

# *The Fourth and Fifth Rs*

## Respect and Responsibility

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### *Children's Literature and Character Development*

**Dr. Joy Mosher, Professor of Education**

Literature plays an important role in our lives and character development. Good stories become a part of us. Books are also a wonderful opportunity to explore the three components of character: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action.

#### *Moral Knowing*

We must first know right from wrong in order to evaluate and make choices. One aspect of moral knowing is *perspective-taking*. As children experience the world from the viewpoint of a character in a story or evaluate the decisions characters make, their cognitive and moral skills develop.

In *Who Belongs Here?* a Cambodian refugee boy confronts schoolmates who call him *chink* and tell him "get back on the boat and go home where you belong." The author asks, "What if everyone whose ancestors came from another country was forced to return to his or her homeland?" As children discuss the boy's experiences and their own experiences with name-calling and unfairness, they consider how words and actions affect others and each person's right to respect.

In *The Bobbin Girl*, a historical tale based on real events in the 1800s, a girl in a textile mill stands up for workers' rights. The narrator does not make the same sacrifices but will always know what was right.

*We All Sing With The Same Voice*, a song from Sesame Street made into a fine book, "embraces the notion that no matter where children live, what they look like, or what they do, they're all the same where it counts—at the heart." In understanding others' perspectives, we realize what we have in common.

#### *Moral Feeling*

As children consider how it feels to have done the right thing or the wrong thing, they develop the emotional side of their moral response to literature and their own lives. In *Esmeralda and the Children Next Door*, neighbor children realize they have hurt a friend and strive to make amends.

Esmeralda is a big child and is taunted and rejected because of her size. Size discrimination is a problem in many schools that can go unrecognized and unaddressed. *How To Be A Friend: A Guide to Making Friends and Keeping Them* helps children recognize and take steps to resolve issues of friendship in a straightforward way.

#### *Moral Action*

Even young children know that people who "talk the talk" must "walk the walk." In *The Summer My Father Was Ten*, each time they plant a garden, a girl's father tells a story from his childhood. He recounts how a ball game turned tomato fight and an old man's garden was ruined. The boy's remorse turned to action and friendship the next spring when he helped the man plant a new garden.

In *Uncle Willie and the Soup Kitchen*, a boy accompanies a neighborhood caretaker to the soup kitchen, where he learns more about homeless and hungry people and the volunteer work done to help them. *Kids Explore Kids Who Make a Difference* tells of real children who have gotten involved in the world and taken moral action. *Children Save the Rain Forest* tells



how children worldwide have worked to save a rain forest in Costa Rica and gives information about what readers can do.

### ***Kids' Books and the Comprehensive Approach***

The "comprehensive approach" to character education, as promoted by the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs, includes nine classroom strategies. There are excellent children's books corresponding to each of these.

**1. The Teacher as Caregiver, Model and Mentor.** All of us need strong models and caring guides. In *Dear Mrs. Parks: A Dialogue With Today's Youth*, a real person who is "a model of courage and a symbol of freedom" provides wise counsel in answer to real children's letters. *John Blair and The Great Hinkley Fire* is an historical account of a man who remained steadfast, doing his duty and helping others in a firestorm that overtook a train. *Night and the Candlemaker* tells of the village candlemaker who keeps the flame of life burning through the night even in the face of his own fears. *Hank Aaron: Brave in Every Way* tells of Aaron's baseball feats and bravery in the face of racist death threats.

**2. A Caring Classroom Community.** In *Grandpa's Corner Store*, his granddaughter rallies community friends and neighbors to help him save his business. In *Whitewash*, a powerful book based on a racially based gang attack, real friends pledge to "stick together" when a girl is a victim. Stories such as these can help students come to a united sense of responsibility for extending caring to one another and taking moral action in difficult times.

**3. Moral Discipline.** In *A Day's Work* Francisco lies about Grandfather's gardening skills to get him a job. Grandfather's integrity when he learns of the lie teaches a youngster about right and wrong and taking steps to correct a mistake. In *Willimena and the Cookie Money*, a girl must "fess up to her spending" of the cookie money she collected and fix the problem.

**4. A Democratic Classroom Environment.** A democratic classroom environment enables students to participate in decisions that affect the group and come to understand the nature of democracy through that participation. *The Magic School Bus* books offer the opportunity to examine group functioning and decision making. *Abraham Lincoln: Letters From a Slave Girl* provides a good example of respectful dialogue about issues. *We The People* illustrates the Preamble to the Constitution, a backdrop for discussing how people come to important decisions. *Hands Around the World: 365*

*Creative Ways to Build Cultural Awareness and Global Respect* invites children to take moral action steps.

**5. Teaching Values through the Curriculum.** The resource book *In The Next Three Seconds* provides fascinating data culled from published official, trade or reference sources to help children think about what happens in three seconds or minutes. Some of the predictions confront readers with moral issues: "In the next three days . . . enough aluminum will be thrown away to build 63 Boeing B-52 bombers."

*Project Puffin: How We Brought Puffins Back To Egg Rock* describes efforts to rebuild an environmental

## ***FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES***

- ◆ After reading *How To Be A Friend: A Guide to Making Friends and Keeping Them* have students plan and create a big book of advice on how to make friends, to share with younger children. Or, use *The Seeds of Peace* as a model and have students create a big book or personal books of wise ethical advice.
- ◆ After reading *Someone I Like: Poems About People*, compose individual or class poems about heroes, conflicts, or other ethical issues.
- ◆ After reading *John Blair and The Great Hinkley Fire* or *The Barefoot Book of Heroic Children*, invite students to identify their own heroic figures—both public and personal.
- ◆ After reading *On The Same Day in March*, have students use what they know of different places to create a big book.
- ◆ After reading *We All Sing With The Same Voice*, have students identify "ways we are different" and "ways we are alike."
- ◆ After reading *Dear Mrs. Parks: A Dialogue With Today's Youth* or *Hank Aaron: Brave in Every Way*, have students compose letters between two people, discussing an ethical issue.
- ◆ After reading *In The Next Three Seconds* or *Bobbin Girl*, have students collect data related to social or ecological issues and create graphs presenting that data. They can follow up with other approaches to taking action regarding problems they have identified.
- ◆ After reading *Judge Judy Sheindlin's Win or Lose by How You Choose!* have students identify problems and serve as juries and judges to achieve a solution.

population. *Indian School* and *Baseball Saved Us* confront readers with historical injustice and offer a different perspective on what it means to be an American.

**6. Cooperative Learning.** Many books help children learn the norms for successful cooperative learning. In *City Green* a girl works with neighbors to reclaim an abandoned lot; in the process, friendships develop and an old man is invited out of hopelessness and isolation. In *The Tale of Gilbert Alexander Pig*, two natural enemies—a pig and a wolf—give up fighting and establish a unique friendship based on cooperative efforts of compromise and respect.

**7. Conscience of Craft.** Holding oneself to high standards is a critical element of responsibility. *Workshop* describes the way tools are partners in creating excellence and beauty. In *Aunt Lilly's Laundromat*, an immigrant woman takes care and pride in all that she does in her Laundromat, serving a city neighborhood. In *Barn Savers*, a man and his son dismantle an abandoned barn, saving the pieces to be reused in new ways.

**8. Ethical Reflection.** Reflection is crucial for developing a well-grounded ethical perspective. In *Secret Signs Along the Underground Railroad* a boy who is deaf worries about his mother's role aiding fugitive slaves. The boy achieves a moral decision and steps up to responsibility when his help is needed. In *The Seeds of Peace* a hermit teaches a rich young man that "peace comes from within you . . . You must give it love and freedom so that it can grow outward into something pure and beautiful. Only then will you know true happiness." *How Leo Learned to Be King* is a moral fable about leadership and admitting and correcting faults. *Judge Judy Sheindlin's Win or Lose by How You Choose!* directly challenges readers to examine ethical dilemmas and make decisions.

**9. Teaching Conflict Resolution.** Children who want to be respectful and responsible must possess the skills and habits to put that desire into action. In *That Toad is Mine!* two friends must resolve a problem; friendship prevails. In *Enemy Pie*, a boy worries about a new boy in the neighborhood and views him as the enemy. A wise father teaches a clever, gentle lesson about resolving conflict. ■

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# "May Peace Prevail On Earth"

**Sr. Katherine Arseneau, CSJ, Principal**



The horrific events of 9/11/01 caused disbelief, anger, fear, and compassion at Catholic High. Within a short time, students started drifting toward the office with ideas of what “we had to do to help.” There was a strong push to gather in prayer for peace around our Peace Pole. The message inscribed there is “May peace prevail on earth.” That has been our prayer every day since 9/11.

For the past three years, we have had an intense focus on “peace” in our character program. In the Spring of 1998, we decided to *commit* to becoming a “School of Character” as a more focused way of carrying out our traditional mission in this area. We established a theme for the coming year and a virtue for each month. We created a Character Council comprised of a Board of Trustees member, two administrators, eight teachers, ten parents, and two students from each grade (7-12). This group gathered input from their “colleagues” and came to our meetings with fresh ideas for activities that would support our theme and the monthly virtues.

## ***A “Peace-full” Heart: The Key to Virtue***

In our second year, it occurred to us that the practice of all virtue depends on what we call “strength of spirit” or “peace of heart.” A common definition of character is “knowing the good, wanting the good, and doing the good.” We realized that the heart is the key, because it is the strong, “peace-full” heart that enables “wanting the good” to *become* “doing the good.”

From that time on, we wanted our school to be about peace and our people about peacemaking. Our daily morning prayer now has a peace focus. Our monthly virtues are connected to peacemaking. Our annual theme has used the peace prayer of St. Francis, broken down into monthly goals (e.g., “Where there is despair, let me bring hope”). Visuals in the school buildings remind us of the peace theme. Departments define specific teaching goals related to peace-making and the monthly virtues. Members of the faculty share their successes and failures in this area in an effort to assist one another.

During our participation in the national campaign to “Stop the Violence,” students learned about the types and extent of violence in our country and individuals

who have made a decision to let their whole life stand for peace. Our Character Council has trained our students to go to local elementary schools as “Ambassadors for Peace” and lead discussions with children in grades 4-6 about what it means to have “peace of heart” and be a peacemaker.

## ***Dedicating Our Peace Pole***

If I had to list my top five experiences as an educator, one of those five would be our Peace Pole dedication on 1/3/00. Prior to the dedication, all theology teachers read the book *Sedako and the 1,000 Paper Cranes* to their classes. The story is about a young Japanese girl who contracts cancer after the nuclear bombing that brought an end to World War II. There is a Japanese legend that if you fold 1,000 paper cranes, you will be granted your fondest wish. Sedako began to fold these cranes in the hopes of being cured but died before she finished. Her friends finished folding them for her and erected a shrine in her honor in Japan.

Our students and faculty members each took one or two squares of paper, wrote a peace message, and folded the paper into cranes, which were strung and hung from the gym lobby ceiling. During December, we also had a speaker from Nagasaki, Japan who represented the “Never Again Campaign,” a group committed to speaking about the horrors of nuclear war in the hope of preventing these bombs from ever being dropped again.

Taking part in our Peace Pole dedication were three Bishops, a rabbi, pastors, local college presidents, school superintendents, mayors, congressmen, and New York State Lt. Gov. Mary Donohue. Our speaker was Hank Brenner, a local resident and Holocaust survivor. At the beginning of each calendar year, we gather at our Peace Pole to recommit ourselves to work for peace. ■

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# Character First in Hamburg

by M. Kerry Courtney, Principal

I am a lifelong resident of the Town of Hamburg, a community of 50,000 residents on Lake Erie, five miles south of Buffalo. Hamburg is officially known as "The Town That Friendship Built." We also want it to be known as "The Town Where Character Counts." With that goal, a committee of 40 community representatives began planning in May 2000 to bring together Hamburg leaders for a *Character-Building Summit*.

Six months of preparation ended on Friday, October 20, 2000. Nearly 400 people attended the Summit. Mayors of the two villages and department heads represented local government. Superintendents, Board members, PTA reps, administrators, teachers, counselors, students, custodians, and other support staff represented schools. Business leaders, doctors, lawyers, seniors, clergy, and civic club representatives helped to almost fill the hall.

For 90 minutes, participants were placed in heterogeneous groups of ten, each with a facilitator, and instructed: *Brainstorm any and all ideas you have that could result in improving character in the Town of Hamburg*. After lunch, attendees were put in homogeneous groups for 90 minutes and asked to take the morning's ideas and turn them into action proposals. A representative from each group then came to the podium to report at least one action idea. (See Box.)

The organizing committee reconvened two weeks after the Summit and elected a 9-member Board of Directors. After many meetings, *CHARACTER FIRST IN HAMBURG* was born. Its goals:

- ◆ *to gain the support of our community leaders in modeling and promoting good character.*
- ◆ *to adopt character initiatives for each community sector.*
- ◆ *to establish a community culture that encourages, recognizes, and rewards good character.*
- ◆ *to assess our progress toward becoming a town known for the good character of its citizens.*

The Board has since recruited volunteers to serve on five committees: *Education, Government, Faith-Based Organizations, Community, and Business/Public Relations*. These committees are implementing our first

action plan: a town-wide theme for every two months of 2001-2002. For September/October, the theme is *Respect*. *Respect* posters were distributed to every classroom. The same poster has been distributed to every business, medical, and government office. All PTAs are promoting respect. *Respect* buttons and decals have been distributed at town events. *Character First in Hamburg* is off and running. ■

## ACTION IDEAS PROPOSED AT THE SUMMIT

### By Students:

- Personal behavior commitment
- Teen Center—recreation, tutoring
- Uniforms to make people equal
- Adults need to model character; more classes on parenting
- Positive youth stories in media; character commercials by kids
- Character-building class instead of detention
- Character clubs, school posters, and character assemblies
- Mentoring younger students
- Wall of Fame—recognition for good character
- Students use current leadership roles to promote character.

### By Religious Community:

- Publicize and promote character component in churches.

### By Town of Hamburg (government):

- Media campaign: buttons, a motto, logos, signs

### By Community/Businesses:

- Monthly character trait in school and showcased in community
- Family Event: "Return to Values"
- Involvement of senior citizens in youths' lives
- "Practice what we preach."
- Character banners in town businesses
- List of people in need/List of helpers
- Notebooks with material on character in waiting rooms
- Investigate character programs in other communities.

### By Parents:

- Mandatory community service for all youth
- Send messages of character to parents.
- A character message on grocery bags and in church bulletins
- Families need to do less and spend more time together.

### By Educators:

- Build character into curriculum.
- Promote cultural diversity.
- More character-building work with at-risk students
- Hear students' voices as to what they would like to see.
- Hamburg Youth Congress
- Challenge ourselves to exhibit character traits.

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# Integrating Character and Academics

by Dr. Helen LeGette



## ENGLISH AND LANGUAGE ARTS

**Poems, novels, biographies, short stories, plays, essays**

**Writing assignments** (What did the main character do that showed respect, responsibility, etc.? Write an essay: "My hero is a person of good character.")

**Social courtesies** (Teach students to write thank you notes; help them understand the etiquette of interview situations.)

**Class discussions on character issues**

**Media literacy** (What are the character messages that are being communicated in popular TV programs and movies? How can students become more critical media consumers?)

## HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES

**Biographies, autobiographies** (Discuss motivation, person's character, and effects of decisions.)

**Historical documents** (What are the messages regarding responsible citizenship? Write a class constitution. How did a particular document affect the lives of citizens in the country involved?)

**Current events** (Analyze various political and social actions in relation to character issues.)

**Mock elections**

**Class discussions** on topics such as ethics in politics, trade agreements, business, and social agendas.

## SCIENCE AND MATH

**Biographies, autobiographies of famous scientists and mathematicians** (Discuss the character issues in their lives and work. Contrast the actions of various individuals.)

**Class discussions on ethical issues** such as the manipulation of data, the human issues in various research projects, and "online" concerns.

## MUSIC AND FINE ARTS

**Depiction of heroic deeds**

**Posters illustrating good character**

**Patriotic music, art, dramas**

**Biographies and autobiographies of great artists and musicians**

**Performances at rest homes and work with handicapped**

**Class discussions on current music** (What are the messages related to character that are being expressed in the lyrics of some hard rock and "gangsta rap" music?)

## HEALTH, P.E., ATHLETICS

**Good sportsmanship** in class and in athletic competition

**Care and respect of the body,** especially in relation to sex, drugs, and alcohol.

**Sports "heroes"** (Are they real heroes?)

**Cooperative learning, team building**

**Service projects** to help younger kids develop positive attitudes, resist drugs and alcohol, and promote healthy living.

## VOCATIONAL AND BUSINESS EDUCATION

**"Conscience of craft" (positive work ethic)**

**Class discussions on ethical issues,** such as honoring commitments, complying with business law, and not cutting corners.

**Computer issues** (confidentiality, copyright laws, and legal and moral issues related to the internet)

**Service projects** to help school or community

## STUDENT GOVERNMENT

**Community and school service projects,** such as school clean-up and beautification initiatives

**Discussion of issues** such as an honor code, student ethics, cheating, and responsible behavior

**School pride**

**School safety issues**

**Student elections** as a democratic (citizenship) issue

**Student recognition programs related to good character**

**Orientation programs and assistance to new students**

**School "ambassadors"** to help with visitors to the school

## ALL SUBJECTS

**Cooperative learning**

**Service projects** (tutoring younger students, assisting the handicapped, etc.)

**Displays related to the principles of character**

**Thought for the day**

**Inspirational stories and readings**

**Character-based rules and disciplinary procedures**

**Emphasis on good manners and the practice of the principles of character**

**Use of the "teachable moment."** ■

*Dr. Helen LeGette is author of Parents, Kids and Character (available from Character Development Publishing; Ph: 919/967-2110) and a frequent consultant to schools. She can be reached at (336) 584-9479.*

**Our 2002 Summer Institute  
in Character Education: July 1-3  
High School Conference: July 2**

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