I teach 7th-grade math. I try to promote kind behavior in my classroom and beyond through a daily character quotation and a weekly character challenge.

**Daily Character Quote**

*No act of kindness, however small, goes unnoticed.* — *Aesop*

I share a quote like this at the start of each class period, along with a photo of the quote’s author and relevant biographical information. First, I ask students, “What does the quote mean?” After they share some of their ideas, I offer my own.

Then I challenge them to think about how they will apply the quote to their own lives. We discuss ways to do that. Later in the week, I ask them to share examples of how they actually did apply the quote.

**Weekly Character Challenge**

Each week I challenge students to perform a kind act over the course of that week. During Week 1 of this school year, this was the challenge:

**Try to give a good compliment to three different people this week. Your kind and uplifting words make more of a difference than you could possibly imagine.**

After I introduce the Weekly Character Challenge, we discuss (1) why it’s important and (2) how to meet it. With the Compliments Challenge, I give examples of what a good compliment is and is not.

**A good compliment focuses on a behavior shown by another individual.** For example: “I think you are an amazing listener. Whenever I have a problem, I know I can come to you and you will always listen and give me support.”

At the week’s end, I have the kids journal about their experience. “What did you like about this week’s challenge? How successful were you in meeting it?” I then collect the journals to check for completion and understanding. To increase accountability, I give a completion grade on the journal at the end of the quarter.

After the Courtesy Challenge (see box), a student named Austin told me that he and his family went out to eat, and he practiced using “please” and “thank you” with the waiter the whole time they were there. At the end of the evening, the waiter came to their table and asked Austin how old he was. The waiter then told him most kids his age don’t use such wonderful manners. I said to Austin, “People really do notice when you use your manners.” He smiled and said he appreciated the lesson.

However, students’ first efforts lacked detail, for example, “Thanks for always being there for me.” I realized I needed to be a part of the process. Now we always brainstorm examples together. Once students have their own statements ready, they show them to me, and I approve them. The quality has gone way up. One girl wrote to her father:

**Dad, you are the person who picks me up and dusts me off after I fail. You give me hope when I have none left. You help me with my math even though I get mad easily. Thank you for everything, and I love you.**

He was blown away.

**Olweus Bullying Prevention Program**

To reduce bullying in our schools, we have implemented the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (see p. 5)—first in the middle school in Jan., 2009, and then districtwide in Aug., 2011. To get baseline data, we administered the Olweus Bullying Questionnaire in May, 2008, and are now planning to administer it every other year. Students and staff can be heard using the Olweus terminology. Whenever a bullying incident is reported, our counselors take one of more of the following steps:

1. **Discuss the incident with the alleged harasser; review Harassment Policy.**
2. **Harasser completes Reflection Form.**
3. **Harasser signs Conduct Statement.**
4. **Conduct mediation with the students.**
5. **Contact the parent(s).**

If a student continues to bully, the principal becomes involved and may take steps such as detention, demerits, loss of privileges, Saturday school, suspension or expulsion, or referral to police. All incidents and consequences are e-mailed to the whole staff.

By combining classroom efforts to promote kindness with schoolwide efforts to reduce bullying, we’re working to create a culture of character in our school.

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