

CHARACTER BUILDING ACTIVITIES

SOMMER-TIME STORIES

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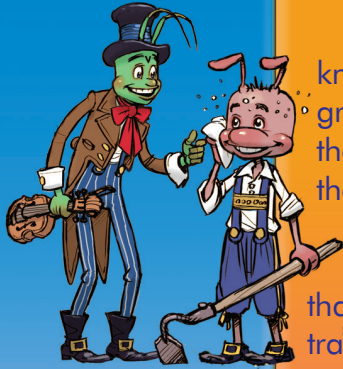
THE ANT AND THE GRASSHOPPER

Story Description

While a little fun is essential for a happy life, wise individuals know that prosperity begins with hard work. Gary and the other grasshoppers want to play all day and they cannot understand why the ants work so hard and miss all the fun. Alex and the ants know they must work during the spring to have food for the winter.

Sure enough, when winter arrives early, the lazy grasshoppers have nothing to eat. Passage of a new law that requires the ants to share their food with the grasshoppers transforms the whole community into a fun-loving crowd.

Will the grasshoppers learn the meaning of hard work before it is too late? This retelling of Aesop's famous story highlights the importance of diligence and a good work ethic.



Major Objective

To define and present the following character traits so they can be integrated into the life of each student:

- Diligence: constant effort and work to complete a project; perseverance
- Fairness: ability to make honest and impartial judgments
- Self-discipline: controlling one's conduct for improvement

Story Time Interaction

Read the story, *The Ants and the Grasshoppers*, and then write these character traits on the interactive whiteboard: diligence, fairness, and self-discipline. Define and discuss these character traits.

Discuss these characters:

The ants
The grasshoppers
The beetles

Activity Objectives

To use the following activities to reinforce the character traits of diligence, fairness, and self-discipline. To guide students to consider the importance of having a proper work ethic.

Make Your Own Ice Cream!

The ants started out to be very diligent workers, but when they realized how unfair it was that the grasshoppers were playing instead of working and still received the food that the ants had worked for, the ants quit working, too. Remind students that everyone must work in order to get the needed things to live and to get the extra things that make life enjoyable. That is the way life works, and it's fair!

To demonstrate this point, explain to students that they are going to get to eat some ice cream, but to get the ice cream they must work for it. Each student needs a large gallon freezer bag and a quart size freezer bag. You will also need about 3-4 cups of ice and 4 T. of salt for each child. For the ice cream each student will get in his baggie: $\frac{1}{2}$ c. milk, $\frac{1}{2}$ t. vanilla, and 1 T. sugar. Make sure that the quart bags with the ice cream ingredients are tightly sealed with not much air in them. Then put 3-4 cups of ice in the gallon bag and add the 4 T. of salt. Next put the smaller bag into the larger bag with the ice. Again, make sure that excess air is pushed out of the big bag. Students will gently shake and roll their bags around. If a student shakes too vigorously, the smaller bag may open up and get the salt in it and be ruined. Students continue shaking and rolling their bags for about five minutes until the mixture freezes and thickens into ice cream. Then they carefully take out the smaller bag, so that the salt/ice mixture does not get into the ice cream. Give each student a plastic spoon and let them enjoy the fruit of their labor! (Some students' ice cream will thicken more quickly than others. Assure students that it is okay. Theirs will turn into ice cream, too. They just have to keep working at it).

What Is Work?

Ask students to explain what work is. Students will probably say that work is putting a lot of effort into doing something. They may have difficulty actually defining it, but will easily be able to come up with examples such as picking up trash, digging holes or ditches, carrying heavy objects, loading or unloading boxes, weeding a garden, picking produce, raking leaves, washing dishes, vacuuming, cleaning, and so on. Next have students go over to the wall and push as hard as they can for about 20 seconds. When they are seated again, ask them if that was hard work and if they were able to move the wall. Then explain that science has defined work a little differently than we usually do. Science says that work happens when force is applied to an object and the object moves. According to the scientific definition of work, did they do work? Although they applied force

by pushing on the wall, the wall didn't move, so no work was done. Next give students small pieces of paper and have them push them across their desks. Is this work? According to the scientific definition, it is work. They applied force (pushed) the paper (the object) and the paper moved, so they worked.

Another scientific principle is the law of inertia. This law states that an object at rest will remain at rest until a force acts upon it or, in other words, everything will stay at rest until some force causes it to move. Here is a demonstration of inertia. Place a square piece of cardboard or cardstock on top of a glass. Place 2 or 3 pennies in a stack on top of the cardboard. Give a hard flick or a hard tap to the cardboard so that it will fly off the glass. (You may want to practice a little at home). The pennies should fall into the glass instead of flying off with the cardboard. The pennies fall into the glass because of inertia. They stay at rest because the force was applied to the cardboard and not to the pennies. They also fall into the glass because of gravity. People's natural tendency is to stay put, to not move, or just be lazy. We must overcome inertia and laziness in order to get work accomplished, but if you determine to work hard, you will.

Birds Do It, Bees Do It, Even Parents Do It!

Explain to students that birds, bees, and other animals all work hard to get their food, make their homes, and sometimes even work for people. Discuss some hard-working animals:

Beavers—cut down trees to make their dams. An average beaver cuts down about 300 trees each year. It usually takes about fifteen minutes for a beaver to cut down a tree.

Hummingbirds—flap their wings from 40-80 times a second, but up to 200 times a second during a fast dive.

A honeybee—can visit 2000 flowers in one day. An average worker honey bee will only produce 1/12th of a teaspoon of honey in its six weeks of life.

Ants—take care of the larvae, look for food, maintain hygiene, and guard the colony.

Hammerkops—a large African bird works a few hours a day for 3-4 months building a nest for its babies. The male collects the material and the female constructs it. When finished, the nest is five feet wide and five feet deep and can weigh over 1000 pounds.

Homing pigeons—carry messages for hundreds of miles and then fly back home.

Shrews—are mouse-like animals that eat insects, worms, snails, and small rodents. A shrew must eat 2-3 times its weight eat day or die.

Salmon—swim miles upstream, even jumping waterfalls along the way to get to their spawning area

Earthworms—rotate 20-40 tons of dirt per acre in a year. Besides

aerating the soil, they inject needed nutrients into it.

Emperor penguins—the male emperor penguin sits on the egg for 64 days until it hatches. Meanwhile the mother penguin goes back to the ocean to look for food. Once the baby hatches, the father keeps it warm and feeds it. When the mother penguin returns, she feeds the baby while the father gets food.

Moles—can tunnel through 300 feet of dirt in a day.

The rhinoceros beetle—can carry on its back weight that is equal to 850 times its own weight. That would be like a person carrying 76 medium-sized cars at one time.

These animals are used by people to do work:

Horses, donkeys, mules, camels, and elephants—are used for transportation and as pack animals.

Alaskan Malamutes—forge trails and pull heavy loads for long distances over snow and ice.

Bloodhounds—are used to track people. They have tracked someone for 125 miles. They can track a scent that is 300 hours old (over 12 days).

German Shepherd dogs—are used to guide the blind, sniff out drugs (helping police officers), guard places and people, and serve in the military.

Retrievers—are used to retrieve prey that hunters shoot.

Border collies, Australian shepherds, Catahoula leopard dogs, Old English sheep dogs, Welsh corgis, and many other breeds—are used to herd cattle and sheep.

We need to learn from animals and work hard like they do. Like animals, when people work hard, we get something we want (a clean house or a meal), or we earn something (usually money) which is very useful to pay for our needs and wants. If you continue to work hard in school, you will be able to go into a career that you will enjoy and that will pay well. This will help you be happy and successful.

Career Day

The first Labor Day celebrated in America was in Oregon in 1887. Then in 1894 President Grover Cleveland signed a bill to make it a national holiday to honor workers all over the U.S. We celebrate it on the first Monday of September by giving workers a day off to rest and enjoy. Remind students that parents work hard to pay for their children's clothes, food, homes, toys, and other things. Send a letter home with students asking parents to come and share about their jobs. Set up times for parents to come and do this. Hopefully, this will help students realize how hard their parents work. Also remind them that parents do a lot at home after work, so they should help out as much as possible.

Grasshoppers in History

From 1873-1877 millions of grasshoppers ate up crops in Minnesota and the surrounding states of Iowa, North Dakota, and South Dakota. They came in a black cloud and within 3-4 hours had eaten the wheat, corn, oats, and barley down to the ground. Horrifically, the grasshoppers kept coming back every summer, and no matter what the farmers did, they could not get rid of them. Finally, an April snowstorm in 1877 killed most of the eggs and the rest flew away when they hatched. A similar event happened in 1931 in Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota. This time the swarm was so thick that the sun was blotted out and people scooped them up by the shovelful. Plagues like this have not occurred in America since that time, but have occurred in other countries such as North Africa and parts of the Middle East. Interestingly, scientists have discovered that when grasshoppers get in a swarm, their appetites increase and their jaws get bigger!

Ant Facts

Ants are very industrious—hard working! The female ants take care of eggs and babies, kill and gather food, and build the anthills. Soldier ants protect the colony and the queen and attack enemy colonies. If a colony defeats another colony, they take its eggs; when the eggs hatch they become slaves to the new colony. Here are a few more interesting ant facts. Many ant species have one queen ant per colony, but some species have many queens. Some workers can live up to seven years, and some queens can live up to 15 years. An ant can lift twenty times its own weight. That would be like a 100 pound person picking up a small car. Red imported fire ants have a painful sting. If water washes out the colony, the ants form a ball that can float on the water.

Ant Crafts

Students can make anthills with ants on them. Use a brown piece of construction paper to represent the anthill. Then make the ants with fingerprints and ink. Use a black stamp pad. The thumbprint is the back of the ant; the tip of the pinky is used to make the thorax; the pointer finger is used to make the head. Students use a fine-tipped ink pen to draw on the legs and antennae. Let them make several ants on their anthills if time allows. Finally, ask students what work they plan on doing in the future to help their parents. Because of all they have learned from these lessons on work, they should want to help their parents with some work around the house. Students may also mention practicing a musical instrument. This is fine; encourage them to practice because that is how you become an expert.

It's Easy Now!

Next ask students if they can think of a way that people have made work easier. Yes, machines make work easier. Have students list various machines. Most will be simple machines combined into a complex machine. Here are some they may list: washing machine, clothes dryer, dishwasher, microwave, stove, blender, food processor, coffee maker, sewing machine, vacuum cleaner, can opener, lawn mower, wheelbarrow, drill, hammer, pliers, cash register, computer, printer, stapler, scissors, pencil sharpener, bicycle, all vehicles, tractor, plow, fishing rod and reel, escalator, elevator, backhoe, crane, etc. Machines make our work easier, but people who invent machines must work hard, studying science and doing experiments in order to figure out how to make the inventions.

Talking Long Distance

How many students like talking on the phone? How many parents, siblings, or students own a cell phone? The first telephone was invented by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876. He was only 29 years old, but it did not happen overnight. He had done years of research and was working with a partner when they finally were able to speak over the telephone. In fact, he would not have invented the telephone if he had not made a big mistake! While reading and researching about sound, Bell misunderstood a German technical manual (since he didn't speak or read German). He thought that the book was explaining how vowel sounds could be transmitted over wires. However, the book was actually stating that vowel sounds can be produced by electrical tuning forks and resonators. Because he believed what he thought he had read, he began experimenting on how to transmit all sounds over wires. This led to the invention of the telephone. Because of Alexander Graham Bell's hard work and determination, we can now talk to people around the world.

Students should now understand Mr. Bell's quote, "Before anything else, preparation is the key to success." Ask students to discuss some inventions that probably took a lot of hard work. Most inventions took a lot of hard work, so most inventions they name will qualify. Some examples are airplanes, the television, cars, the light bulb, the refrigerator, air conditioning, computers, etc.

What Is your Reaction Time?

Part of being diligent is doing what you are asked to do immediately—not waiting until you finish a game or a TV show, etc. How many of you say this to your mom: "I'll do it in just a minute"? Or some of you say, "I'll do it as soon as I finish...." Unfortunately many times what happens is that when you finally finish what you are doing, you then forget to do what your mom asked you to do. You need to get in the habit of stopping what you are doing and instead

going to do what your mom asked you to do. Your reaction time—the time it takes you to act or do what she asked should be from one to five seconds!!! Next try this experiment so each student can take a turn seeing what his or her reaction time is. One person holds a ruler at the top (by the 12 inches). The other person puts his hand around the ruler without touching it (about 1½ to 2 inches space between thumb and fingers with the ruler in the middle). The person holding the ruler drops it, and the other person catches it. Be sure to note how high on the ruler the person’s hand is at before it is dropped. Then when he catches it, note the distance that it fell. The shorter the distance is, the quicker the reaction time. Here are some distances and their equivalent reaction times: 2 inches—.10 seconds reaction time; 4 inches—.14 sec.; 6 inches—.18 sec.; 8 inches—.20 sec.; 10 inches—.23 sec.; 12 inches—.25 sec.

Here is another option: Decide on several activities that students must complete as quickly as they can. Some options are to skip rope ten times; walk from one point to another while balancing something on their heads; build a tower out of blocks with eyes closed, etc. Be sure to time the students to see who has the quickest time. After everyone has had a chance to participate, discuss how everyone was trying their hardest to do the activities quickly. Remind them that they should be just as willing to do things quickly for their moms or other adults. It just takes some self-discipline!

That’s Not Fair!

Ask students if it was fair when the grasshoppers ate without working. What if one of the students worked every Saturday all day to earn money? What if he or she used that money to buy a really cool toy? Would that boy or girl want another child to play with the toy most of the time while he or she just watched? No! Since your student paid for it, he or she would want to play with it most of the time. (I’m sure it would be fine to let another student play with it once in a while). Explain to students that you are going to play a guessing game. Divide the group into two teams and allow students to guess what is in a box. Give the students on one of the teams many more guesses than the other team. Do this again with a different object in the box. Again, let the same team have many more turns guessing. Hopefully, the class will catch on that you are not being fair. Ask students on the team that didn’t guess much how they felt. I am sure they felt frustrated, angry, and unhappy. The other team probably felt great, but it would have been better if they could have put themselves in the other students’ places and thought about how they needed to have more turns to even it out. They wouldn’t have felt so happy if they had been on the other team.

Here is another situation to discuss with students. Five students were walking to the park when one student’s neighbor asked them if

they would like a job raking leaves. He said, "If you will work from now (1:00 p. m.) until 5:00 p. m., I will pay you each ten dollars." The students were happy to earn some money so they agreed to work. About 3:00 the home owner realized that they needed more help to get the job done. He saw two more boys walking to the park and asked if they wanted a job raking leaves. He said, "I will pay you each ten dollars to rake leaves from now until 5:00 p. m." The boys agreed to work for the ten dollars. At 5:00 p. m. the man paid all seven students ten dollars each. Was that fair? Yes, it was because they were paid the amount they had agreed upon and had worked the amount they had agreed to work.

Fair for All

In this discussion, help students realize that sometimes giving everyone the exact same treatment is not the fair way to do things. For example, if the teacher said that only students who can jog around the school track can have an ice cream cone, would that be fair? What about a student who is sick or who has a physical disability? No, that would not be fair. Teachers have to look at the whole picture and look at each student and their abilities when they decide what is fair. What is difficult for one may be simple for another. It is best if all students can accomplish something, yet be challenged. Sometimes parents may expect more work from an older child than a younger child. After all, a twelve-year-old can help cook, but it would be more fair for a three year old to pick up toys. Allow students to share personal examples of times their parents or teachers were fair, yet treated children differently.

Tying It All Together

The ants and the grasshoppers finally realized that they had to work if they wanted to eat. They could still have fun, just not all the time. It is the same way for us. We have to work hard in school and our parents have to work in order to buy the things we need and want. That's just the way life works, and that makes it more fair, too.