

Character Education and Service Learning

Character Counts Week is celebrated the third week of October every year-this year it is October 21 - 27. With so much turmoil in the world today, it is more important than ever to teach children the important values of life, and how to share these values with others. This thematic unit will explore character education and community service for all grades.

"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically... Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education."

- Martin Luther King Jr.

Character building is an essential reason many parents decide to homeschool. There are effective ways to build character every day:

1. Emphasize moral choices in every day activities. This will strengthen children's awareness and significance of good character.
2. Point out great acts of good citizenship in the community around you-what professions in your city help other people?
3. Enhance the desire to do the right thing-find examples with friends of the wrong and write choices, and talk about it.

The Six Pillars of of Character

The Joseph & Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics is a public-benefit, nonpartisan, nonprofit membership organization founded by Michael Josephson in honor of his parents to improve the ethical quality of society by advocating principled reasoning and ethical decision making.

This Institute has created a philosophy entitled "The Six Pillars of Character," which is a list and description of six core ethical values that provide objective criteria to guide our choices. The standards of conduct that arise out of those values constitute the ground rules of ethics, and therefore of ethical decision making. The six "pillars" are:

1. Trustworthiness
 - a. Be honest
 - b. Don't lie, cheat or steal
 - c. Be reliable
 - d. Do the right thing
 - e. Be loyal
 - f. Stand by your friends, family and country



2. Respect
 - a. Treat others with respect
 - b. Be tolerant of difference
 - c. Use good manners
 - d. Be considerate of the feelings of others
 - e. Don't threaten or hurt anyone
 - f. Deal peacefully with conflicts

3. Responsibility
 - a. Do what you are supposed to do
 - b. Don't give up.
 - c. Always do your best
 - d. Be accountable for your choices
 - e. Think before you act

4. Fairness
 - a. Play by the rules
 - b. Share
 - c. Listen to others
 - d. Don't blame!

5. Caring
 - a. Be kind and compassionate
 - b. Tell people "thank you"
 - c. Forgive others
 - d. Help people who need help
 - e. Try to understand the other person's feelings

6. Citizenship
 - a. Find ways to help your community
 - b. Cooperate with others
 - c. Be a good neighbor
 - d. Obey laws and rules
 - e. Protect others

Sample file

Understanding Service Learning

Service learning is a form of project-based learning in which academic goals are accomplished through community service. Service learning develops citizenship and good character, and provides a rich context for academic instruction and student learning.

In a properly implemented service learning program the role of the home educator is a supportive one. The parent helps the students select a project, integrates the project into a planned curriculum or theme, and guides the students through the necessary steps to completion. The parent makes sure that activities are structured in

ways that promote learning, monitors student activities, and helps students reflect on their experiences.

Service Learning is for kids of all ages. Many address community needs related to health, poverty, social issues, or the environment. Another popular kind of community-based activity involves the students in documenting local history or culture through interviews, archival research, and photography. Projects like these connect the students more deeply to their communities and help the community at large to maintain a sense of history and identity. Other good service learning activities can involve students helping younger siblings through mentoring cross-age tutoring.

Some activities can take place within your own home. Others require getting the kids out into the larger community. Some may be one-time activities, while others occupy the whole school year or longer.

Whatever the project, your children will gain character, perform a community service, and learn curriculum too!

Learn More!

General Resources About Character Education and Service Learning

Online:

- [Character Counts!](#)
A nonpartisan, nonsectarian coalition of schools, communities and nonprofit organizations working to advance character education by teaching the Six Pillars of Character.
- [Good Character.com](#)
A site dedicated to educators and the process of teaching good character to children.
- [Character Education Connections Sample Lessons](#)
K-12 - Sample lesson plans from the book of the same name.
- [Character Education Lesson Plans](#)
K-12 - A sizeable collection of lessons categorized by subject area
- [Character Education Partnership](#)
CEP is a non-partisan, nonsectarian organization dedicated to the idea that character and education are natural partners in helping children become ethical, responsible adults.
- [National Character Education Center](#)
This site offers resources for students in pre-school through High school.
- [Center for the 4th & 5th R's](#)
This site is designed for educators. But has some great articles on character ed that may be interesting.
- [Cyber-Citizen](#)
The Cybercitizen Awareness Program educates children and young adults on the danger and consequences of cyber crime.
- [Character Education Network](#)
This site was made with classroom teachers in mind and contains a large collection of ready to use lesson plans and activities. Some may need to be modified for homeschooling use.
- [Tips for Keeping the Peace](#)
A list of 10 items to help solve conflicts peacefully.
- [Teaching Social Skills](#)
An article describing how to approach teaching children about social skills, plus some ideas you can apply in your classroom
- [Strategies for Empowering Students](#)
Cross curriculum teaching activities for grades K-12 that incorporate ethics and values.

Service Learning Resources

- [Do Something](#)
These people take their name seriously. Their mission statement says: "We inspire young people to believe that change is possible, and we train, fund and mobilize them to be leaders who measurably strengthen their communities." This is a very exciting website for anyone who wants to, well . . . do something.
- [Kids Can Make A Difference](#)
An educational program about hunger and poverty that encourages students to take action and make a difference. Be sure to click on "What Kids Can Do."
- [Free The Children](#)
Want to wipe out child slavery? Want to help poor children in third world countries go to school instead of laboring every day in dangerous, inhumane jobs? Then join this international network of children helping children, founded by (then) twelve year old Craig Kielburger. You'll be amazed at what you can do.
- [America's Second Harvest](#)
Help end hunger. This is the largest hunger relief organization in the U.S. Their main activity is feeding hungry people by collecting and distributing food, and they could use your help. Come to this website to get involved, or even just to learn about hunger in America.
- [Habitat for Humanity](#)
Wanna build a house? Habitat for Humanity uses volunteer labor and donations of money and materials to build and rehabilitate simple, decent houses for low income families. Thousands of students and young people worldwide are spending school breaks or weekends on Habitat construction sites. Here's how you can join them.
- [Children's International Summer Villages](#)
CISV is a volunteer organization promoting peace education and cross-cultural friendship. There are 67 participating nations. Local chapters offer lots of exciting opportunities for young people to get involved both locally and internationally.
- [VolunteerMatch](#)
A fabulous website with lots of great information about volunteer work. Includes a powerful online database allowing individuals to find volunteer opportunities by zip code, category, and date.
- [ServeNet](#)
This site is a good place to start for web surfers looking for an opportunity to volunteer. It lets users search a database of service roles to find one that's right. Click on "resources" for some great volunteer advice for people under 18.
- [helping.org](#)
This site makes it easy for people to learn more about the causes they care about and how to volunteer to take action.
- [Idealist.org](#)
Here you'll find a long list of volunteer organizations as well as a listing of volunteer opportunities both in the US and abroad.

Quotes

Quotes can be a wonderful source of inspiration about the importance of good character, and the warm fuzzies that we often feel when we do good things in the world. Here are a few great sites that with collections of quotes related to good character.

- Appleseeds.org
"quotations and short stories from eclectic sources that promote positive attitudes, and development of holistic human dignity--from tiny seeds to ripened fruit"
- [Quote Library](#)
From the Josephson Institute of Ethics
- [Quotes to Live By : Character](#)
- [Motivating Moments](#)

Books that Teach Character

Books Lists:

- [Books of Character: Eighteen Books for Teaching About Character Across the Grades](#)
- [Children's Books that Illustrate the Six Pillars](#)

Book Titles:

- Dotson, Anne C., Dotson, Karen, *Teaching Character : Teacher's Idea Book*, Character Development Group; ISBN: 0965316343
- Koehler, Michael, D., Royer, Karen E., *First Class Character Education Activities Program : Ready-To-Use Lessons & Activities for Grades 7-12*, Prentice Hall Trade; ISBN: 0130425869
- Christian Character Development Series: *Who Am I...Really?*, Group Publishing Inc; ISBN: 0764421328
- Kilpatrick, William, Wolfe, Gregory, Wolfe, Suzanne (Contributor), *Books That Build Character : A Guide to Teaching Your Child Moral Values Through Stories*, Robert Coles Simon & Schuster (Paper); ISBN: 0671884239
- Unell, Barbara C., Wyckoff, Jerry L. (Editor), *20 Teachable Virtues : Practical Ways to Pass on Lessons of Virtue and Character to Your Children*, Perigee; ISBN: 0399519599



LESSON 1: Make a Difference Day

Concepts:

You will learn about ways that you can volunteer and make a difference in your community.

Lesson:

October 27th is "[Make A Difference Day](#)"! This special day of volunteerism was created by USA Weekend to inspire people to help "make a difference" in their community through volunteerism and community service projects.

You too can get involved! Visit the [Make A Difference Day Web site](#) to get ideas and find existing projects in your area that you can participate in. If there isn't anything listed near you, create your own project! This is a great project for the whole family. It can be as simple as visiting the elderly in the nursing home, or more involved like helping to restore a local wetland. Everyone who helps others on October 27th and sends in an entry form is eligible for a national or local award and for a cash donation to a charitable cause.

Sample file



LESSON 2: Adventures in the Book of Virtues

Concepts:

You will learn about the virtues that you display in your daily life.

Lesson:

This set of activities revolves around the Adventures in the Book of Virtues, an animated PBS program for children that explores a specific virtue every week. The characters are two children and a set of animal friends. Each week a virtue is explored through the adventures of the characters and is further illustrated by stories out of world folk literature and told by Plato the worldly and wise buffalo.

In addition to the television programming, there is an [Adventures in the Book of Virtues](#) Web site.

Have your kids visit the [Treasure Box](#) and play some of the games. They can also read introductions to the characters, watch media clips from the television programs, and checkout the TV schedule for the program in your area.

For specific ideas on lessons and activities that you can do with your kids check out the [Parenting Guides](#) for each of the TV program's weekly episodes. Each guide contains a condensed version of the weekly story and a set of activities and discussion topics.