

# 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.

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# 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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## **Move Beyond Stereotypes (Grades 6-12)**





### Overview:

This lesson explores the stories of real people to help students learn how to move beyond stereotypes. They'll learn how accepting others' authentic and unique selves demonstrates respect and fairness.

### Character Education Objectives:

#### Students will:

- how sharing our individual stories with the world helps break down unfair stereotypes.
- explore Human Library stories.
- reflect on their experiences with the Human Library story.

### Materials:

- Videos from Aumen Film Co. (2017) *The Human Library Trailer*.  
Youtube.com. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7vJgyRJ-zo>

### Opening Discussion:

- "Stereotypes lose their power when the world is found to be more complex than the stereotype would suggest. When

we learn that individuals do not fit the group stereotype, then it begins to fall apart.” – Ed Koch

- Ask students what this quote means to them?
- Share some stereotypes (teens, elderly, rich, poor). Then, ask about a stereotype students have (or used to have) about a group or individual.

### **Instruction and Activity:**

- Teach students about Human Library projects. It is a collection of real-life human stories you can “check out.” These stories aim to break stereotypes. In addition, they help people embrace fairness and togetherness through our differences.
  - Example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7vJgyRJ-Z0>
- Ask students to explore the Human Library to learn more about others. Most importantly, suggest choosing individuals whom they may normally stereotype.
  - <https://humanlibrary.org/meet-our-human-books/>

### **Discussion:**

- Why did you select that particular human library book?
- What did you learn about someone else today?
  - Why did learning about someone’s story impact any stereotypes you have or had?
  - How does getting to know someone else’s story make you a more connected citizen?
  - Describe how hearing someone else’s journey impacts your own story.

### **Reflection:**

- What did you learn about yourself today?
- How did what you learn today help you move beyond stereotypes?

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# 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](mailto: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
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# Making Assumptions and Respecting Others (Grades 6-12)



**Overview:** This lesson focuses on the importance of respecting the differences of others, the impact of making assumptions about others, and how respecting each other's differences can make relationships stronger.

## **Character Education Objectives:**

Students will:

- watch a video about respecting the differences of others,
- discuss how to recognize and respect each other's differences,
- reflect on experiences when they made assumptions,
- reflect on how making assumptions impacts our ability to respect differences

## **Materials:**

- Video: UNeek Productions. 2017. *Different*. Youtube. <https://youtu.be/yu24PZIbkoY>

## **Opening Reflection:**

- “We do not see the world as it is, we see the world as we are” – Andy Stanley
  - What does this quote mean?
  - How do our assumptions impact the way we treat others?
  - How do our assumptions affect relationships?

## **Watch Video:**

- UNeek Productions. 2017. *Different*. Youtube. <https://youtu.be/yu24PZIbkoY>

## **Discussion:**

- How were these two different from each other? You? Me?
- How did their differences impact their relationship in the beginning?
- What did they learn about one another's differences?
- How can changing your perception help you to respect differences?
- In what ways can you show someone that you respect their

differences?

- How can respecting someone's differences help you develop stronger relationships?

## Reflection

- Write about a time when you made an assumption about someone. Describe how you discovered that your perception of them was wrong once you got to know them.
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# 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->

# Fairness and Appearances (Grades 6-12)

This lesson explores injustice based on appearances. The lesson explores a group of children who could not live with the lack of fairness shown to one couple.

## Responsibility (Grades 6-12)

# Artwork



**Overview:** Students will create responsibility artwork with a quote.

### Character Education Objectives:

Students will:

- research quotes or proverbs about responsibility.
- share their favorite quote on responsibility.
- create a drawing featuring their quote.

### Materials:

- Paper
- Markers
- Colored pencils
- Access to the Internet to research quotes about responsibility

### Opening Reflection:

- Find a quote about responsibility that speaks to you.

### Independent Creative Time:

- Create responsibility artwork of your favorite responsibility quote.
- Examples:





### Group:

- Share your drawing. Why you chose this quote about responsibility?
- What does this quote look like in your life?

### More Resources:

- Responsibility is one of the Six Pillars of Character. [Click here](#) to learn more about the Six Pillars.
- See more posts about responsibility by using the filter on our blog.
- Quotes about responsibility:
  - “There are no shortcuts to any place worth going.” – Beverly Sills
  - “Character consists of what you do on the third and fourth tries.” – James Michener
  - “If you think you are too small to make a difference you haven’t spent the night with a mosquito.” – African proverb
  - “If you think you are too small to make a difference you haven’t spent the night with a mosquito.” – Dalai Lama XIV
  - “When we tackle obstacles, we find hidden reserves

of courage and resilience we did not know we had.”

-A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

- “Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.” – Arthur Ashe
  - “Life isn’t perfect, any failures you have are actually learning moments. They teach us how to grow and evolve.” – Phillipa Soo
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## Disagreeing with Respect (Grades 6-12)



### Overview:

This lesson focuses on disagreeing with respect.

### Character Education Objectives:

Students will:

- review a video about respecting others even when you disagree.
- discuss what it means to respect others through disagreement.
- reflect on their own level of respect during disagreements.

## Materials:

- Videos (Choose one)
  - SoulPancake. (2016) Kid President Is Over It! Youtube.com. <https://youtu.be/ghk-nDJB3Tk>
  - Myahamoment. (2015) Donna and Bob- An Unlikely Friendship. Mutual of Omaha. <https://youtu.be/4dMMCVfKP9s>

## Lesson:

### *Opening Reflection*

- What does this quote teach you about disagreeing with respect? “Do not focus on being right, focus on getting it right. “

### *Review content (Whole Group)*

- SoulPancake. (2016) Kid President Is Over It! Youtube.com. <https://youtu.be/ghk-nDJB3Tk>
  - Myahamoment. (2015) Donna and Bob- An Unlikely Friendship. Mutual of Omaha. <https://youtu.be/4dMMCVfKP9s>

### *Whole Group Discussion*

- What was your favorite take away from the video?
- What are the differences between healthy and toxic disagreements?
- How can you show respect even when you disagree?
- What are some hot topics that people around you, on the news, or in the community disagree on?

- What examples have you witnessed of people handling disagreements disrespectfully and respectfully?
  - Compare the outcomes and emotions in those disagreements.

### *Reflection*

- Think about the last disagreement you had and consider ways you showed respect or ways you could have modeled respect better. What is a strategy discussed today that you can try to remember for the next time you have a disagreement?

### **More**

- Respect is one of the Six Pillars of Character. Learn more about the Pillars.
- For more lessons on respect, use the filter tool to find lessons by value and age range.

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# **Trust and Safety (Grades 6-12)**





**Overview:** Students will reflect on their responsibility for trust and safety.

### **Character Education Objectives:**

Students will:

- Read essays on trust and safety.
- Reflect on how they keep themselves safe.
- Consider ways they could protect themselves better.
- Essays:
  - Tucker, A. 2011. It's Yours. Own It. Stage of Life.
  - Kestep. 2011. Defending Yourself Against Social Media. Stage of Life.
  - art paper/markers or polling/word cloud technology tool

### **Opening Reflection:**

- How do you keep yourself safe in today's world?
  - Utilize chart paper and markers or a polling/word cloud online tool to record responses.



### Small Groups:

- Read two different essays (above) by teens about trust and safety.
- Highlight ways these teens suggest you must learn to trust yourself for your own safety.

### Whole Group:

- Why do you need to trust yourself?
  - Who is to blame when you make a mistake?
  - Why is it challenging to keep yourself safe in this world?
  - How can teens learn to trust themselves to be safe physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually? (Consider online and physical location)

### Reflection (5 mins):

- Reflect on your own ability to trust yourself to keep you safe.
  - What are some ways you already protect yourself?
  - Where or how could you improve?

### More:

- For more lessons, use the filter tool to find lessons by value and age range.