

Shaping Character Through Children's Literature

The award-winning Heartwood Ethics Curriculum for Children uses multicultural children's literature to foster seven character qualities affirmed by cultures around the world: courage, loyalty, justice, respect, hope, honesty, and love.

For each of these seven qualities, the Heartwood program provides six children's books (folk tales, hero stories, legends, and modern classics) along with interdisciplinary activities that develop children's understanding of the particular character quality and how to apply it.

Diane Root, a second-grade teacher using the Heartwood curriculum, tells of a mother who came to her and said, "What in the world are you doing this year at school? David is a different child." Her son David had previously often been in trouble in the classroom, on the bus, on the playground.

His teacher responded, "The only thing that's different is the Heartwood program." She explained that when the class finishes studying a particular character attribute, one assignment is to go to the classroom mirror, stand in front, and ask themselves if they have shown that attribute (e.g., "Have I shown courage?", "Am I a respectful person?").

Then the child goes to his or her Heartwood Journal and writes a personal answer to that question. This encourages children to act upon the ethical insights emerging from their reading and discussion.

"Perhaps," the teacher concluded her conversation with the mother, "when David looked in the classroom mirror, he decided to change."

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