

The Fourth and Fifth Rs

Respect and Responsibility

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A Class of Character: "This is Who We Are"

Jenna Smith, 3rd-Grade Teacher

I have now been a teacher for 1 year and 126 days. During college you have these lofty notions of what it's going to be like: "The kids will love ME because I've been working so hard and I want to be a teacher so much. They'll all sit, listen, and work hard." Even student teaching only partially knocks you out of naive land, because your cooperating teacher is backing you up, helping students who are most in need of extra attention. Then one day you finally land your dream job, they give you your very own key, they give you your own room, and they leave you alone with 26 children.

At that second, Hilltop's character education program—so thoughtfully implemented before I was ever given my own room—became the key to my ability to create an environment where my students can be successful learners. Our character program works for me because it provides a framework in which learners of all ages continually engage in searching for solutions. It gives me language with which I can involve all of my students in a conversation about how to be better people.

In my 3rd-grade classroom I rely on seven strategies to help build character.

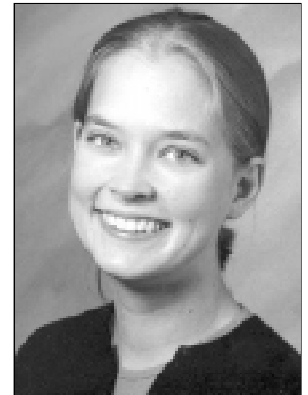
1. Establishing Expectations Together

At the start of the year the students and I work together to create the climate in which we want to work, learn, and grow. Our first task is to draft a pledge, with me providing sentence starters and the students adding what's important until we have the words we will live by during our entire year together. See box below for the pledge we wrote this year.

The pledge works for several reasons. First, it's *their* pledge. Since they were partners in writing it, they have a reason to become partners in following it. Second, it gives them a power they can use to solve simple conflicts. Sometimes I watch my students from across the room pointing and saying, "Don't laugh at my mistakes—remember, we agreed." Or, "That's not the truth. You need to tell the truth—we agreed." Finally, it becomes a tool I can use to remind us what it looks like to be a 3rd-grader in our room. I begin some mornings by asking, "What will playing fairly look like for us today?" Or, I end the day by asking them to reflect, "Who saw honesty today?"

2. Class Meetings

The backbone of our program is our weekly class meeting. Class meetings have one major rule: "People are never a problem. Actions and choices are problems." In our room hangs a Problem Board that says, "Please



OUR CLASS PLEDGE

- In Room 16 we believe you should treat others how you want to be treated.
 - We show respect by playing fairly, not bragging, helping each other, understanding each others' mistakes, listening, being honest, and using a kind tone of voice.
 - We are good friends to one another because we share, play together, and learn together.
- This is who we are, even when no one is watching.

write down your name and the problem you need help solving.” Each time a student has a problem that extends beyond a single person they can write the problem down. Then, every Wednesday morning we sit down together and help each other solve our problems.

One reason the class meeting strategy works is that, just as with the pledge, the students have an immediate investment in what’s going on in our classroom. They are responsible for finding reasonable solutions or consequences without placing blame. The class meeting also enables us to be proactive as a class in finding solutions to things that may distract students from learning or from being comfortable at school.

3. Talk It Out

We needed a place in our classroom where we could talk out problems with one person, without making that person feel embarrassed in front of the whole class. We created the “Talk It Out” space. The space was named after steps for conflict resolution given to all classrooms by our school counselor, Linda Babin. A clipboard in the Talk It Out space says, “Please write down your name and the person you would like to talk it out with.” The procedures at the station are:

1. Stop. Cool off.
2. Talk and listen.
3. Find out what you both need.
4. Think of ways to solve the problem.
5. Choose the idea you both like.

When kids come to Talk It Out, they begin by making an “I-Statement.” For example, “I don’t like it when you call me names. It makes me feel sad. Will you please stop?” The other person responds with an I-Statement if necessary, and they discuss their different points of view. The Talk-It-Out works because both kids leave feeling that their voice was heard by the other person. I find it amazing to watch 3rd-graders engaged in this process of discussing, empathizing, and problem-solving.

4. Monthly Character Expectations and Goal Setting

Part of being able to solve conflicts is having the tools and the language to solve them or to stop them before they start. One method by which we help students to continually gain new language and strategies is our monthly “character expectations.” Each month has a character expectation the whole school focuses on.

The first Monday of the month I gather my students

on the carpet and read a story to introduce our new character expectation. In March it is courage, and the book *Courage* explains the many different forms this character quality can take. We use the book to begin to answer the questions that will guide our month: *What is courage? What does courage look like? When do you need courage the most? Who can show courage?*

The next day the students gather on the carpet again. I start with a quote about courage by Winston Churchill: “Courage is rightly esteemed the first of human qualities because it is the quality that guarantees all others.” This is a deep idea, so I read it again slowly before asking kids to think about what it means. “I think he means,” one student says, “that it’s the best one because you need it for all the other things.” We discuss what that means for us. “When do third-graders need courage the most?” “You need it when you have to try new vegetables.” Then we discuss what we’re working on getting better at. “It’s hard to control my temper when someone makes a bad call at wall ball.” Finally, we move to our seats to write personal courage goals, based on what each individual needs to work on. For example. “By the end of March, I will be courageous by trying at least one new thing before asking a grown-up to help.”

5. Curriculum Integration

Character education is recognizing the character issues that are embedded in all we do. For example, during our classroom’s writer’s workshop, my students write stories about topics of their choice. Many of my boys, especially, love and watch a lot of violent cartoons, and this is reflected in their fiction writing. I have concerns about boys being limited in their literacy development by schools not accepting what boys find interesting, but I also have concerns about how much violence I can comfortably allow in my classroom, even in fiction form. So when one of my students came to me really wanting to publish a well-written story about two boys who got into a violent sword fight, I tried to get him to think about what we could do to reach a compromise. I asked, “Do you think solving problems through violence is a good idea?” He responded, “No, but it makes a good story.” We talked about what other people might think when they read the story, and what he thought they could learn from his main character. While violence was still in his final draft, he changed the ending from a bloody, senseless death to a teaching lesson about how the main character could have used words instead.

6. Reflection Time

Reflection time, in its various forms, is the key to learning from our experiences. As much as possible, I try to make character education focus on students making choices about what is right, and less about me *telling* them what is right. Levels Scores is a schoolwide strategy that we use on a regular basis to help kids do this. The levels are:

- 4 "Respectful. Responsible. Helps Others."
- 3 "Respectful. Responsible."
- 2 "Works or Listens When Reminded."
- 1 "Not Working or Listening."
- 0 "Bothering Others."

Sometimes I ask the kids to give themselves a private levels score. The students decide what level they think they're working at and put those fingers to their leg. Sometimes I ask them to share their reasons for their self-rating. Sometimes I'll ask, "What level is our class working at today?" or "What level did you feel we were at during math?"

I'll ask, "What level is our class working at today?"

My students are generally honest and accurate about their scores for each area. This self-reflection provides a sense of autonomy and develops their ability to think for themselves. Instead of a grown-up pointing a finger and saying, "You really need to work on cooperation," they're being asked, "How do *you* think you're doing on cooperating?" As I guide my students through self-reflection, I believe I am laying the groundwork for independent self-reflection in the future.

7. The Quiet Space

This year I have a special needs student who has been diagnosed as having Sensory Integration Disorder. Practically, this means he gets very emotional when overstimulated. He has difficulty controlling his frustration and is easily upset by minor, unexpected changes. He is also an endearing storyteller, with an amazing retention of facts.

When I found out I was going to have this student in my class, I spent many days that summer reading books about children with special needs and pondering what I could do that would enable him to fit into our class-

room. Then it occurred to me that my most important job was not to figure out how to make him "fit into" the classroom; I needed to figure out how to make the classroom fit *him*, so that with security and comfort in place, he could learn how to be successful in my room and outside of it.

Based on that, the easiest classroom adaptation I made for him was based on my understanding of Sensory Integration Disorder and the principles of "silence and stillness" that we practice as a whole school. Silence and stillness doesn't look identical in all rooms, but it's based on the idea that we all need quiet time in order to slow down and let our brains do their best work. For 10 minutes each afternoon right after recess, Room 16 kids "rest their brains." I knew that one of this child's behaviors is that he gets overwhelmed when overstimulated. I concluded he might need more than a 10-minute scheduled brain rest each day, so I created a space for him in our classroom where he could go to calm down.

We call it "The Quiet Space." It is a bean bag, nestled in a cozy nook between two bookshelves and a wall. Peeking in on different days, you might find a pile of books or a writing notebook. Other days there is a stuffed animal waiting to be snuggled. Some days you might find nothing but a child, sitting quietly, remembering to breathe or knowing it is okay to cry when you need to without being embarrassed in front of your friends.

At the beginning of the year when my special 3rd-grader would show signs of frustration, I would ask him to please take a time in the quiet space. By now he will go independently, calm down, and return to the class when he is ready. Just as it has become a primary resource for him, it has also become an occasional resource for other kids who are having a bad day or need a moment of quiet in the often chaotic world of 8- and 9-year-olds.

When We Are No Longer Watching

The last line of our class pledge says, "This is who we are, even when no one is watching." I know a big part of why our character education program works is because grown-ups *are* watching and guiding. But that last line of the pledge is there because it's what we all are working towards. It's there because in our classroom, and all around our school, we're working on teaching kids reading, writing, mathematics, and character skills that will be authentic and long-lasting—that will follow them into a time when we truly are no longer watching. □

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"Walking the Talk" at Harris Hill Elementary

Marc Nelson, Principal & Fran Palma, former Walk the Talk Co-Chair



How do you get kids—and everyone else in a school—to "walk the talk"? That's the biggest challenge in character education. Most kids, like most adults, *know* the right thing to do. Actually doing it is the hard part.

At Harris Hill Elementary, our focus has been on helping students internalize and act upon principles of good character. We do this through our "Walk the Talk" Rights and Responsibilities (see below), developed by a committee of parents, teachers, and administrators. Walk the Talk is now the standard against which behavior is evaluated. There are colorful visual reminders everywhere—in the classrooms, the cafeteria, the gymnasium, and the hallways. Throughout the school the question, "*Are you walking the talk?*" can be heard as teachers and other staff members gently remind students to check their behavior.

Each week we have a schoolwide focus, led by the principal, on one specific right and its corresponding responsibility. Through our Home-School Partnership, families are encouraged to focus on the same right and responsibility at home. This provides reinforcement and builds a sense of community. Issues we've addressed include: lack of respect, bullying, exclusion, responsi-

bility, integrity, self-discipline, and caring. Our PTA newsletter, *The Hotline*, carries articles on character-related issues such as cliques and relational aggression among girls and reviews books on character themes. Last year we held an evening book discussion of *Queen Bees and Wannabes* by Rosalind Wiseman.

Our Kids Care Club has students ages 5-12 working side by side after school to help people in our local, national, and global communities. Building birdhouses for Habitat for Humanity, sewing teddy bears for children in Tanzania, and providing hygiene items for a local women's shelter are some of our students' recent projects. We find that community service is a very effective way to get kids to internalize good character traits.

Walk the Talk has helped our students understand and recognize unacceptable behavior, communicate with each other, solve conflicts, and become good citizens. These skills empower our students to become agents of their own social improvement and change, preparing them for their future as people of character and positive contributors to our society. □

Excerpted from "Harris Hill Elementary School: A Community of Character." The article, in its entirety, can be found at www.harrishillpta.org.

"Walk the Talk" Rights and Responsibilities

I have a right . . .

1. To be safe.
2. To my feelings.
3. To be heard.
4. To be talked to in a caring way.
5. To use my belongings and school property in a careful way.
6. To be included, have fun, make new friends and try out new skills.
7. To talk with my teachers about my concerns in school.
8. To expect my parents to talk with me—to find out about and help me with my needs at school.

I have a responsibility . . .

1. To keep others safe.
2. To try to respect and understand all people's differences and their feelings, opinions, and beliefs.
3. To listen when someone else is talking.
4. To use language which shows consideration for other people's feelings and differences and does not cause or increase conflict.
5. To respect the property of others including the school building grounds, equipment, and materials.
6. To include others, since no one likes to be left out.
7. To find ways to solve problems.
8. To tell my parents what is going on at school.



Curbing Bad Language

Tom Lickona and Matt Davidson
Center for the 4th and 5th Rs



In a 1999 Zogby Poll of New York State teachers, 77 percent ranked students' use of profanity as their *most* serious

behavior problem. How can we teach students to be more reflective and respectful in their use of language?

SEVEN PROMISING PRACTICES

1. Teach Why Language Matters

An Atlanta high school teacher posts the following sign in her room, gives a copy to every student, and discusses it with each of her classes:

LANGUAGE IS AN INDEX OF CIVILIZATION. IT IMPACTS OTHERS. IT CAN AFFIRM AND INSPIRE, OR DISTURB AND DENIGRATE. IT CAN SET A GOOD EXAMPLE OR A BAD ONE. IT INFLUENCES HOW OTHERS THINK OF US. IT REVEALS—AND SHAPES—OUR CHARACTER.

2. Establish Language Expectations

A California high school teacher says to his students, "Are there any places you go where you don't swear?" Students answer yes. He responds, "Well, now you have another one—my classroom."

3. Use the Leverage of a Relationship

Teachers who build rapport with students can use that relationship to elicit respectful behavior. A high school biology teacher said he had a boy who used the "f-word" during group work. The teacher spoke to him after class: "Mike, I can't let you use that language in here. It's just not respectful. Could you try to work on that for me?" Mike made a sincere effort, and by the end of the quarter his language was no longer a problem.

4. Help Students Reflect on Language's Impact

In his book, *Powerful Words, Positive Results*, former high school history teacher Hal Urban says he would write the following questions on the board and use them as a springboard for a class discussion of language:

Would you think differently of me if I constantly used swear words?

Why are some persons offended by swear words?

Are people who use foul language in public polite or rude?

What do you reveal about yourself when you swear a lot?

"What really helped them were their own answers to that last question," Urban says. "People who swear a lot, they

realize, may come across as angry, uneducated, rude, inconsiderate, having a limited vocabulary, or trying to be cool. Even kids who admitted to swearing a lot said this exercise got them to think about what they were conveying by their language."

5. Get a Class Agreement to Prohibit Bad Language

When one class developed its "social contract" specifying how they would treat each other (with respect), the teacher asked, "What about bad language; does it show respect?" They agreed that it did not show respect since some people might be offended by such language, and it should be prohibited in their class. They also agreed on a consequence: If you used bad language, you had to come up with two respectful replacement words.

6. Teach Media Literacy

One teacher, as a homework assignment, had her students watch a sit-com and keep a running tally of insults vs. positive comments in the show. The next day, the teacher asked: "What did you find?" "What would happen in real life if people insulted each other this often?" Students concluded that in real life, such remarks would damage or even destroy relationships.

7. Implement a Schoolwide Strategy

Typically, school expectations regarding appropriate language aren't enforced consistently because staff haven't made a commitment to respond to inappropriate language in the same way. In one school that had a problem with language, staff agreed that whenever they heard a student using unacceptable language, they would approach the student, say, "In this school, we don't talk like that," and then walk away. After this new approach was implemented, the level of student profanity dropped noticeably. □

Excerpted from *Smart & Good High Schools: Developing Excellence and Ethics for Success in School, Work, and Beyond*. For a free copy of this national report, go to <http://web.cortland.edu/templeton>.

TEACHING WITH CHARACTER QUOTATIONS

Tom Lickona and Matt Davidson

In becoming ethical thinkers, young people can learn from the wisdom of the ages. Teachers at all levels have found character quotations to be an easy entry point for integrating character into their classrooms.

In *Character Quotations*, we provide 180 character quotations (5 for each of 36 weeks) that we think are a good developmental match for students up to grades 3-8. Because we define character to include both performance excellence and moral excellence, we've chosen quotes that relate to: (1) virtues such as effort, positive attitude, and perseverance that make up what we call

performance character, and (2) virtues such as kindness, respect, and honesty that are part of what we call moral character. For each quote, we've suggested at least one reflection question that can be used as a writing prompt or discussion starter. For each weekly virtue, we've provided "action assignments"—activities that help students put the quotes' wisdom into practice. Below are two sample weeks. □

Character Quotations: Activities that Build Character and Community is available from Kagan Publishing: (800) 933-2667 or www.KaganOnline.com.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Day 1: Sow a thought, and you reap an act. Sow an act, and you reap a habit. Sow a habit, and you reap a character. —ANONYMOUS

What does it mean to say, "Our habits become our character"?

Day 2: Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be. —ABRAHAM LINCOLN

How does having a positive attitude help you to do your best?

Day 3: Each new hour holds chances for new beginnings. —MAYA ANGELOU

When something goes wrong, why is it important to make a new start?

Day 4: I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it. We are in charge of our attitudes. —CHARLES SWINDOLL

What can you do to keep a positive attitude when things become difficult?

Day 5: Hold fast to dreams, for if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly.

—LANGSTON HUGHES

What is something you dream of doing or becoming, and what can you do to make it happen?

ACTION ASSIGNMENTS

1. Find and interview a person who shows a positive attitude. Ask that person: "How do you keep a positive attitude, even when things go wrong?" "How does a positive attitude help you?"

2. Each day, keep count of the number of times you complain. Each day, continuing to keep count, try to reduce the number of your complaints.

HONESTY

Day 1: Character is what you do when nobody's looking. —J. C. WATTS

What does this mean? (Put it in your own words.)

Day 2: Honesty is the best policy. —MIGUEL DE CERVANTES

How can you help yourself be honest when you are tempted to be dishonest?

Day 3: Liars are not believed when they speak the truth. —PROVERB

Why aren't liars believed even when they are telling the truth?

Day 4: Half the truth is often a lie. —PROVERB

What is an example of telling half the truth that is actually telling a lie?

Day 5: He who permits himself to tell a lie once finds it much easier to do it a second and third time, till eventually it becomes a habit. —THOMAS JEFFERSON

If you had a habit of telling lies, what are some things you could do to help yourself break this habit?

ACTION ASSIGNMENTS

1. Read *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* to a younger child or group of children and discuss the importance of telling the truth.

2. Interview your parent or another adult at home about the importance of honesty. Ask, "How will telling lies cause problems for a person, now and in the future?"