

Character Building with the Six Pillars of Character



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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.

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*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.

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

Social-Emotional Learning
Funded by ESSER



Social-Emotional Learning and Character Education can be funded by ESSER! An intentional focus on social-emotional learning and character skills has never been more important. Fortunately, the **Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund (I and II)** provides funding for COVID-19 relief projects. This can include professional development, curricular resources, assessment, and support services for students' social-emotional needs.

Professional Development

Our professional development workshops:

- teach strategies on creating a positive school culture,
- provide best practices on how to teach, enforce, advocate, and model social-emotional skills,
- and help educators create a plan to provide sustainable SEL services.

Curricular Resources

We have a variety of curricular resources to help you intentionally and consistently focus on character and SEL

skills. Additionally, you can buy many of our digital materials as a perpetual license. Your school can use ESSER money on a one-time purchase that you can utilize long after ESSER funding runs out.

Assessments

Schools use culture and climate assessments to identify parts of their culture that may need attention. When taken annually, these surveys can illustrate how your social-emotional interventions are positively impacting school culture. Importantly, since you can use ESSER funds through September 2023, schools can gather two years of valuable data.

Get Started

We're dedicated to helping educators intentionally and consistently teach these important skills. For more information on using ESSER funds for CHARACTER COUNTS!, please contact Jason Lamping at Jason.lamping@drake.edu.

More information about ESSER:

- U.S. Department of Education Makes Available \$36 Billion in American Rescue Plan Funds to Support Students and Institutions

Support for afterschool and summer programs:

- Afterschool Alliance: COVID-19

Funding by state:

- Department of Education Announces American Rescue Plan Funds

T.E.A.M.

CHARACTER COUNTS! is designed to work in partnership with students, parents and faculty to make your school a great place to learn. The acronym T.E.A.M (T-Teach, E-Enforce, A-Advocate, M- Model) is a process for you to use in the implementation of CHARACTER COUNTS!

Tips for Educators: An Introduction to Caring

Teachers care about the relational aspect of teaching. They take time to establish a trusting and caring connection with students, who in turn become more receptive to what's being taught. Caring is at the heart of our character and will help in creating a positive school climate. Here are our tips for educators: an introduction to caring:

Questions to ask:

- What are your thoughts on teaching caring, kindness and empathy in the classroom?
- In what way are our students already upholding the Pillar of caring?
- Are there examples of where we could improve in words or actions on the part of students toward the Pillar of caring? How about as a staff?
- What can we do to teach students to be more caring and kind to others?

Activities to do:

1. Write 3 classroom key beliefs around the Pillar of caring that you would like to instill in your students.
2. Write 2 key beliefs you would like to instill in students throughout the school, hallways, lunchroom, etc.
3. What instructional strategies or classroom management techniques could you use to be intentional and explicit in instilling these beliefs?
 - Positive Sticky Notes – Leave sticky notes with positive messages
 - Thank You Letter – Write (and send!) an anonymous letter to someone you respect in your school, workplace, or other community space.
 - Caring Bulletin Board – Create a bulletin board in your school and provide plenty of paper in fun shapes or designs where adults and students can write down the acts of kindness they have received or benefitted from.

Project to explore:

One of the effective ways to implement CHARACTER COUNTS! in a school is the creation of a school-wide project. As this lesson is on the Pillar of caring, a school could consider as a project a Campaign of Kindness. As a staff, brainstorm the following:

- Slogan for the campaign
- Agree upon at least four action items that would help to implement the Culture of Kindness campaign
- Assign responsibilities for staff, students and parents
- Establish a timeline with a specific target date for the Kindness project

For additional ideas, a great resource is Random Acts of Kindness – <https://www.randomactsofkindness.org>

Join our CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition to have access to more videos like this!

Digital Citizenship (Grades K-5)

Our citizenship does not stop at the physical space we occupy. Citizenship has expanded to the communities we have created online. Being a digital citizen is important for students as they complete school work and socialize in the digital space. This lesson is designed to give students tips on being a safe digital citizen.

Six Pillar Coloring Pages

Download these PDFs and get started coloring!

Trustworthiness

Respect

Responsibility

Fairness

Caring

Citizenship

Six Pillar Animal Coloring Pages

Download these PDFs and get started coloring!

Trustworthiness – Camel

Respect – Lion

Responsibility – Elephant

Fairness – Giraffe

Caring – Kangaroo

Citizenship – Bear

Building Trust (Grades K-5)

Students develop and demonstrate the character trait trustworthiness. They understand that trust is an essential ingredient in meaningful and lasting relationships as well as school and career success and they strive to earn the trust of others by demonstrating the ethical virtues of integrity, honesty, promise-keeping and loyalty.

K-5 Character Education

Lesson Plan: Gratitude

Expressing gratitude is one of the simplest ways to demonstrate caring to other individuals. Moreover, research shows that expressing gratitude has the added benefit of raising our happiness levels, making us more productive and healthier, especially if we make gratitude a habit.