

CHARACTER BUILDING ACTIVITIES

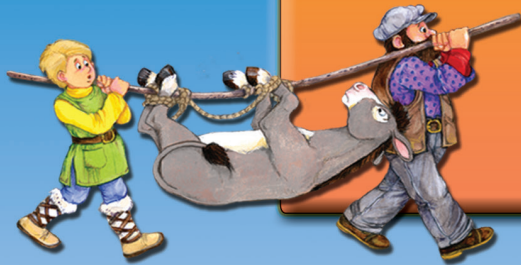
SOMMER-TIME STORIES

THE MILLER, HIS SON, AND THEIR DONKEY

Story Description

The miller Elmo and his son Mort have a problem—instead of standing up for what they know is right, they follow everyone else’s opinions. When a farmer complains that Elmo is overworking the donkey, Elmo and Mort mill the grain. When others complain that his prices are too high, Elmo reduces the price, even if he’s losing money. When a friend suggests Mort steal apples with him, Mort goes along with the plan.

Their trouble worsens when they take their donkey to sell at the market and listen to all the advice they hear along the way. By trying to please everyone, they end up pleasing no one and losing their donkey. This retelling of Aesop’s classic fable illustrates that the path to success means standing up for what is right.



Major Objective

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

- Responsibility: being trustworthy to complete assignments and duties
- Assertiveness: expressing ideas or actions toward others with confidence
- Courage: the determination to do something in spite of being fearful

Story Time Interaction

Read the story, *The Miller, his Son, and their Donkey*, and then write these three character traits on the interactive whiteboard: responsibility, assertiveness, and courage. Define and discuss these character traits.

Discuss the characters:

- Elmo Mort Heddy Sid
- The farmer and his wife The donkey
- The girls The old men and women
- The mothers and their children
- The store owners

Activity Objectives

To use the following activities to reinforce the character traits of responsibility, assertiveness, and courage. To guide students to consider the importance of honesty, listening, obedience to parents, proper work ethic, respect for others, and trustworthiness.

Doing the Right Thing

Have students discuss doing the right thing. Ask students how they know if something is the right thing to do or not. Ask students to share about a time when they did the right thing and how they felt. Next ask students to share about a time when they did not do the right thing and how they felt. What were the results? What should you do if a cool kid in class wants you to help him cheat? What would you do if some friends start picking on a younger kid—join in or stop the bullying?

Tug o' War

Conduct a Tug o' War and then ask: Have you ever experienced a strong pull or desire to do something wrong, even though you knew you shouldn't? It is important to think about the consequences of not doing the right thing. Ask students to suggest some things that strongly tempt them. What would the consequences be if they give in?

What Are You Doing, Mr. Skunk?

To reinforce the importance of doing right, teach students to play the game, What Are You Doing, Mr. Skunk? You will need a home-free base (such as a blanket) and a large open space where students can run. Begin by sitting on the ground (or just standing if you are slow) with students staying a safe distance from you. The home-free base should be placed about 10 yards away from you. As the students cautiously come near you, encourage them to ask, "What are you doing today, Mr. Skunk?" You are the skunk, so you say something like, "Today I am being kind." (List a behavior that is either right or wrong). When you call out an action that is right, the questioning continues. When you call out an action that is wrong, you chase the students, trying to tag someone before they get to home base. Possible statements that do not involve chasing: "Today I am working hard." "Today I am listening." "Today I am using self-control." Possible statements that require the skunk to chase students: "Today I am losing my temper." "Today I am selfish." and "Today I am disobeying!" If needed, create a list of statements. Then students can take turns being the skunk and just read the statements in random order.

Consequences or Rewards?

Discuss the importance of always doing what is right. Talk about how we cannot make everyone happy by doing what they want. Also, we should not do something wrong just to make someone else happy. If we do right things, we will be successful and get rewards in life instead of winding up in a miserable job or in prison. Students should learn to accept good advice from their parents and other trusted adults, and to reject bad advice from people who only claim to be their friends. A true friend does not want a friend to do wrong things. Sometimes classmates or neighborhood kids will make fun of those who want to do right, but students should learn to stand up for what is right. There are consequences for wrong behavior. You may not get caught for every single wrong thing you do now, but if you get in a habit of doing wrong things, you will eventually get caught. Have students identify some consequences of wrong behavior.

Science—Transfer a Copper Coating to Pins and Nails

Discuss the fact that some people influence others. Happy people can make others feel happy; sad people can make others feel sad. In addition, people sometimes influence others to do right or wrong. We should try to influence others to do right. Also, we should not let anyone influence us to do wrong. Here is a science experiment to show how people can influence others. Place about ten shiny pennies in a little glass dish and cover them with vinegar. Place some pins or small nails in the same solution on top of the pennies. (Be sure that the pins and nails are first cleaned well by using scouring power or a scouring pad). Wait thirty minutes to two hours and then look at the pins and nails. They should have a light copper coating on them that came from the pennies. It transferred from the pennies to the pins and nails. This is similar to what happens with people. Our attitudes and values can transfer to other people.

How Would You Like Some Nasty Food?

Bring in some food that is really nasty looking and smelling. It could even have mud mixed into or have mold on it since no one will be eating it. Say something like, “I have some of the worst-tasting, most horrible, nasty food I have ever smelled, and it is really bad for you, too. Go ahead and just try it.” Of course, no one will want to eat it; it is easy to say, “no.” Unfortunately, something very similar to this often happens. Kids offer other kids drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes which are very harmful to a person’s body. Encourage students to learn to say, “no,” to these harmful substances even though it may not be as easy as saying “no” to the nasty food. This is standing up for what is right.

Corrie ten Boom and the Nazis

Discuss the fact that doing what is right can be very hard. Sometimes it is difficult because people fear for their lives. For example, in the late 1930’s and early 40’s in parts of Europe, some people were against the persecution of the Jewish people by Hitler and his men—the Nazis. Some of these good people, such as Corrie ten Boom, her sister Betsey, and their father hid some Jews in their homes. However, Corrie’s family and many others did so at great risk to their lives. When the Nazis discovered the Jews hiding in their home, Corrie, Betsey, and their father were imprisoned in a concentration camp. Only Corrie survived. Doing what was right cost Betsey and their father their lives. Even today people are persecuted and enslaved in various parts of the world. Also, discuss this quote by Helen Keller: “Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”

Don’t Talk—Just Act

Remind students that sometimes actions speak louder than words. For example, Mort stole apples and Elmo acted on the advice of others. Have students think of some actions of people that show either good or bad character. For example, doing kind deeds or pushing someone down are actions that people do. Think about the hand signals that a traffic cop uses. It is very important that people understand his signals or they could do the wrong thing and wind up in an accident. Then have

students play a little game of identifying the meaning of some common actions (hand motions) in our culture: come here—beckoning with hand; you’re crazy—making a circle motion with the index finger while pointing to the head; be quiet—index finger on the lips; stop—hand held out in front; hello—wave; go ahead—to motion with the hand and arm; I want to hug you—open arms; dah—hitting the head; I’m mad—folded arms; I’m a winner—arms up with hands in fists; I don’t know—shrug shoulders. (Students may think of more). Finally, display and discuss this quote: “Well done,” is better than “Well, said.”

Row, Row, Row Your Boat

Teach students this version of the song, Row, Row, Row your Boat by Christa Grant. Then discuss the importance of always doing what is right and what it means to paddle against the stream.

Row, row, row your boat,
Always do what’s right.
You may paddle against the stream,
But you’ll achieve your dream.

Role Play

Have two students act out a role play of wanting to buy a present for their mothers’ birthdays. One has the money because he saved, but the other has spent all of his money on candy and has no money to buy a present.

For the second role play, have two students get hired to do the job of raking leaves. The one does the job, but the other one plays instead. Then the person who hired them comes and pays the one who worked and offers her a job washing the car. Talk about how important it is to make good decisions and always do what is right. Doing the right thing affects our future. People look at what we do and then decide whether or not to offer a job, a promotion, a bonus, more responsibility, etc.

Special Speaker

Have someone from a juvenile detention center come in and speak about what juveniles did to get there and how friends influenced them.

Tying It All Together

Although it can sometimes be very difficult, always do what is right, and you will not regret it. The rewards for doing right will far outweigh the consequences of doing wrong, and you will feel good about yourself. Don’t let anyone influence you to do wrong; instead, influence others to do right.