



CHARACTER BUILDING ACTIVITIES

SOMMER-TIME STORIES

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THE EMPEROR AND THE SEED

Story Description

The richly colored illustrations in this book beautifully reflect the majesty of this timeless retelling of an ancient oriental tale. When an aging emperor begins the search for his successor, he wisely listens to an elderly advisor and creates a test to find a courageous boy of character and integrity. To choose a worthy successor, he gathers seven of the best students in the land and gives them each a seed to cultivate and return to the palace.

Even with careful research and tending, Ming's seed does not grow. While many urge him to use another seed, he refuses to be dishonest. When it is time to return the pots, six students display vibrant plants, but Ming's pot is barren. Does Ming even have a chance to become the next emperor? This clever fable highlights the importance of honesty, courage, and integrity.



Major Objective

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

- **Courage:** the ability to face danger in spite of fear
- **Honesty:** being free from fraud, deception, cheating, or lying
- **Listening to Good Advice:** listening to the advice of those you respect and trust such as parents or others with proven character

Story Time Interaction

Read the story, *The Emperor and the Seed*, and then write these character traits on the interactive whiteboard: courage, honesty, and listening to good advice. Define and discuss these character traits.

Discuss these characters:

The emperor

Ming's friends

Ming

Ming's parents

The other six boys

Activity Objectives

To use the following activities to reinforce the character traits of courage, honesty, and listening to good advice. To guide students to consider the importance of displaying wisdom, integrity, responsibility, diligence, and respect for parents.

Be Courageous!

The emperor realized it was very important to choose a successor who would have good character traits like courage, honesty, wisdom, and integrity. He also realized that it would not be easy to find someone with these qualities. That is why he gladly went along with Sun Han's plan. When Ming's seed did not grow, it took a lot of courage for him to keep trying and not replace the seed with a different one. It was especially courageous of him to continue being honest about the seed when the other children made fun of him and when he had to go before the emperor. Many people think that courage is doing something dangerous. However, many times it takes more courage to do the right thing when everyone else is doing wrong and laughing at you. When a coward sees a giant, how does he feel? When a hero sees a giant, how does he feel? Yes, they both feel afraid, but the coward runs away and the hero meets the challenge. If you let it, fear will control you. Instead you must face your fears; it is the only way to conquer them. Here are some quotes that are very true about courage. Discuss their truth and meanings with students.

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear. Nelson Mandela

It takes a lot of courage to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends. J. K. Rowling

Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go. T. S. Eliot

Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway. John Wayne

He who is not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish nothing in life. Mohammad Ali

It's easy to stand with the crowd. It takes courage to stand alone. Mahatma Gandhi

If you want to double your rate of success, double your rate of failure. Winston Churchill

Failure is an event, never a person. William D. Brown

Courageous Animals

Although doing what's right is many times the most courageous

act someone can do, people sometimes do heroic deeds when they save someone's life despite danger. People have been saved from drowning, from burning buildings, from cliffs, and from other dangers. Interestingly, animals have also been known to do heroic deeds. Some people may think that animals don't feel afraid, but it is certain that they do. Have you ever seen a dog during a thunderstorm or around firecrackers? Some, but not all, dogs will shake and tremble when they hear these loud noises because they are afraid, yet many animals have rescued people from dangerous situations. Here are some interesting stories about heroic animals (there are many more):

In 1945, during World War II, a pigeon named William of Orange flew 250 miles to deliver a message that saved over 2,000 soldiers' lives. He was rewarded with a Dicken Medal for his bravery.

LuLu, a pot-bellied pig, saved her owner's life. When JoAnn Altsman collapsed from a heart attack, LuLu broke through a gate and ran to the road where she lay down on the road in front of passing cars. Finally, a motorcyclist stopped and followed LuLu to her owner and called 911.

Todd Endris owes his life to a pod of dolphins. While Todd was surfing, a great white shark struck him three times. Todd thought he was doomed, but suddenly he was surrounded by a pod of bottle-nosed dolphins. They protected him as they guided him to shore, undoubtedly saving his life.

In 1925 the only way to get life-saving serum to people dying of diphtheria in Nome, Alaska was by dog sled. The credit for this feat usually goes to the dog, Balto, who led a team on the last leg of the trip for 55 miles. However, a dog named Togo also deserves a lot of credit for leading his team 250 miles through white-out storms and across treacherous ice that was breaking up. Togo and his team ran five times further than the other teams in temperatures below -30 with a wind chill of -85 degrees. This team effort saved many lives!

Act It Out

Ask students to name some things they are afraid of. Here are some things they might list: spiders, snakes, the dark, monsters, storms, dogs, bears, height, roller coasters, clowns, flying, bullies, fire, getting lost, speaking in front of a lot of people, drowning, fireworks, eating something nasty, getting a shot, the dentist, the unknown, change. These are common fears. Next ask one or two students to act out one of these fears and the class will guess which one it is. Finally, discuss why students are afraid of these things. Talk about the fact that some of these fears are understandable, such as fearing poisonous snakes. However, point out why many of these fears are not worth worrying about. For example, most people will probably never see a

bear except in a zoo. Also, monsters don't exist. Most of the time we can avoid these potential dangers. Other times we need to face our fears. If you are afraid of drowning, then face your fear and learn how to swim. Facing your fears can take a lot of courage, but you can do it!

Sometimes people have huge fears that are irrational; these are called phobias. This means there is really no reason to be afraid. Here are some examples: fear of washing, the wind, dust, walking, flowers, the sun, books, buttons, trees, light. Allow students to think of things that seem silly to be afraid of. Then they can look on the Internet to see if it is a recognized phobia. Again, point out that having a fear is not silly or crazy, and no one should make fun of someone's fears. In fact, facing your fears takes a lot of courage!

Doing the Right Thing

In *The Emperor and the Seed*, Ming showed us that it is very important to always do what is right even when it is difficult. Ming did not know that doing right was going to make him the next emperor. He did the right thing because he was committed to doing right. A commitment means that you are going to do something no matter how hard it gets. It is a promise to do something. A common example of commitment is marriage. A hundred years ago very few people divorced. People were very committed to the idea of marriage, and to divorce meant great disgrace and shame. Unfortunately, today people are not very committed to staying married. If a couple has difficulties, they many times just divorce and move on. This is not good because a divorce can cause financial problems and, if the couple has children, it is very painful for them. Tell students that it is important to learn now to keep a commitment or a promise. First of all, don't make a promise if you think you may not be able to keep it. Second, if you make a promise, determine when you make it that you will keep it no matter how hard it is to do so.

Many times in life there is a right way to do something and a wrong way. Doing it the right way can make a big difference. For example, riding a bicycle is not that hard. However, if you turn around backwards and do it the wrong way, you will probably fall over and get hurt. The same is true of cooking. If you follow the recipe's directions you will get a delicious cake, but if you do it the wrong way, the result may taste terrible. To show students that doing what is right can be hard and make a difference in the results, demonstrate this activity. Place several layers of newspaper flat on a table. The pages should be opened up all the way, and the bottom edges of the newspaper should be even with the edge of the table next to you. Next slide a yardstick under the fold leaving about 18 inches sticking out. Explain that you want to push the yardstick down and make the newspaper come up off the table. That is the right thing to do. Now try to do it quickly and hard. The newspaper won't move. Now explain that you are going to do it the right way—pushing gently and slowly down and the newspaper will come

up. Give students a chance to try this experiment both ways.

Going in the Right Direction

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “The time is always right to do what’s right.” By always doing what is right like Ming did, you will keep your life going in the right direction—towards having a happy, successful life instead of heading towards misery and a life of drugs or imprisonment. Many times teachers and adults can look at a student and can see that if the child does not change his attitude, actions, and direction, he will wind up either in jail or in a low-paying, dead-end job or addicted to drugs or alcohol. To help students remember to go in the right direction, show them how to make a compass. First show them a compass and explain that a compass always points to the North. This is very useful to ships or anyone lost. If they know which way is north, they can navigate the ship or find their way home. For this experiment you will need a large bowl of water, a needle, a piece of cork, and a magnet. First magnetize the needle by rubbing a bar magnet over the needle about forty or fifty times. If the needle will attract a paper clip or stick to other metal, then it is magnetized and ready for the experiment. Carefully poke the needle through the cork and place the cork in the water. The needle should rotate and point to magnetic north. Turn the bowl and watch the needle move and continue to point north. It is now a compass.

Next remind students that sometimes they are headed in the wrong direction and may need to change their direction. That will mean that they change their actions—what they are doing—and they may need to change their friends, too. If their friends are influencing them to do wrong, get new friends! Using the bowl of water from the above experiment, put a little boat in the water. You can use a toy boat or a paper boat. Next give it a little push across the water. Say, “Oops! That’s the wrong way!” Ask a student or two to blow the boat so it will change directions. Yes! Now it is going the right way!

My Pledge

Have students make a class pledge to do what is right. They can work individually, in groups, or you can lead them as a class. Say the pledge together as a group or class. Another option is to use this pledge: I pledge to always do my best. I will do what is right even when it is hard. I will keep my promises and always tell the truth even when I am afraid of the consequences. By living this kind of life, I will be happy and successful.

Badges of Honor

To give positive reinforcement to students for doing what is right, make some badges or necklaces with the following statements and award them when you catch a student doing something right. If

possible, laminate them so they will last longer and can be reused or, if paper, let the students take them home. You will need multiples of each since the whole class will probably turn in their homework, etc.

I'm awesome! I was caught being kind!
Wahoo! I tried my best!
I rock! I listened to the teacher!
Yes! My effort was out of this world!
I'm awesome! I lined up quietly!
Wahoo! I used good manners!
I rock! I turned in my homework!
Yes! I showed a positive attitude!
I'm awesome! I helped clean up without being asked!
Wahoo! I encouraged someone who was down!
I rock! I did the right thing when it was hard!
Yes! I told the truth when I was afraid!
I'm awesome! I kept my promise!
Wahoo! I helped a friend!
I rock! I shared today!
Yes! I showed appreciation!
I'm awesome! I obeyed!
Wahoo! I was a team player!
I rock! I let someone else go first!
Yes! I showed respect to others!

I'm in Charge of Me!

Sometimes people want to blame others for what they do or don't do, but in reality each person is responsible for themselves—their actions, their decisions, their words, and their school work. That means it is important to plan ahead and be prepared, to do your job and not worry whether or not someone else is doing theirs, to think before acting or speaking, to think about the consequences of your actions, words, and decisions for you and others, and to get advice from wise adults. You can also explain that yes, your parents are in charge of you, but you have the freedom to obey and get good results or not to obey and face the consequences. Have students read this motto several times: I'm in charge of me! I'm in charge of my actions, my words, my decisions, and my school work! I'm in charge of me!

Go Fish!

Here is a fishing game to help students remember the importance of doing right. Cut out and laminate some paper fish that have words or phrases on them. Attach a paperclip to each fish. Then with the fish face down, students "fish" for a good character trait. Tie a string to a dowel rod or a stick from a tree. At the end of the string tie a magnet.

Each student gets one fish before passing the rod to the next student. If it is a good character trait, he keeps it. If it is a bad character trait, he puts it in a discard pile. If this activity is used for the whole class, you may want to discuss each trait. However, later the students can play it in small groups and just take turns fishing. Here are the words and phrases to write on the fish:

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| Be fair. | Only look out for yourself. |
| Show respect. | Cheat if no one will know. |
| Be responsible. | Come to school late. |
| Forgive others. | Don't turn in homework. |
| Work hard. | Be a bully. |
| Be kind. | Never say thank you. |
| Help others. | Boss others around. |
| Cooperate. | Tell a lie if it will get you out of trouble. |
| Show appreciation. | Be a complainer. |
| Tell the truth. | Be lazy. |
| Have a good attitude. | Tell everyone how great you are. |
| Set a goal. | Quit if you can't do something the first time. |
| Be a good listener. | Don't brag. |
| Keep trying. | Keep calm. |

Don't Get Caught in a Web of Lies

Before students come into the room, prepare a "web of lies." Take a roll of yarn and wind it in and around chairs, desks, and other objects making a criss-crossed web. While sitting in a different area, discuss with students how lies will trap you and cause you to get in a lot of trouble instead of getting you out of trouble. Telling a lie will usually cause you to tell more and more lies and you have to keep remembering what lies you have told. This can be very difficult and stressful, so you are better off just telling the truth in the beginning. Ask students if they have any examples of when lying caused them to get in even more trouble than when they started. Next let students take turns in trying to get across the "web of lies" without touching the yarn. Hopefully, you made it impossible!

Where's Abe?

When Abraham Lincoln was a boy, he borrowed a book which he placed between the logs of his cabin wall. Unfortunately, it rained and the book was ruined, so Abe worked and paid the owner for the cost of the book. Another time after he arrived at home from the store, Abe realized that the clerk had given him too much change, so he walked back to the store (twelve miles round trip which probably took about four or five hours) and returned the money. These two

examples help us understand how the future president received the nickname “Honest Abe.” To help students remember Abe’s honesty, play the game Where’s Abe? Show students a penny and Abraham Lincoln’s face that is on it. Explain that only our country’s most beloved and respected presidents (and other respected people like Benjamin Franklin) are depicted on our money. Next tell them that you have placed some pennies (about 50) around the room and you want them to find the pennies. Make sure that the pennies are visible, and tell students to sit down once they have found two pennies. This will allow everyone a chance to find one. If needed when there are just one or two students still looking, give clues by saying hot or cold meaning near or far.

Tying It All Together

Ming demonstrated the importance of always doing what is right and being honest even when it is hard. It may be hard to do right, but eventually it will help you be successful. And the more you do right, the easier it will be to keep doing right. People will see you doing right things, and then you will get a reputation for being a person of integrity and honesty. This will help you in the future to get good friends, to get a job, and to get promotions.