

“Character Education: Finding Ways to Educate the Whole Child in an Age of Accountability” by Angela Powell

This is web-exclusive content.

"My principal told me not to even teach Social Studies or Science anymore, just reading and math. I can't teach core content, how am I supposed to squeeze in character education?"

I used to think like that, too. With kids coming to school less prepared to learn and teachers having more and more curriculum to cover, I used to toss out the monthly character ed curriculum pamphlets from my district without much more than a quick once-over. I figured that nearly half of my class was coming to me reading below grade level--how could I justify a series of lessons on kindness? My kids could be the nicest people in the world, but if they couldn't read, how would they ever get a job??

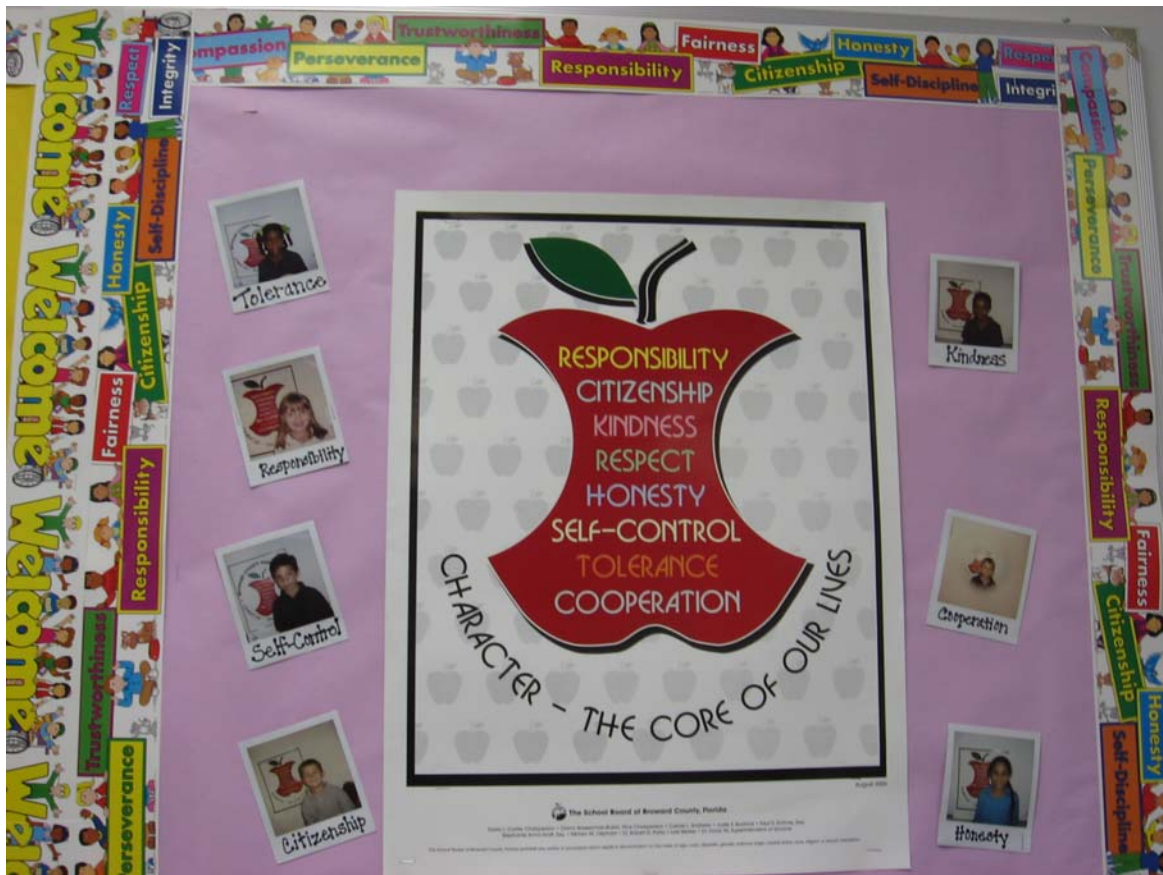
But I always felt guilty about not spending more time teaching students how to make good choices. I would take advantage of teachable moments, but if an issue didn't naturally arise in the classroom, I generally didn't address it. There were so many important things I never taught my kids about proper social etiquette, which was so crucial for kids living in poverty and abiding by a totally different set of cultural norms.

I'm convinced that it's important for ALL kids to have explicit, ongoing character development lessons with structured and informal opportunities to practice what they are learning. I just needed to take the time to develop a scope and sequence that I believe is developmentally appropriate and relevant for my kids.

Well, I finally developed a workable system. It's based on my district's 'mandated' character education program, and could easily fit in with the system you are supposed to use. (In most school systems, if something's not tested, it's not emphasized, and teachers can modify their character ed lessons as needed.) Each month focuses on a different character trait:

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|----------|----------------|
| October | Responsibility |
| November | Citizenship |
| December | Kindness |
| January | Respect |
| February | Honesty |
| March | Self-control |
| April | Tolerance |
| May | Cooperation |

Because these traits are abstract concepts that are difficult for children to apply in practical situations, I developed a list of specific guiding principles to show students exactly what behaviors are expected for each character trait. *These principles are not presented as rules for students to memorize; rather, they are tied into the county's character education program with an overview at the beginning of the school year and more in-depth activities occurring during the corresponding month and as the need arises in classroom situations.* These guiding principles serve as concrete reminders of the character traits and actually become second nature to children as they internalize the reasons why the character education program is in place. I have based them on the research and classroom practice of the internationally acclaimed educator Ron Clark (www.ronclark.com):



This is a Character Ed bulletin board from Mrs. Norton, 1st Grade gifted teacher at my former school. (The poster was provided by the school district.) As a school-wide program, each teacher would choose a student who exemplifies that month's character trait. The school then took the child's picture, and his/her name was announced on morning announcements. I had my kids vote on who in the class they think best represented the trait, selecting a new child each month. I really like that method because the kids had to give specific reasons for their nominations and it caused them to think critically about what it means to have good character.

October: Responsibility

Involves diligence, excellence, good decision-making, initiative, and courtesy

- *Answer all written questions with a complete sentence.*
- *Complete your homework every day.*
- *Be as organized as possible.*
- *Don't turn in any work that is less than your best.*
- *Be the best person you can be.*
- *Problem solve for yourself instead of depending on others.*
- *Take initiative instead of waiting to be told to do something.*
- *Learn from correction.*
- *If someone drops something and you are close to it, pick it up.*
- *Hold the door for the person behind you.*
- *Say, 'excuse me' after sneezing, coughing, or other bodily functions.*
- *Keep yourself and the bathroom clean and germ-free.*
- *Follow along when we read together in class.*
- *Look at the person talking during class discussions.*
- *Refrain from sidebars.*

Resources:

14 comprehensive lessons on responsibility
Great problem-solving/ decision making activities
Using good manners

November: Citizenship

Involves obedience, charity, patriotism, and environmental concern

- *Do things the right way the first time you are asked.*
- *Do not ask for rewards: do the right thing because it's the right thing to do.*
- *Be quick, quiet, and orderly during transition times.*
- *When walking in line, stay to the right, keep your arms at your sides, and move quietly.*
- *Never cut or save spots in line.*
- *If you see friends in the hallway, wave to them but do not call out.*
- *Follow other teachers' rules when they are in charge.*
- *Help people who are less fortunate in every way you can.*
- *Stand up for what you believe.*
- *Show respect for American symbols & during the Pledge of Allegiance.*
- *Be responsible for your trash.*
- *Do not be wasteful.*

Resources:

12 lessons on the important aspect of obedience in citizenship
"They Broke the Law- You Be the Judge" role plays and lots of free downloads
Great activities for environmental awareness
The Giraffe Project- for people who 'stick their necks out' to make a difference

December: Kindness

Involves caring, random acts of kindness, generosity, forgiveness, & compassion

- *Never say, "I don't care" when someone tells you how they feel.*
- *Be kind towards others without expecting them to treat you the same way.*
- *Surprise others by performing random acts of kindness.*
- *Share with others whenever you have more than enough.*
- *If someone bumps you, say 'excuse me' even if it wasn't your fault.*
- *Do not hold a grudge: you're only hurting yourself.*
- *Try to understand WHY people act the way they do.*

Resources:

Kindness lessons from goodcharacter.com
Online fairytales about kindness with printable worksheets
Online fairytales that address selflessness and printables

January: Respect

Involves patience, politeness, and showing concern for all creatures

- *Do not show impatience when someone takes a long time to answer or understand something.*
- *Never say, "That's easy!" when it's hard for someone else.*
- *Learn to entertain yourself without being disruptive when waiting.*
- *Respond to an adult when spoken to.*
- *In America, it's important to make eye contact when spoken to.*
- *If you are asked a question in conversation, ask a question in return.*
- *Never interrupt an adult when you are being corrected: wait and then politely ask to explain yourself.*

- *If an adult does not let you explain yourself, let Ms. Powell know.*
- *Do not show disrespect with gestures or noises.*
- *Keep your grades private & do not ask about other people's grades.*
- *Do not tease or harm any living creature for "fun".*

Resources:

Web quest for respect: The Grouchy Ladybug (more cross-curricular character ed activities for this book here
Free class sets of magazines and other resources by PETA about respect for animals- I've used these for years to spark discussion!

15 lessons on respect

Respect for girls: click on 'your rights' and '7 respect basics'

February: Honesty

Involves trustworthiness, reliability, integrity, and self-awareness

- *Always be honest, no matter what the circumstances.*
- *Keep your promises.*
- *When you make a mistake, admit it, make things right, & let it go.*
- *Do the right thing, even when no one is looking.*
- *Don't start, repeat, or even listen to gossip.*
- *If you wouldn't say it to a person's face, don't say it to anyone.*
- *Before speaking, think, "Is it true? Kind? Necessary?"*
- *It's okay to say you don't know something.*

Resources:

13 lessons on honesty

March: Self-control

Involves humility, perseverance/ courage, and contentment

- *If you win, do not brag; if you lose, do not show anger.*
- *Congratulate classmates when they are successful.*
- *Never laugh at or tease someone when they make a mistake.*
- *Do not stare or laugh at a student who is being corrected.*
- *Do not make a big deal out of bodily functions.*
- *Learn from your mistakes and move on.*
- *When work is assigned, do not moan or complain.*
- *Be patient with yourself and don't give up easily.*
- *Be satisfied with what you have.*
- *Always find the positive in life; complaining makes everyone miserable.*

Resources:

Called 'abstinence' by a TX school district, these lessons focus on self-control with regards to drugs/alcohol
From the school system above: demonstrating self-control through humility and also perseverance
Great self-awareness and drug awareness activities

April: Tolerance

Involves acceptance of diversity, equality, peace, and appropriate conflict resolution

- *Laugh with people, not at them.*
- *Respect other students' comments, opinions, and ideas.*

- *If people near you are too noisy, politely ask them to lower their voices.*
- *If someone asks you to lower your voice, say "no problem" & do so.*
- *It's okay not to like someone; it's not okay to be rude to them.*
- *Tell, don't tattle. (Telling= trying to help someone, tattling= trying to get them in trouble).*
- *Accept that life isn't fair and people sometimes do mean things.*
- *If anyone is bullying you, let Ms. Powell know.*
- *Don't expect yourself or other people to be perfect.*
- *Don't sweat the small stuff.*
- *When you feel like overreacting, take deep breaths and relax.*

Resources:

[Tolerance website with stories, interactive activities, games, and more](#)

[Mix it up at lunch day \(posters, fliers, and stickers\)](#)

["I'll Be Your Friend" free 26 song multi-cultural CD](#)

[Lessons on compassion](#)

[Stop Bullying Now webisodes \(cartoons you can watch from the computer\) and games](#)

[Bullying resources from Education World](#)

May: Cooperation

Involves friendliness, fairness, loyalty, and gratitude

- *Greet visitors and make them feel welcome.*
- *When meeting new people, shake hands and repeat their names.*
- *Stay out of cliques.*
- *If someone you play with is continually rude and mean, choose other friends.*
- *Cheerfully work with any partner you are assigned so you do not hurt their feelings.*
- *When offered something, take only your fair share.*
- *Stand up for people you care about.*
- *Always say thank you when given something.*
- *When you receive something, do not insult the gift or the giver.*

Resources:

["Join In"- teaching kids how to join in others' play and invite others in their own play](#)

[Great interpersonal activities](#)

[Peace activities from abcteach](#)

More About These Principles

The purpose of these guiding principles is for students to learn and practice appropriate behavior, proper etiquette, and effective social skills so that the classroom will run smoothly, and so that all students will eventually excel in a work environment and society as a whole.

If they sound harsh or excessive, I encourage you to read Ron Clark's book, *The Essential 55*, which is the rule list I have based these principles upon. It's a controversial method but I think if used as a flexible guideline and 'enforced' with grace, it will be a great opportunity for the kids to reflect on their motives and the consequences of their decisions. I plan to display the guiding principles on the wall ([click here for my FREE printable guiding principles posters](#)) and revise them frequently as the class provides input.

For me, the key to making time for character education is incorporating reading, writing, and other skills into the lessons. I address a lot of our social studies objectives this way, which is great because our social studies time is limited, too. Character education can also be used to target state standards that are often marginalized after the primary grades, such as oral language and cultural appreciation.

Although each month will focus on a different trait, the obvious goal is for students to carry over what they have learned about each of the traits to every aspect of their lives, all year long. Character development is supported on a daily, ongoing basis through teachable moments and through a few short, meaningful classroom routines that I am working to develop.

General character education resources:

[How To Do Character Education \(great overview\)](#)

[Free video and 250 page guide for primary teachers called "Starting Small"](#)

[Service learning opportunities \(cool community outreach projects\)](#)

[Opportunities for character building](#)

[Web resources](#)

[Literature-based exploration of character traits: numerous traits with corresponding book suggestions](#)

[Character Ed lessons organized by curricular area \(math, science, etc.\)](#)

[Aesop's Fables web quests for grades 1-2](#)

[Crossroad of Character 'think quest'](#)

[Values: Making Choices for Life 'think quest'](#)

[Aesop's Fables online](#)

[Character quotations and more quotations](#)

[60 Recommended books for parents and teachers](#)

[Character Counts newsletter with activities](#)

[Character pillars in scripture \(can be legally used in schools as a historical perspective rather than religious one\)](#)

[Quotes on character development in kid-friendly terms \(a handful are religious in nature\) and more quotes](#)

[Grandparents for Character Ed: invite families to come read and talk with the class!](#)

[Things you can do \(class- or school-wide\)](#)

[Character trait- reinforcing email greeting cards for students to send](#)

[Articles with activities on volunteerism, simplicity, fulfillment, bullies and more](#)

[Suggestions from I Love That Teaching Idea](#)

[Quick, fun lesson for teaching the power of positive thinking](#)

[Creating a classroom culture that emphasizes each of the character traits](#)

Quality character education helps schools create a safe, caring and inclusive learning environment for every student and supports academic development. It fosters qualities that will help students be successful as citizens, in the workplace, and with the academic curriculum. It lays the foundation to help students be successful in all of the goals we have for our public schools. It is the common denominator that will help schools reach all of their goals!
CHARACTER EDUCATION IS NOT ONE MORE THING ON YOUR PLATE! IT IS THE PLATE!!!"

-Utah State Office of Education Character Education