

CHARACTER BUILDING ACTIVITIES

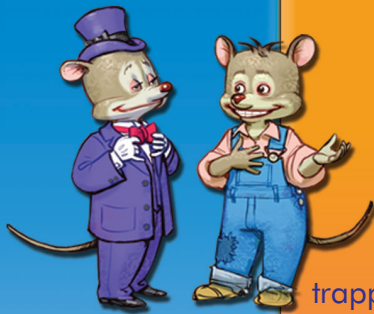
SOMMER-TIME STORIES

THE COUNTRY MOUSE AND THE CITY MOUSE

Story Description

City Mouse turns up his nose at the Country Mouse's simple home and plain food. Back at his house in the city, he treats his country cousin to a soft bed, beautiful gardens, and a buffet of delicious things to eat. Country Mouse is greatly impressed with City Mouse's riches until he meets a cat and nearly loses his life in a mousetrap.

City Mouse might have a beautiful home with fancy trappings, but Country Mouse prefers his own home where he has a cozy bed, healthy food, and a safe, peaceful life. Join Country Mouse and City Mouse in this modern-day retelling of a classic Aesop fable, to learn that peace and safety are more valuable than material possessions.



Major Objective

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

- Appreciation: valuing or regarding highly; an expression of gratitude
- Cheerfulness: expressing a feeling of joy or happiness
- Peacefulness: free from worry, danger, fighting, or disorder

Story Time Interaction

Read the story, *The Country Mouse and the City Mouse*, and then write these three character traits on the interactive whiteboard: appreciation, cheerfulness, and peacefulness. Define and discuss these character traits.

Discuss the characters:

Country Mouse	City Mouse
The Cat	

Activity Objectives

To use the following activities to reinforce the character traits of appreciation, cheerfulness, and peacefulness. To guide students to consider the importance of friendship, humility, proper work ethic, respect for others, safety, and tolerance.

Don't Be a Peacock

Discuss the fact that City Mouse showed a lot of pride and how we know this. (He was always talking about how great his house, yard, bed, and food were along with putting down everything that Country Mouse had). Bring in for display a peacock feather and show a picture on the internet of a male peacock. Explain that the male peacock is known for having pride due to the way he struts around showing off his feathers. However, explain that there is a saying: Pride goes before a downfall. Discuss its meaning and how this might relate to a peacock. Then show students a picture from the internet of a peacock that has molted. It looks pitiful! Allow students to give examples of people who have bragged or strutted and then fallen.

A Beautiful Present

Bring in a beautifully wrapped present and a brown paper bag and explain that the class will get to share what is inside the gifts. Put gummy bears or some tasty treat inside the brown paper bag; inside the beautifully wrapped present put something disgusting like Bertie Bott's jelly beans which has flavors like rotten egg and dirt. These can be purchased on the internet, but you can substitute very unripe fruit, citrus peel, or Durian wafer cookies which have a disgusting smell. Don't make anyone try the disgusting food, but a few brave ones probably will want to. Allow students to share the yummy food.

Discussion: The point is that the beautifully wrapped gift seemed like it would be the best gift, yet the brown paper bag contained the best food. Life can be this way, too. In the story the City Mouse seemed to have the best house and food, but once you got to know the situation, it was not good and was better to live in a simple home in the forest in peace and safety. It is important to look at the "whole picture" and not just part of it or what it seems like at first. We also tend to look at other people and think that what they have must make them happier than we are. This is not usually the case. Many times people who seem to have everything are actually miserable and wish they had a happy, peaceful, and loving family. Money simply cannot buy happiness.

Special Glasses See the Good in People

We shouldn't be critical like City Mouse. Listen to this story about a critical man: Once there was a man who had a problem. Nobody liked him. Finally, a co-worker told him why. It was because he criticized everyone. The co-worker told the man that he had some special glasses that would help him, but he could only use them for one week. The glasses would help him see the good in people. The man tried the glasses and to his surprise, he did see the good in people. When the week was over, he had made a lot of friends. He went to give the co-worker the glasses back and told him how well they had worked. The co-worker then said, "My friend, they didn't work. Those are just regular glasses. Because you thought they were magical, you were able to see the good in people." Have children make some "glasses" out of pipe cleaners. Show them how to bend the pipe cleaners and join them together to make glasses. Explain that these glasses are just a reminder to "see the good in people."

Narcissus

Explain that there is an ancient story about a man named Narcissus who saw his reflection in a pool of water and fell in love with himself. (There were no mirrors back then). He wouldn't leave his reflection so he eventually starved to death. Today some people are so narcissistic that they cannot have good relationships with other people. All they want to do is talk about themselves, never about others. We call this narcissism after the character, Narcissus. Nobody wants to be around someone who only cares about himself. To be a good friend we need to let the other person talk and share about his life. Take turns talking and take turns playing what each wants to play. It is also important not to point it out if you have something that is better than what someone else has. That is what City Mouse was constantly doing.

Pig Jewelry

Bring in a stuffed animal—a pig if possible. Put some jewelry on the pig. Ask students if pigs like to wear jewelry. Of course, they don't care about jewelry—they're pigs and they like to wallow in the mud! Besides, a pig with jewelry is still a pig no matter how you dress up the outside. However, people care about jewelry and use it to make them look good on the outside. Many times people care more about how they look on the outside than how they look on the inside. How we look on the inside is our character. Our character is kind of like jewelry—it can make us look good. City Mouse's character or insides didn't look too good because he was always criticizing and bragging. Have students help you list character traits that make a person beautiful and then list traits that make a person ugly on the inside.

What a Bunch of Junk!

If you have a collection of some things or know someone who does, bring in the collection for the class to see. Ask students if they collect anything and allow time for them to explain about their collections. Ask this question: When will you stop collecting _____ (whatever it is they collect)? Many will probably say that they will quit when the set is complete—when they have every piece that is available. Ask them if they will be happy then. Explain that many people work and strive to get more and more of something or of things. They think that the more they get, the happier they will be. Unfortunately, that is not how life works. Relate this story: Once there was a little girl who got an allowance each week for doing her chores. She saved her all of her money for two years without spending it on anything. Many times she wanted something, but she didn't get it because she was saving her money for something special. Then after two years her family went on vacation and she took all of her money because she wanted to buy some souvenirs. Well, she started off by buying just one souvenir, and then another and another until all of her money was gone. When she got home, she looked at all of the souvenirs, and they didn't really seem that great anymore. She was sorry that she had blown all of her money on just a bunch of junk, but she decided to learn a lesson and never do that again!

The Elephant Poem

Explain that different people have different perspectives on things in life. This means that we all look at things a little differently. How we look at something is our perspective or our outlook. In *The Country Mouse and the City Mouse*, the two mice had different perspectives on living in the city. Some students look at the rain as awful because they won't be able to go outside for recess. However, farmers are thankful for rain because their crops get watered for free. See if students can think of things that some may think of as bad, but could be good to someone else. Here is a story/poem that illustrates different perspectives.

John Godfrey Saxe's (1816-1887) version of the famous Indian legend:

It was six men of Indostan
To learning much inclined,
Who went to see the Elephant
(Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
Might satisfy his mind.

The First approached the Elephant,
And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side,
At once began to bawl:
"God bless me, but the Elephant
Is very like a wall!"

The Second, feeling of the tusk,
Cried, "Ho! what have we here
So very round and smooth and sharp?
To me 'tis mighty clear,
This wonder of an Elephant
Is very like a spear!"

The Third approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake!"

The Fourth reached out his eager hand,
And felt about the knee.
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he,

“’Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!”

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: “Even the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can?
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!”

The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Then, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
“I see,” quoth he, “the Elephant
Is very like a rope!”

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!

MORAL.
So oft in theologic wars,
The disputants, I have seen,
Rail on in utter ignorance
Of what each other mean,
And prate about an Elephant
Not one of them has seen!

A Beautiful Bouquet

Discuss why some people like to put others down. (Sometimes it makes the one putting someone down feel better about himself, but it is still wrong to do). Let students give examples of comments they have heard when someone put another person or their things down. Talk about how being honest does not mean that we say everything we think. We need to think of nice things to say to people instead of saying something that might hurt their feelings. It is also important to remember that just because some people are different or live differently from us does not mean that they are not as good as us. Sometimes being different is even better because then life is more interesting and less boring.

To show how differences in people are good and make life interesting, do the

following activity. Bring in about five or six different kinds of flowers (real or fake), at least three or four of each kind. You should have at least one flower per child. Pass the flowers out so that each child holds one. Explain that the many different kinds of flowers make a beautiful bouquet, just like the class is a beautiful mixture of different people. As each child brings up a flower, explain that this flower is like a student who is always happy. The next is like a student who studies hard and always does his homework. The next is like a student who is a fast runner. The next is like a student who is kind to everyone. Continue naming various traits until the entire bouquet is made. Finally, remind students that we should show appreciation and kindness to everyone around us even if they are different from us in looks or in how they act.

Role Play

Have two students act out a role play of visiting one of the children's houses. The house they visit will not have much or be very nice. The visitor will complain that there is nothing to do and nothing to eat. Then have a different child be the visitor and instead of complaining, the child will suggest they play tag or some other game that doesn't require any materials. The children have a lot of fun playing and pretending. Ask the students if you have to have fancy toys to have fun. (Of course not, and sometimes it is more fun to use your imagination).

For the second role play, have one student be the older sibling and the other child, the younger sibling. The younger sibling will complain about not having new clothes and having to wear hand-me-downs. The older sibling will remind the student that she wears used clothes, too, and that they should be thankful to have clothes when some children in the world only own the clothes they wear and those may be rags.

Tying it All Together

Remember to be humble—never bragging or boasting; then you'll have many friends. Also, instead of criticizing others, give them compliments and let them have turns in sharing about themselves. Finally, remember that everyone is different and has different perspectives, so don't think everyone must be just like you or do just what you do; instead, be tolerant of others' differences.