  
bo  
ok  
s.*

**Story Monsters Ink** is offering all CHARACTER COUNTS! supporters a free 12-month digital subscription. Subscribe here **StoryMonstersInk.com** and use code: CC12

*Learn more about **Story Monsters**.*

---

# What is the Content of Your Character?



*This article was originally published in the January 2023 edition of **Story Monsters**.®*

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. may have stated it best when he wrote, “Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education.” That’s what we’re chasing as educators, as parents, and as a society—intelligence plus character. We want our kids to be smart and good. We want our students to maximize their intelligence and academic competencies, and we want them to be good people. Though schools and governments are always focused on intelligence and academic proficiencies, the focus on character education rises and wanes. And yet, we continue to return to this simple truth—to do our best work and be our best self requires good character.

Character isn’t simply what one does when no one is looking, as the oft-repeated saying goes. It’s also what one does when everyone is looking. In fact, our character is revealed in every action and decision. It’s what powers our performance, any performance, from practicing a sport or musical instrument to completing a group assignment or learning a new language.

After all, one is far more likely to succeed at any of those tasks if they demonstrate work ethic, discipline, a growth mindset, and other character traits.

Character also powers our relationships. Our relationships are far stronger when we are trustworthy, respectful, caring, empathetic, generous, and so on. At CHARACTER COUNTS! we work with teachers, staff, administrators, coaches, and other educators to help them teach, enforce, advocate, and model key character competencies so that their students can maximize their potential. Built on the Six Pillars of Character—trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship—CHARACTER COUNTS! helps schools and organizations create, sustain, and enhance a Six Pillar culture that shapes the character of the individuals in that culture.

Thankfully, character skills aren't fixed. No one is eternally blessed or condemned with good or bad character skills. Like dribbling a basketball, writing an essay, or solving math problems, character skills can be taught, practiced, and improved, and CHARACTER COUNTS! provides resources and professional development to aid teachers in their work to develop students' intelligence and character.

For example, pick any book for any grade level. As your student engages with the book, ask them to consider:

- What traits are the characters demonstrating, and how do those traits impact the action in the book?
- Whether the decisions the characters make are trustworthy, respectful, responsible, fair, caring, and a demonstration of good citizenship.
- If they would make a different decision than the characters. Why they would make that decision?

No one has perfect character; we're all works in progress, but

the more we examine our character, reflect on our decisions, and practice putting good character traits into action, the more opportunities for success and positive relationships are presented. Intelligence plus character—that is and should always be our goal.

CHARACTER COUNTS!  
is proud to partner with Story Monsters Ink to br



*in  
g  
yo  
u  
mo  
re  
in  
fo  
rm  
at  
io  
n  
ab  
ou  
t  
ch  
ar  
ac  
te  
r  
de  
ve  
lo  
pm  
en  
t  
an  
d  
us  
in  
g  
re  
so  
ur  
ce  
s  
to*

te  
ac  
h  
st  
ud  
en  
ts  
cr  
it  
ic  
al  
ch  
ar  
ac  
te  
r  
co  
mp  
et  
en  
ci  
es  
. **St  
or  
y  
Mo  
ns  
te  
rs**  
,  
ho  
me  
to  
th  
e  
aw



ar  
d-  
wi  
nn  
in  
g  
**St**  
**or**  
**y**  
**Mo**  
**ns**  
**te**  
**rs**  
**In**  
**k®**  
ma  
ga  
zi  
ne  
,  
is  
th  
e  
li  
te  
ra  
ry  
re  
so  
ur  
ce  
fo  
r  
te  
ac  
he  
rs

an  
d  
li  
br  
ar  
ia  
ns  
an  
d  
th  
e  
ma  
rk  
et  
in  
g  
an  
d  
pr  
od  
uc  
ti  
on  
so  
lu  
ti  
on  
fo  
r  
au  
th  
or  
s  
an  
d  
pu  
bl

is  
he  
rs  
of  
ch  
il  
dr  
en  
's  
bo  
ok  
s.

**Story Monsters Ink** is offering all CHARACTER COUNTS! supporters a free 12-month digital subscription. Subscribe here **StoryMonstersInk.com** and use code: CC12

*Learn more about **Story Monsters**.*

---

## Living the Golden Rule

\*\*

Fr  
an  
k  
So  
nn  
en  
be  
g  
ha  
s  
be



en  
a  
lo  
ng  
ti  
me  
fr  
ie  
nd  
of  
Th  
e  
Ra  
y  
Ce  
nt  
er  
an  
d  
CH  
AR  
AC  
TE  
R  
CO  
UN  
TS  
!.  
We  
'r  
e  
pr  
ou  
d  
to  
sh  
ar

e  
an  
ex  
ce  
rp  
t  
fr  
om  
hi  
s  
ne  
w  
bo  
ok  
,  
*Th  
e  
Pa  
th  
to  
a  
Me  
an  
in  
gf  
ul  
Li  
fe*  
.  
En  
jo  
y!  
\*\*

Everyone knows the Golden Rule. In fact, numerous religions espouse it, the most familiar version being, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The question is, if most

people know, and agree, with the principle, why don't more folks live by that standard? Do you abide by the Golden Rule?

*When you do nothing, nothing happens.*

If you truly want to live by this principle, the first place to start is to understand its *true* meaning and how to apply it effectively.

First, the Golden Rule should say, "Do unto others *as THEY want to be treated*" rather than "*how YOU want to be treated.*" Otherwise, you're imposing *your* preferences and values unto others.

Second, be empathetic. Don't *assume* you know what people need; you're not a mind reader. Everyone is unique; treat people according to their *individual* needs and desires.

## How to Live by the Golden Rule

There are many ways to incorporate the precepts of the Golden Rule into your daily life. Here are 30 examples:

**See the good in people.** Make people feel special.

**Be the first to give.** Give for the right reason – and that is, give for no reason at all.

**Play by the rules.** Don't cut in line. Wait your turn.

**Listen to others.** Communicate. Don't just take turns talking.

**Be unbiased.** Never judge someone you don't know.

**Keep an open mind.** Search for the truth by listening to opposing arguments and letting others challenge your views and opinions.

**Give people a chance.** As you climb the ladder of success, reach down and pull others along with you.

**Make every collaboration win-win.** Never win at the expense of a relationship.

**Be selfless.** Put others' needs ahead of your own.

**Tell it like it is.** Don't say anything behind someone's back that you wouldn't say to their face.

**Stop criticizing.** Constructive feedback is helpful; criticism is hurtful and damaging.

**Set the bar high.** Be tough but fair. Don't demand things of others that you're unwilling to do yourself.

**Work hard.** Pull your weight rather than weigh down the team.

**Have a heart.** Stand up for those who are less fortunate.

**Be tolerant.** Don't force your views on others. You can't expect others to abandon their values any more than you would forsake your own.

**Give with an open hand.** Give with no strings attached.

**Be available.** Be a good friend in good times and bad.

**Be informed.** Listen to both sides of a debate before forming your opinion.

**Build trusting relationships.** Earn respect rather than demanding it.

**Be compassionate.** Help people get back on their feet. But don't make them dependent on your good graces.

**Be even-handed.** Consider whether fairness would still apply if the tables were turned.

**Forgive and forget.** Let it go. Seeking retaliation rather than forgiveness traps you in the anger.

**Share the credit.** Deflect recognition rather than hoarding it.

**Hold out hope.** Lend an ear or a shoulder to cry on.

**Accept “no” for an answer.** Respect people’s priorities rather than making everything about you.

**Be willing to sacrifice.** Raise your own hand rather than volunteering others.

**Offer your unconditional love.** Accept people for who they are, *not* for who you want them to be.

**Earn your keep.** You *don’t* get what you want; you get what you deserve.

**Give up control.** Put your faith in people rather than micromanaging them.

**Be grateful.** Show your appreciation and never take anything for granted.

### **The Golden Rule – Make It a Reality**

The only thing required to live the Golden Rule is the will and desire to shift your focus from yourself to others – selfish to selfless. In doing so, it’s not only beneficial to others, it’ll benefit you in ways you’d never imagine. But a good intention is like an idea that you keep to yourself. If you don’t do something with it, it’s like it never existed.

*The Golden Rule is not just a nicety; it’s a way of life.*

Make the effort today, and then again tomorrow. As Edwin Markham, the American poet, said, “We have committed the Golden Rule to memory; let us now commit it to life.” The fact is, success is a game of inches. When you do something well day in, and day out, the cumulative impact is huge. Before you know it, you’re living the Golden Rule.

Excerpted from *The Path to a Meaningful Life* by Frank Sonnenberg.





***Frank  
Sonnenberg  
is  
an  
award-  
winning  
author  
and  
a  
well-  
known  
advocate  
for  
mo-  
ra***

l  
ch  
ar  
ac  
te  
r,  
pe  
rs  
on  
al  
va  
lu  
es  
,  
an  
d  
pe  
rs  
on  
al  
re  
sp  
on  
si  
bi  
li  
ty  
. He  
ha  
s  
wr  
it  
te  
n  
ni  
ne

bo  
ok  
s  
an  
d  
ha  
s  
be  
en  
na  
me  
d  
on  
e  
of  
“A  
me  
ri  
ca  
’s  
To  
p  
10  
0  
Th  
ou  
gh  
t  
Le  
ad  
er  
s”  
an  
d  
on  
e  
of

*“A  
me  
ri  
ca  
's  
Mo  
st  
In  
fl  
ue  
nt  
ia  
l  
Sm  
al  
l  
Bu  
si  
ne  
ss  
Ex  
pe  
rt  
s.  
”*

*Fr  
an  
k  
ha  
s  
se  
rv  
ed  
on  
se  
ve  
ra*

l  
bo  
ar  
ds  
an  
d  
ha  
s  
co  
ns  
ul  
te  
d  
to  
so  
me  
of  
th  
e  
la  
rg  
es  
t  
an  
d  
mo  
st  
re  
sp  
ec  
te  
d  
co  
mp  
an  
ie  
s

*in  
th  
e  
wo  
rl  
d.  
Fr  
an  
k'  
s  
ne  
we  
st  
bo  
ok  
,  
Th  
e  
Pa  
th  
to  
a  
Me  
an  
in  
gf  
ul  
Li  
fe  
,  
wa  
s  
re  
le  
as  
ed  
Ju*

Additionally, his blog – FrankSonnenbergOnline – has attracted millions of readers on the Internet. It was recently named one of the “Top Self-Improvement and Personal Development Blogs” in the world, and it continues to be named among the “Best 21st Century Leadership Blogs,” the “Top 100 Socially-Shared Leadership Blogs,” and the “Best Inspirational Blogs On the Planet.”

---

## True Friends (Grades 6-12)



**Overview:** This lesson asks students to consider their current friendships. Having true friends is important and learning

what healthy and trusting relationships feel like is imperative for a teen's social development.

### **Character Education Objectives:**

Students will:

- read a poem about a true friendship.
- share the elements of a true friendship.
- reflect on their own friendships to consider if they have true friends.

### **Materials:**

- Poem: Alabi , A. 2017. My True Friend. FamilyFriendPoems. FFP Inc. <https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/my-true-friend-4>
- Chart paper/markers or online wordcloud tool

### **Discussion:**

#### **Small Groups**

- Read the poem *My True Friend*.
- Ask students to highlight key words from the poem that are needed in a friendship.

#### **Whole Group**

- Ask students to share the words they highlighted in the poem.
- Write the words on chart paper or in an online wordcloud tool.

### **Reflection**

- Reflect on the words collected on the chart paper/wordcloud.
  - Do you have any friendships that are not



represented by the words we collected?

- What can you do about it?
- Think about the qualities of true friends. Do you represent the words on the chart?
- How will you change your behavior to improve or develop friendships?

## **My True Friend by Abimbola T. Alabi**

You always answer when I call  
And help me up if I should fall,  
But you never complain at all,  
My true friend.

You confront me when I am wrong  
But will never scold me for long,  
Instead, you try to keep me strong,  
My true friend.

You know the funny things to say  
To make me laugh my fears away.  
Like the sun, you brighten my day,  
My true friend.

You see in me gifts I deny  
And urge me to give things a try.  
You spread for me my wings to fly,  
My true friend.

You always perceive what I need  
And offer it before I plead.  
Just like a book, my mind you read,  
My true friend.

You value little things I do  
But won't brag of what you do too.  
How can I ever repay you,  
My true friend?

And greatest of all I have found  
When times are tough and I'm down,  
You are the one who sticks around,  
My true friend.

Source: <https://www.familyfriendpoems.com/poem/my-true-friend-4>

---

## Finding Common Ground (Grades K-5)



**Overview:** Students will explore the benefits of finding common ground with others in their community. This lesson promotes good citizenship.

**Character Education Objectives:**

Students will:

- experience finding common ground with others.
- discuss how collaboration and community are impacted by citizens finding things in common.
- journal about how they can connect with others in their communities.

### Directions:

- Identify an area to play this game. Specify where “out” will be (to keep group together even though they are out).
- On a signal, have everyone walk around and mingle saying, “mingle, mingle, mingle”—until the leader shouts a number.
- When the number is announced, everyone must get into a group of people of that number. For example, if the leader says “3” then students should be getting in groups of 3.
- Anyone not in a group is “out”. All members of any group having more or less than the specified number are “out”.
- After playing one round, the leader will call out a new number and add the following characteristics as the number is called:
  - People:
    - of the same age
    - in the same grade
    - who live in the same city
    - with the same shoe size
    - with the same eye color
    - who love to eat the same food
    - who like the same kind of ice cream
- Keep playing until you get down to one or two people and then discuss.

### Discussion Prompts:

- Ask students:
  - Was harder to find a group after you started grouping by things in addition to than numbers.
  - Did you learn things you have in common?
  - Did you feel more like you belonged when you learned about what you have in common with other students?
  - How did it feel when you couldn't find something in common and were out of the game?
  - Do you think it is possible to have nothing in common with someone?
  - When working in a group, is it easier when you have something in common?

### Journal:

- Encourage students to journal about how they can find common ground with others. Ask students to think how they can find things in common with others in their school, home, teams, clubs, neighborhoods, etc. Ask students to think about questions they could ask if they are having a hard time finding something in common.

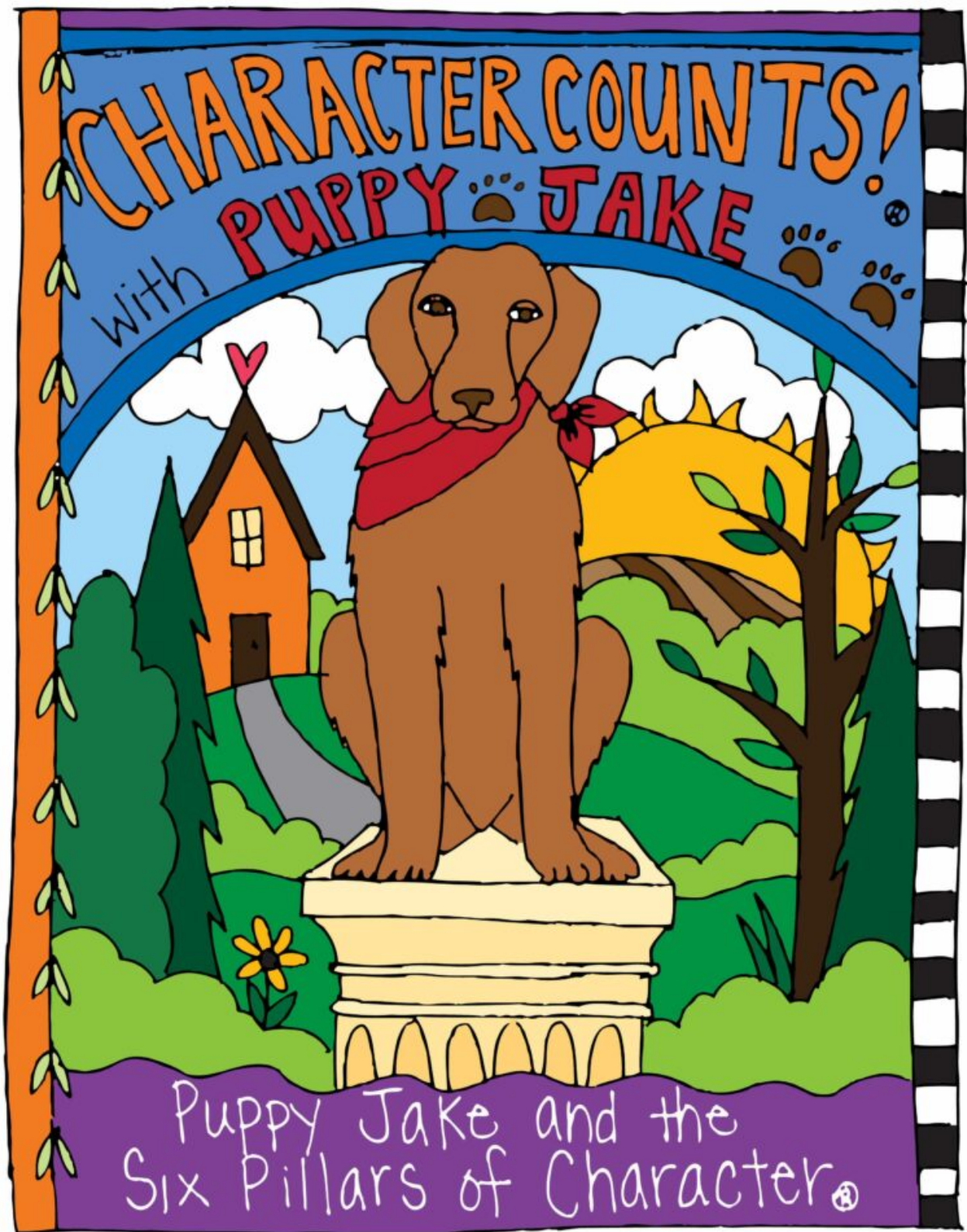
Citizenship is one of the Six Pillars of Character. [Click here](#) to learn about the Six Pillars of Character.

---

# CHARACTER COUNTS! Coloring Book

Download our CHARACTER COUNTS! with Puppy Jake coloring book.





Special thanks to our friends at the Puppy Jake Foundation and Sticks.

---

# A Dave Kinnoin concert

Chances are if you've enjoyed songs by Mickey Mouse, Kermit the Frog, Winnie the Pooh, Big Bird, Ariel, Jasmine, Belle, Sebastian the Crab, and Larry the Cucumber, you know Dave Kinnoin. Dave has written songs for some of the most beloved characters in movies and on television.

In addition to writing for his character friends, Dave has released eight solo albums. He is half of the acclaimed songwriting/recording duo Randy & Dave, who have won numerous awards and landed on many Top 10 lists. He is also the brains behind the group Grin Brigade.

Dave is well-known for his acts of kindness and generosity. As a volunteer, he builds structures in Mexico, Haiti, and elsewhere for struggling families and communities with OneSmallHouse.org and writes songs for sick children with SongsOfLove.org.

Enjoy this special concert from Dave.

Dave has been involved with CHARACTER COUNTS! for 10 years. He performs assemblies, wrote the CHARACTER COUNTS! Week theme song and jingles, and produced the CD *CHARACTER COUNTS! Strikes a Chord*.

---

## #FeelGoodFriday

Brighten up your day with these great #FeelGoodFriday stories!

---

# #FeelGoodFriday

Start the weekend off right with these #FeelGoodFriday stories!