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Introduction

About the *Habits of Character* Lesson Plans

Habits are patterns that we adopt in life. People demonstrate good habits, but sometimes people exhibit bad habits. There are many common examples of bad habits that can have a negative impact on a person's success in life. Some of these bad habits include tardiness to work, poor personal hygiene, inappropriate language, insufficient sleep that results in general listlessness and the inability to complete work duties, inadequate consideration of one's attire and personal appearance, and inattention to the quality of work performance. These poor habits can be strong negative factors and can be associated with undermining a person's ability to secure a job, reducing one's chances of getting a promotion at work, and even contributing to dismissal from a job. The lessons in this book can help students eliminate bad habits and replace them with good habits while strengthening their positive character traits.

It is commonly said that, to eliminate a bad habit and adopt a new habit, a person must engage in the desired new behavior for at least 21 days to have the new behavior become a part of the person's routine. Although the 21-day rule is not the cornerstone of the approach applied in these lessons, similar strategic steps are encouraged to help students make positive changes in their behavior.

The lessons in *Habits of Character* are geared toward helping students identify poor or bad habits and replace them with good ones. The approach for changing poor behaviors involves:

1. Completing assessment tools to isolate poor and inappropriate behaviors.
2. Identifying suitable replacement behaviors.
3. Completing steps to reinforce and make permanent the new replacement habits.

One focus of this series of lessons is good behaviors, such as perseverance, honesty, respect, compassion, self-control, and responsibility. As schools prepare students to survive and thrive in the real world, these values are of particular importance. Regardless of one's ultimate station in life, values

such as honesty, respect, and responsibility will be critical to success in working with others.

Through real-life experiences and relevant classroom experiences, the learners are expected to engage in deep cognitive processing, shift in their affect (feelings), weigh the importance and impact of good character upon their lives, and ultimately inculcate good character—making these traits the very essence of their being.

The habits and character traits taught in these lessons are universally accepted among diverse groups of people. Different religious groups, ethnic groups, national groups, and racial groups should find these character traits acceptable and desirable. When all young people adopt these character traits and practice them in everyday living, the world is seen as a better place and everyone should feel that his or her personal rights and feelings are enhanced and supported.

This series of lessons will increase the awareness of youth about good habits and poor habits. The learners will engage in the analysis of their habits—identifying their good habits and poor habits. Just as “admitting blindness is the beginning of vision,” recognizing poor habits is the beginning of improvement. Learners will be encouraged to identify their weaknesses and poor habits and to move forward with deliberation to make changes.

Navigators Character Award

Requirements: While a participant in Learning for Life's Navigators program:

1. Participate in 50 hours of community service.
2. Complete the *Habits of Character* program.
3. Be the leader in at least one session involving at least one ethical dilemma lesson.
4. Complete the Leadership Development Series.
5. Write an essay on the importance of good character in your daily life.

Recognition: A certificate that may be downloaded from www.learningforlife.org and a medal, which may be ordered through your local Learning for Life distributor.

HABITS OF CHARACTER

Lesson Plan 1: Character and Habits

Objectives: Students will discover the connection between character and habits, understand the difference between individual acts and habits, and learn the seven-step approach to habit formation and habit elimination.

Related Content Standards: Social Studies, English/Language Arts

Materials: Copies of handouts for Activities 1 and 2 and the Extension Activities

Activity 1: Tell students: Good character is a person's most valuable possession. It is the essential key to success in school, in work, and in one's family life. There are many things in life that we cannot change, like our height or who are parents are; our character, however, is one of the things we can change.

Our characters are our own responsibilities. While people can help us or inspire us to develop our characters, it is our own work. The word "character" comes from a root word that means "to engrave," and we are, in fact, the engravers of our own characters. The buck stops with us.

Our habits, however, are what make up our characters. Habits are patterns of behavior. We establish many important habits early in life. Crawling, walking, and running become habits of the young child, along with speaking. Later we develop others, such as the way we treat others or do our work. We develop habits throughout our lifetimes; although it is much easier to acquire habits when we are still young.

Habits can be divided roughly into two types: good habits or virtues—such as always doing the thing you know to be right or regularly being considerate of others—and poor habits or vices—such as cheating or putting off the things we have to do until the last minute. Our vices, or poor habits, come easily to us. We slip into telling convenient lies, and before long we have the lying habit. We are liars. Or we start watching more and

more television, and soon we are hooked and have little time for school assignments. The road to poor habits is smooth and slippery. Good habits, or virtues, on the other hand are more difficult to come by. We have to work to acquire a strong, good habit.

Habits differ from individual acts. If someone tells a lie, that doesn't mean he is a liar. That is a single act. He may be starting down the road of establishing the habit of lying, but he is hardly there yet. If someone decides not to watch her favorite television shows, but instead do her homework really carefully, this doesn't mean she has broken her television habit. It may be the important beginning of a habit, but it is only a beginning.

Each person's character is made up of his or her mix of good and bad habits. While we cannot see our characters, our characters are very evident to the people who know us. They see our habits in action. They observe our patterns of always considering ourselves first or always telling the truth. In effect, we are *known* by the habits that make up our characters.

There are many reasons to shed our poor habits and build good habits. Most people have a combination of motives for trying to change their habits. Here are a few:

- To feel better about ourselves
- To achieve greater success in school
- To gain friends and be more attractive to others
- To achieve goals, such as success in sports
- To become the type of person people want to hire for good jobs
- To be more desirable as a future husband or wife
- To prepare to be an outstanding father or mother
- To prepare to be a good citizen

On the other hand, doing nothing about our poor habits and failing to engrave our characters with good habits, in effect, freezes us where we are. A few years ago, the U.S. Army had a slogan, "Be all you can be...in the Army." However, a motto we all can adopt is "Be all you can be...in life."

The “How” of Habits

Knowing that we need good habits to succeed in life and that poor habits will get in our way is not enough. Neither is it enough simply to want to acquire some habit or virtue. Again, knowing and wanting are a beginning, but only a beginning. An old adage says it all: “The road to Hell is paved with good intentions.” We must go beyond knowledge and desire to *systematic doing* if we are going to turn good intentions into habits.

Many successful people throughout history have acquired good habits and rid themselves of poor habits that were getting in their way by following a tried and true method. The method, which will be used throughout these leadership workshops, involves seven steps. The seven steps are like links in a chain. Each is important. Each must be understood and followed. This method works for developing good habits and for eliminating poor habits.

Activity 1: The short version of the seven-step method is as follows (list these on chalkboard and provide copies of the “Seven-Step Method for Developing Good Habits” handout to students):

1. **Identify:** Recognize a need, a lack, a problem.
2. **Understand:** Expand your mental map of how you want to change.
3. **Commit:** Make a personal decision to “go for it.”
4. **Plan:** Work out a roadmap to victory.
5. **Act:** Put your plan into action.
6. **Self-Monitor:** Regularly check how you are doing.
7. **Persist:** Stay with it.

Tell students: Let’s now look at these seven steps in greater detail.

Step One: Identify/Becoming Aware. We must first realize that our lives are ruled by our habits. We need to understand that each of us has these patterns in our lives. We need to step back and see the powerful influence they exert on our daily lives. Second, we need to become aware of a good habit we currently do not possess and that we believe would make us a better person if we did. This awareness could result from reading about some person in history or in a story. Or we may

admire a quality in someone else, such as always being in control of themselves or never getting angry or upset. Or we might not pass an important test or fail to make a team and then realize that we did not really try hard enough. The first step is to focus our minds on some lack in our lives or some problem area. With this awareness should come a real desire to change.

Step Two: Understanding. Being aware that we lack a good habit or have a vice we ought to rid ourselves of needs to be followed up with real understanding. If kindness is that habit we wish to attain, we must learn more about it. We might ask ourselves, “How do people like me show kindness to others?” “Why are people kind and considerate of others?” “What are the opportunities I have to be kind?” “What small acts of kindness do I fail to perform?” “What are the larger acts of kindness?” “What are the results of being kind?” “What are the costs and consequences of being kind?” “How can I learn more about kindness?” “What kinds of changes will I have to make in my life to acquire the habit of kindness?” In other words, we need to expand and deepen our knowledge and understanding of what it is we have focused on. Focused thinking, talking to others, and reading are a few ways to expand our understanding.

Step Three: Committing. To commit means to make a serious pledge to ourselves that we will acquire a good habit or eliminate a poor habit. It means looking hard at the efforts we will have to make and deciding to “go for it.” This is not an easy step, and it should not be taken lightly. We are weakened by pledges we don’t fulfill. It is often quite useful to write out our commitment on paper. Sometimes it is helpful to tell others of our commitment. Besides being helpful, going public with our decision keeps the pressure on when we are tempted to give up.

Step Four: Planning. For real change, that is establishing or eliminating a habit, we need a well-thought-out plan. Simply having goals and commitments is not enough. What are the large and small steps we are going to make in our daily lives to practice this new way of behaving? If it is a poor habit, during which occasions do we slip into this pattern and what counter-measures will we take? How are we going to stay focused on this goal? How can we keep our good intentions fresh and alive? What will we do when our interest

weakens? Who can help us stay on task? How can we keep learning about this habit? What will we do if we lapse and fall back? These and other issues and questions are part of a good plan. A good plan often includes rewards for staying on task. If we persevered at our studies and completed an important assignment, we might reward ourselves with a television break or a call to a friend. Our plan, too, should be written out, even if only in a sketchy form. This takes effort, but it is a necessary step.

Step Five: Action. All of our good intentions and preparations are worthless unless we get down to the hard, but rewarding, work of putting the plan into motion. We must do the tasks we committed to. The first action steps of habit formation or habit elimination are clearly the most difficult, and we should be aware of this. The other danger point occurs after a few days, when our motivation may weaken and other things may seem more important. Again, mentally preparing ourselves for these barriers and problems is important. We must remind ourselves why we set out on this journey. We must go over our plan and perhaps improve it. We must keep doing this until our goal is reached, until behaving this new way is “natural.”

Step Six: Self-Monitoring. Real change doesn't just happen. We have to stay on task. We have to make the habits we are trying to change a mental priority. It is useful to remind ourselves of our goal when we get up in the morning, perhaps, with a sign on the bathroom mirror. Throughout the day we should be checking ourselves. Most important, however, is a short process at the end of the day in which we fill in a checklist, a “how-we-did-today” performance rating. This short period of reflection also provides an opportunity for us to firm up our resolution, adjust our plan (if it needs it), and celebrate our successes. Without this critical self-monitoring, it is likely all our efforts will simply drift away.

Step Seven: Persevere. The habit of perseverance is the fundamental difference between people who succeed in life and those who do not. Persistence is the ability to stick to a task or goal until it is completed. There is nowhere that this is more important than in forming a new habit or breaking a poor habit. Often we have great enthusiasm when we begin a task, but we get distracted or bored or let other goals get in the way. The end is

disappointment. Perseverance is crucial to habit formation. In addition, there is a double-win here. If we persevere, we not only reach the goal of acquiring a new habit, but we also strengthen our habit of perseverance!

In summary, while good habits are the keys to success in life, they don't come to us by merely wishing. There is no free lunch! We have to work at them. However, there is good news: Most habits can be fairly well established in only 21 days. And, once we have a habit, maintaining the habit is not that difficult.

Classroom Discussion Questions:

1. How does “character” differ from “personality”?
2. How does the statement “The buck stops with us” relate to character formation?
3. How does the term “engrave” relate to a person's efforts at building his or her character?
4. What is the difference between “character” and “habit”?
5. Which are easier to acquire: good habits or poor habits? Why?
6. Which of the seven steps is most demanding?

Activity 2: Tell students: Knowing about the seven-step method is nothing more than having a piece of information. To receive any benefit, you must put it into action. This activity is an opportunity to master the method.

Give students a copy of the handout “Small But Good Habits” and have them read it. Second, discuss the habits listed (as an entire class or in small groups) and brainstorm other good habits, adding them to the list.

Discuss and list on the board students' ideas about barriers to forming a good habit such as honesty.

Have students debate the proposition “It is better to have a good personality than a good character.”

Activity 3: Have students conduct a face-to-face meeting with parent(s), guardian grandparent(s), or another adult they admire to explain the seven-step method of habit formation and discuss their experiences in forming habits.

Extension Activities

1. From the expanded list of “Small But Good Habits,” have students select a habit they wish to acquire. Have students fill out the “Good Habits” worksheet. Tell students: Using the handout, work hard to practice the method and establish your new habit over the next four weeks. Then have them complete the “My Daily Progress Report” each day for four weeks.

Assessment of Classroom Activities

- The teacher might grade individual students for their positive contributions in brainstorming and adding to the “Small But Good Habits” handout.
- The teacher might grade individual students for their contributions to successfully completing class exercises.

Assessment of Individual Activities

Students might receive major credit for completing and submitting “My Daily Progress Report.”

ACTIVITY 1

Name: _____

Date: _____

Seven-Step Method for Developing Good Habits

1. **Identify.** Recognize a need, a lack, a problem.
2. **Understand.** Expand your mental map of how you want to change.
3. **Commit.** Make a personal decision to “go for it.”
4. **Plan.** Work out a roadmap to victory.
5. **Act.** Put your plan into action.
6. **Self-Monitor.** Regularly check how you are doing.
7. **Persist.** Stay with it.

ACTIVITY 2

Name: _____

Date: _____

Small but Good Habits

- ___ Wash your hands three or four times a day.
- ___ Bathe or shower at least every two days.
- ___ Greet people with a sincere smile.
- ___ Never pass on an unpleasant story about someone.
- ___ Hold the door for others—younger, older, or same age.
- ___ Never use crude language or curse.
- ___ Make friends with the people you admire, not who are convenient.
- ___ Regularly think about where you are going and what you are doing with your life.
- ___ Get up early and eat a good breakfast before going to school.
- ___ Be nice, especially to younger students.
- ___ Never say anything that could hurt someone’s feelings.
- ___ Avoid tobacco and alcohol!
- ___ Do your homework before watching television or phoning friends.
- ___ Regularly ask your parents, “Is there anything I can do?” and mean it.
- ___ Regularly clean your fingernails.
- ___ Seek out smart people and listen to them.
- ___ Read often, especially something other than school assignments.
- ___ Limit the amount of junk food, soft drinks, and sweets you consume.
- ___ Don’t take advantage of other people.
- ___ Don’t talk too much.
- ___ When you have had a fight or disagreement with someone, be the first to make up.
- ___ Always follow the rules when playing games such as sports or board games.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Name: _____

Date: _____

Good Habits Worksheet

This worksheet will help you put the Seven-Step Method for Developing Good Habits into action.

1. What habit you will work on for the next four weeks? _____

2. Write out or define the habit clearly in your own words. _____

3. State how you will be different once you acquire the habit. _____

4. List the everyday events or issues in which you have trouble with the habit. _____

5. What are you going to do to learn more about your chosen habit and how it will benefit you? _____

Whom are you going to talk with to learn more about the habit? _____

6. What are you going to do on a regular basis that will give you the opportunity to practice your new habit? Be specific. For instance, "I'm going to limit myself to this or that." Or "I'm going to do X and Y to help me with the habit." _____

7. What will you do if you forget to practice the habit or become discouraged? _____

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Name: _____

Date: _____

My Daily Progress Report

Write a sentence each day describing your progress toward acquiring a good habit.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
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