

K-5 character education

Lesson: caring



Overview:

Reflecting on your own character is important to grow and stay accountable. This lesson is designed for students to reflect on the character trait of caring and the ways they display it to others. It also allows students time to discuss how they can continue to show care towards others and how they can make changes to become even more caring.

Character Education Objectives:

1. Students will reflect their own character.
2. Students will share their character traits with a partner and discuss similarities.

Materials

- Body outline for each student

Lesson:

Large Group

1. Discuss the character trait of caring with students. Ask them what caring looks like and what caring sounds like. Encourage them to think about people who they know that are caring and what they say and do.
2. You may want to write those traits down on chart paper.

Small Group/Partners

1. Give each student a body outline.
2. Encourage students to think about their own character of caring. Give them a few minutes to brainstorm how they are caring. Remind them with some of the examples they thought of in the large group.
3. Have each student describe the things that make them caring in the body outline by either writing or drawing. Encourage students to fill their entire body because it's important not only to self-reflect, but also to compliment yourself and the work you do.
4. Students will share their character body outline with a partner or small group.

Discussion Questions

- How do you and your partner/group members show caring the same way?
- How do you and your partner/group show caring in different ways?
- When is it hard to be caring?
- What do you do when
- How can you show caring more often or in a better way?

Journal

Encourage students to journal one thing they will commit to in order to become more caring. Have students be specific with their commitment, not something general like “I will be nicer” or “I will care more.”

Learn more about character education.

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.

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!

K-5 lesson: digital citizenship



Overview:

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.

Character Education Objectives:

- Students will discuss their own digital citizenship.
- Students will brainstorm ways to be a safe digital citizen.

Materials:

- Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9Htg8V3eik>
- Chart paper or space on whiteboard/chalkboard

Lesson:

Discussion Questions

- Where are you a digital citizen? YouTube? SnapChat? TikTok? Google?
- What do you do the most on the internet?
- How do you know it is to talk to someone on the internet?

Large Group

1. Explain to students that just like their neighborhood, school and family, the internet is a community as well. As a community member, they a responsibility to be a safe digital citizen.
2. Watch “5 Internet Safety Tips” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9Htg8V3eik>

Small Group

1. Break the students into five groups. Each group will be assigned a different Internet safety tip. The tips are:
 1. Don't give out personal information.
 2. Never send pictures to strangers.
 3. Keep passwords private.
 4. Don't download anything without permission.
 5. Tell an adult if you receive a mean or strange message.
2. Have the groups develop a slogan, song, rhyme or short skit for their rule. The goal is to find a way to create something catchy so students are able to retain the rules.
3. Have groups present their ideas to the large group.

Journal

Remind students that there are a lot of restrictions put on internet access at school, but in some settings (home, friend's houses) there are few restrictions. What are some other things you can do to make safe internet decisions?

Learn more about character education.

Fun ways to help kids learn

the power of kindness



From guest contributor Dr. Michele Borba

When my children were little, we played a game called the Silent Fuzzy Pass. Fuzzy was a bright orange, ragged old stuffed animal that I suppose was a bear though it's debatable. Each night, Fuzzy "mysteriously appeared" on one of my son's pillows because the receiving child had been especially caring that day-and trying to sneak it there was always challenging. I only needed to put Fuzzy out once for the game to be effective.

The very next day-and the next few weeks-the boys were on a "kindness alert," watching for a brother to say or do something nice so that they could later try to guess who Fuzzy would visit that night. All day long they would run to me with "kindness reports": "Zach was really nice. He shared his toys with me." "Jason was kind. He let me choose the game we played." The only rule was that the boys had to explain why they felt the deed was kind. Later that night they would run to their pillows to see who Fuzzy had visited. The nonrecipients would tell the honored brother why Fuzzy probably chose him by reciting the kind deeds they remembered him doing earlier. Then the discussion would turn to their telling the brother how much they liked receiving his kind gestures, and the smile on the listener's face was always priceless.

I still don't remember how our "Fuzzy visits" got started. It

probably was one of those spontaneous parenting moments when my kids' "kindness level" needed readjusting, and the idea just came. But it was amazing how such a simple little strategy could be so effective in boosting the virtue in my family. It sure taught me a few things: I learned that by really targeting kindness for a few weeks at home, my sons focused more on the behavior, and doing so helped them acquire a repertoire of kind deeds. I also learned the importance of letting my children know that their kind deeds positively affected others. Their kind gestures blossomed in our home-and it was so simple!

I've used these virtue-building lessons with my kids as well as students ever since. And it also seems that research shows that that easy little "spur of the moment" technique is one of the best ways to boost our children's kindness muscles.

The Science of Kindness

Studies firmly support the theory that by practicing small acts of kindness, people are often guided to perform more widespread acts of compassion *even though that may not have been their original intention.*

Samuel and Pearl Oliner discovered this phenomenon in their famous landmark study in Europe involving the rescuers of Jews from the Nazi persecution. Their book, *The Altruistic Personality*, is profound. In their interviews with the rescuers, a significant number said they had first planned to give only limited help, but their commitment grew once they became involved. The same phenomenon will take place with children once they recognize that their acts of kindness are appreciated. The more opportunities children have to

experience what it feels like to be the giver of kindness, the more likely they will incorporate the virtue as part of their character. *We need to make sure our children have those opportunities to extend kindness.*

3 Ways Kids Can Practice Doing Kind Deeds

What follows are a few ideas parents, teachers, and club leaders have used that encourage kids to practice doing kind deeds.

1. Create a Kindness Center Piece

A family from Toledo shared this heart centerpiece activity with me; it not only makes a charming decoration but also nurtures kindness. Gather your family together and brainstorm a list of kind deeds kids can do for just about anybody. Set one criterion: the deeds must all come “straight from the heart” and can’t be something you purchase.

Here are a few simple kindness suggestions other kids have come up with: say hello, ask how they are, offer to help, share something (anything!), give a compliment, invite them to play, listen and wait, give a pat on the back, ask someone to have lunch with you, teach a game to a friend, let the other person “go first,” write a thank you note, hug someone you love, open the door, give praise, do an errand for someone, give a high five, recycle, rake the neighbor’s leaves, wave to a stranger, bring a flower to your teacher, let them choose first, smile

Next, help your kids cut out fifteen to twenty-five colored paper heart shapes about three inches wide. On each heart, write a different kind deed. Then have kids decorate the hearts with whatever art supplies you have handy—glitter, stickers, marking pens, doilies, and paper scraps. Tape the back of each heart onto a pipe cleaner. Now place the “heart flowers” into any vase.

Every morning, invite each family member to pull a heart shape from the centerpiece. Encourage him to do the kind deed for people sometime that day. Each night at dinner, have everyone take turns describing his kindness-giving experience. Be sure to point out that people react differently to kindness and that not everyone may seem appreciative, but kind deeds are always the right thing to do.

2. Assign Secret Kindness Pals in Your Class or Home

This idea is a great way to help children learn that giving can be just as fun as receiving. Start by writing each child’s name on a paper slip; put them all in a basket, bag or other container. Each participating child then takes a turn pulling a slip; the pulled name becomes the child’s secret kindness pal. Explain that her task for the next week—a few days for younger kids—is to do a *secret* act of kindness toward her pal each day. Emphasize that the pal should not “see” the child performing the deed—that’s what makes it secret and what makes the game so intriguing.

Some of the secret deeds kids come up with are just plain wonderful. I’ve had students draw pictures, write a song, pick a flower bouquet, and string a necklace. My own kids secretly cleaned a brother’s room (a true first!), did laundry, and

even ironed a shirt (though this was definitely a time when the thought was what really counted, *not* what the shirt looked like later).

My favorite example came from a Girl Scout troop in New York. Each girl's secret buddy was a cancer patient in a pediatric ward. Each day for a month, the girls did secret kindly deeds for the children, such as leaving e-mail messages for them on the hospital computers, bringing toys, making colorful posters to wish them a happy day, baking cookies, and even making tapes of their favorite music to give. The patients adored the gestures, but the girls got even more enjoyment from doing the secret caring deeds.

When I did this activity with students, I always allowed a few minutes before dismissal to ask: "Has anybody done something nice for you? What was it? How did it make you feel? Who do you think your secret pal was today?"

The discussion always generated ideas for more secret kind gestures and also clearly let the senders know that their gestures were appreciated. Warning: the key to the activity's success is keeping the secret pal a secret-which is almost impossible for some kids (like one of my own sons -so try to keep things lighthearted even if the secrecy rule isn't strictly adhered to. Feel free to give younger kids hints for ideas they might try to keep things hush hush.

3. Make a Giving Tree Filled with Kind Deeds

One of the cutest ideas I've seen for helping kids practice kindness was done by a Boys and Girls Club in Atlanta. The

leaders first read *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein, a wonderful parable about a tree and a boy who grow old together and finally that recognize the greatest gift is giving of yourself. Next, they stood a large leafless tree branch in a pot and placed it in the middle of the room. The leaders then asked the kids to think of kind gestures they could do for someone when she looked sad or lonely like the tree. Each child's idea was written on a six-inch leaf shape precut from colored paper, then hung to the branch with a paper clip.

In a short time, their Giving Tree was covered with kind ideas, such as give a hug, smile, call her at home, ask her to play, sing a song, say a kind word, share something, ask what you can do, draw a picture. The leaders finally said, "Each day during the week when you come to the club, go to the Giving Tree, find an idea you could do for someone to make his day brighter, and then do it. It will make not only his day better, but also yours."

Parents, scout leaders, and teachers have told me they also made Giving Trees to help promote kindness with children. All you need is a small branch, plaster of paris, construction paper, scissors, paper clips, and a can. In fact, a fun family outing is taking a walk together just to find "the perfect branch."

There are dozens of simple kindness rituals you can do with children.

- **A year-round Giving Tree:** My girlfriend Cindy Morse kept her tree for years standing by her kitchen table. Every holiday, her children decorated the tree: paper bunnies for Easter, Kleenex ghosts for Halloween, American flags

for the Fourth of July, and hearts with kind deeds for Valentine's Day. It's a wonderful family tradition you might want to begin. Cindy now does the same activity with her grandkids.

- **Pull a kind deed every day Giving Tree:** My own family kept a small "Giving Tree" on our kitchen table. We'd periodically add more "kind deeds" written on small paper leaves to the tree. It was the perfect way to start. Each of us could look at one kind deed and then try to remember to do it for someone that day. A highlight of the evening dinner was talking about the kind deed and the impact it had on the individual.
- **A Giving Tree kindness wall at a school:** The Shipley School in Pennsylvania just emailed that they were started a Kindness Wall today. Every student was writing (or drawing) on a Post-it note an act of kindness they had done or seen that day. The wall was wrapping the school! What ideas are you doing with your students or children? Please share! After all, the world needs kindness and it must start with our children. Let's start kindness traditions and keep them going all year round!

Michele Borba, Ed.D. is an internationally renowned consultant, educational psychologist and recipient of the National Educator Award who has presented workshops to over a million participants worldwide. She is a recognized expert in parenting, bullying, youth violence, and character development and author of 22 books including UnSelfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About Me World, The 6Rs of Bullying Prevention: Best Proven Practices to Combat Cruelty and Build Respect, The Big Book of Parenting Solutions, and Building Moral Intelligence. She has appeared over 130 times on the TODAY show and is a frequent expert on national media including Dateline, The View, Dr. Oz, Anderson Cooper, CNN, Dr. Drew, and Dr. Phil. To book her for speaking or media even

refer to her website: www.micheleborba.com. Follow her on twitter @MicheleBorba.

Learn more about character education.

K-5 lesson: perspective taking



Overview:

Fairness is hearing all sides to a story, even when it's hard to see there is another side. This lesson is designed for students to stretch their ability to see the view of others in stories that feel like there is a good and a bad side. Students will be encouraged to think about how a story that they thought they knew looks different when you see the perspective of others.

Character Education Objectives:

Students will:

- identify the perspectives of each character.

- discuss the impact of seeing only one side of a story.
- reflect on their own experiences with fairness.

Materials:

- Choose a classic good vs bad story like *Hansel and Gretel*, *Three Little Pigs and The Big Bad Wolf*, *The Three Billy Goats Bluff*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, etc.

Lesson:

Large Group

1. Read or tell the story you chose. Pick a story where there is a good vs. bad dynamic with the characters.
2. Explain to the students that every story has two sides. To be fair, you need to hear both sides. Share with students that the story you just read only shares one side of the story. We know this because the story focuses on the one character and we know what that character does before, during and after the main events.
3. The other side of the story is the “bad guy’s” story. For example: In *Hansel and Gretel* there is only the story of the children and the witch’s story goes untold.
4. Explain to the students that they will be creating another story to show the view point of the other character in the story.

Small Group

1. You can also do this in a large group depending on the developmental level of your students.
2. Students will write and/or draw a short story that involves telling the side of the other character in the story. The story will need to include the following:
 - The main plot points of the story.
 - Why do you think the character did what they did?
 - What did this character do before the event?
 - What was the character thinking during the event?
 - How did the character feel after the main events?
 - What did the character do after the main events?
3. Have the groups share their short story out to the large group.

Discussion Questions

- When you first read the story, did you think about the side of the other character? Why or why not?
- Did writing the other character's side of the story change how you felt about the character? If so, how?
- What would happen if you didn't think about the other character's side of the story?

Journal

Think about a time where you were in a disagreement with someone. What was your side of the story? What do you think their side of the story was?

Learn more about character education.

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

K-5 lesson: respecting cultural differences



Overview:

With the holidays approaching, it is a wonderful time to remind students about the wide array of celebrations around the world. Respecting the cultural differences of one another includes becoming informed of the celebrations of others. This lesson is designed for students to learn about the traditions of others and celebrate the similarities and differences.

Character Education Objectives:

Students will:

- learn about several holidays celebrated by other cultures.
- share and learn about the traditions of other students

Materials

- Paper with Venn diagram (two overlapping circles)

Lesson: *Large Group*

1. Watch "Holidays Around the World" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Sv0ac-W8Vc>
2. Have students share out things they saw in the video that looked similar to how they celebrate, things that looked different and things they would like to try at their next family celebration.
3. Have students pair off and give each pair a Venn diagram. Explain that a Venn diagram is designed to show

how two things are the same in some aspects and different in others. This Venn diagram is going to be about how your family celebrates. Each circle includes the things you do that the other person does not do, but the middle are things you both do. For example: My family wraps presents, but my partner's family hides the presents. In my circle I would have wraps presents and my partner would put hides presents in his circle. My family makes a cake and my partner's family makes a cake, so we would put that in the middle, overlapping part of our circles because we both celebrate by making cakes.

4. Have students write their name above one circle and their partner do the same. Have students start to discuss celebrations in their families. You may need to help students along by asking some of these questions:
 - What do you eat when you celebrate?
 - Who celebrates with you?
 - When do you celebrate?
 - Do you travel or go somewhere else to celebrate?
 - Are there parades or festivals?
 - Are there presents? Who receives presents and who gives presents?
 - Do you make anything special to celebrate?
 - Do you wear a certain outfit to celebrate?
5. Have the pairs share out to the large group some ways they are similar and some ways they are unique in celebrating. After each pair, ask the large group to raise their hand if they heard any similarities to their own celebrations.

Journal

After learning about different celebrations, encourage students to think about why it is important to learn about different holidays and reflect on how best to respect the celebrations that look different than your own.

Learn more about character education.

K-5 lesson: I am responsible for my emotions



Overview: You may often hear students place blame on others for their own emotions. It is difficult for students to understand that not only do they control their own emotions, but they are responsible for their emotions. One of the best ways to be responsible for your emotions is to be aware of how you are feeling and take preventative measures. This lesson is designed for students to think about how they are feeling and how they move towards more regulated emotions.

Character Education Objectives:

Students will:

- describe their own behaviors and emotions during calm, increasing distress and distress.
- create a plan of how to safely and effectively regulate during each period.

Materials

- Stoplight handout

Lesson: (*large group*)

1. Share with students about how responsibility includes being responsible for our own emotions. Although it doesn't always feel like, we do have a choice in how we respond and we have the responsibility to regulate our emotions to keep ourselves and others safe.
2. Show students the stoplight handout. Talk about each light. Green light is your calm state. Describe what you look like, what you sound like, what you do and how you feel when you are personally calm. Yellow light is when you are escalating. Again, share your personal feelings and behaviors when you are escalating. Red is distress. Share with students how you feel and behave when you are in distress. It is important to be candid and show students that adults get to the red light occasionally, too.
3. Ask students to individually reflect on their own emotions. Encourage them to write or draw in each light how they feel and how they speak or act while in that light. It may be helpful to go light by light with students, depending on their level of comprehension.
4. Once students have completed their own stoplight, explain that life isn't always being in the green light and it is ok to be yellow or red, but part of our responsibility of our emotions is to regulate and try to bring ourselves back down to green. Also, share that often when we are in the red it is too late. Catching ourselves in yellow means we need to know what yellow looks and sounds like for us. Then, we have to use the tools we have to bring ourselves back down to green.
5. Have students brainstorm ways they can bring themselves back down to green. Share personal examples and

encourage students to think about the resources they have available to them in the classroom or the school.

Journal

Have students write down a few ways they can deescalate when they are in the yellow or green. Ask them to think about the resources they have available at school and home, as these techniques may look different in different settings.

Learn more about character education.

Return to learn: citizenship

There is, perhaps, no more important time to be a good citizen than during a global pandemic. Each of us plays a critical role in contributing to the health and well-being of others. Whether returning to the classroom or engaging in online learning, educators, administrators, students, and families have an important role to play in maintaining the health and safety of all parties, and contributing to a positive educational environment.

The Leader-to-Detractor tool serves two important purposes. First, it defines what each role – detractor, participant, and leader – looks like in action. Good citizens are able to change detractor behaviors to participant behaviors, and participant behaviors to leader behaviors. Second, one can use the tool reflectively by asking, “were my actions that of a

leader, detractor, or participant, and what do I need to do better or differently tomorrow to be a better citizen?"



Citizenship for Educators: Educators can use the Leader-to-Detractor tool to define what each role looks like in their classroom (virtual or in person). You may choose to include leader to detractor behaviors that are specific to following health guidelines as well. Share these definitions with parents so they know what your expectations are as well.

Citizenship for Students: Once students have worked with educators or parents on defining what leaders, participants, and detractors look like in action, they can engage in daily self-reflection to gauge their behaviors for the day. Students should note if there are instances in which they are more likely to be a detractor or participant and create and follow a plan to be a leader in every circumstance. Their reflection can be centered on school, home, following health guidelines, or a combination of all three.

Citizenship for Families: Families can use the Leader-to-Detractor tool to identify leader, participant, and detractor behaviors they observe each day. These may be behaviors the student exhibits, or observations of others, whether at the grocery store, at work, or in the community. Ask your student what leader to detractor behaviors they notice in others each day, and what could be done better or differently to be a leader in each situation.

Download the Leader-To-Detractor tool.

Learn more about character education.