

# *Accountability*

Accepting responsibility  
and answering for one's  
choices

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Your life is the sum of all the choices you make, both consciously and unconsciously. If you control the process of choosing, you can take control of all aspects of your life. You can find the freedom that comes from being in charge of yourself.

Robert F. Bennett

“What kind of school  
would my school be, if all  
of its students were just  
like me?”



# March 2006 Character Connection Theme: Accountability



## Definition

If something is accountable it is “answerable” and “capable of being explained.” It is synonymous with being responsible.<sup>1</sup> “Accountable emphasizes liability for something of value either contractually or because of one’s position of responsibility.”<sup>2</sup> People who are accountable think about long term consequences before they act. They accept responsibility for the consequences of their choices. They do not make excuses, blame others for their mistakes or take credit for another’s success. While some may think that accomplishment is just “the luck of the Irish,” successful people realize that accountability has everything to do with victory.

In 1778 John Quincy Adams was traveling in Europe with his father. Abigail Adams wrote to her son, John Quincy, about the importance of being accountable in the way he used his education and talents. She wrote: "Improve your understanding for acquiring useful knowledge and virtue, such as will render you an ornament to society, an Honour to your Country, and a Blessing to your parents. Great Learning and superior abilities, should you ever possess them, will be of little value and small Estimation, unless Virtue, Honour, Truth and integrity are added to them. Adhere to those religious Sentiments and principals which were early instilled into your mind and remember that you are accountable to your Maker for all your words and actions."<sup>3</sup>

## Quotes

“I repeat ... that all power is a trust; that we are accountable for its exercise; that from the people and for the people all springs, and all must exist.” -- Benjamin, Earl of Beaconsfield Disraeli (1804–1881)<sup>4</sup>

“We must reject the idea that every time a law's broken, society is guilty rather than the lawbreaker. It is time to restore the American precept that each individual is accountable for his actions.”—Ronald Reagan

“Good men prefer to be accountable.” --Michael Edwardes<sup>5</sup>

“What kind of School  
Would this School be  
If all of its students  
Were just like me?”<sup>6</sup>



## Activities

\*\*Play Chain Soccer.<sup>7</sup> The group is divided into two teams. Each team forms a line facing the other team. There are six feet between the two lines. The players hook elbows with those on either side to form a chain. Establish a goal line for each team. A soccer ball is rolled between the two teams. By using their feet, players try to move the ball toward their goal line. *How important is it for team members to be responsible for their portion of the chain?*

<sup>1</sup> “accountable,” The American Heritage Dictionary, page 9

<sup>2</sup> “responsible,” The American Heritage Dictionary, page 1108

<sup>3</sup> Bryant, Wilbert, August 27, 1998 remarks to the faculty and Staff of the Collegiate Schools of Richmond, Virginia <http://www.education.state.va.us:8000/speechfiles/collegiate-web.htm>, accessed February 8, 2002

<sup>4</sup> John Bartlett (1820–1905). Familiar Quotations, 10th ed. 1919. <http://www.bartleby.com/100/424.27.html>, accessed February 8, 2002

<sup>5</sup> “http://www.cyber-nation.com/victory/quotations/subjects/quotes\_responsibility.html, accessed February 8, 2002

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from William B. Smart, The Scouters Minute, page 40

<sup>7</sup> How-to Book, page 2-6

\*\*Divide the class into teams and use relays: Carry a nut in a spoon, walk with a ball between legs, walk holding ankles, carry beans on a plastic knife, etc. *How important is your performance to the rest of the team? Why is doing your best important?*

\*\*Place a marshmallow on each child's desk. Tell them that at a specific time, if the marshmallow is still there, another will be added, and later another, then follow through. The consequence of more marshmallows is clearly determined by the actions taken.



During a talk show, some money was placed in piles in front of a group of people. The people were told that they could have the money on the table if they took it or they could wait for more. At a specific interval of time, another dollar would be added to the pile if the money had not been touched. The starting timer had hardly rung before someone had grabbed up all the money: they were too greedy to share or wait for more. *Many times, our choices have consequences for others as well as ourselves.*

\*\* Newton's third law states: "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction."<sup>8</sup> List some action-reaction force pairs. Talk about the way choices are connected to consequences. ("You can not pick up one end of the stick without moving the other end.") Have the class talk about the consequences of certain paths taken in life, and then memorize a poem such as "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost.<sup>9</sup>



## Stories

### **The Price is High** By Zig Ziglar<sup>10</sup>

A long time ago, a Chinese rice farmer looked over his hilltop field and saw a huge wave in the ocean. He realized a tidal wave would soon follow. To warn his unsuspecting neighbors working in fields close to the ocean, he quickly lit his field on fire and ran to ring the temple bell. His ocean side neighbors heard the bell and came rushing to help. From the safety of the hill, they watched the water engulf their fields and realized that for the price of a rice field their lives had been spared. *What does accountability have to do with saving the lives of others? As a community are we accountable for more than just ourselves? Contrast this story with "The Boy Who Cried Wolf." Who is accountable for the loss of the sheep? Are the villagers accountable in any way?*

### **The Buck Stops Here**

When Truman was nominated as vice president in 1944, many Democratic leaders thought that since President Roosevelt would probably not live through a fourth term, his vice president would succeed to the presidency. Roosevelt won the 1944 election. On April 12, 1945, Truman was summoned to Eleanor Roosevelt's study. "Harry," she said, "the President is dead." Truman replied, "Is there anything I can do for you?" Mrs. Roosevelt responded, "Is there anything *we* can do for *you*? For you are the one in trouble now."

Truman took the Presidential office at 7:09 that evening and the next day commented to newsmen: "Boys, if you ever pray, pray for me now. I don't know whether you fellows ever had a load of hay fall on you, but when they told me yesterday what had happened, I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me."

During his presidency, Truman made many important decisions: he ordered American fliers to drop an atomic bomb on Japan, recognized the new State of Israel, and sent U.S. troops to South Korea.<sup>11, 12</sup> On the desk of President Truman was a sign that said, "The Buck Stops Here." He often referred to the idea of accountability stated on that plaque. For instance, on December 19, 1952 in a speech at the national War College, he said, "You know, it's easy for the Monday morning quarterback to say what the coach should have done, after the game is over. But when the decision is up before you -- and on my desk I have a motto which says 'The Buck Stops Here' -- the decision has to be made." In January 1953, during his farewell address Truman spoke of presidential responsibility, "The President--whoever he is--has to decide. He can't pass the buck to anybody. No one else can do the deciding for him. That's his job."<sup>13</sup> *For what decisions are you accountable?*

<sup>8</sup> Henderson, Tom, The Physics Classroom, <http://www.glenbrook.k12.il.us/gbssci/phys/Class/newtlaws/u214a.html>, accessed Feb. 18, 2002

<sup>9</sup> Tripathi, Shefali and Banerjee, Anando, The Road Not Taken [http://frost.freehosting.net/poems\\_road\\_not\\_taken.htm](http://frost.freehosting.net/poems_road_not_taken.htm), accessed Feb. 18, 2002

<sup>10</sup> Zig Ziglar, "The Price is high" Pleasant Grove Review, Wed., February 18, 1998 page 4

<sup>11</sup> Hamby, Alonzo L. "Truman, Harry S." *World Book*, 19, 1988

<sup>12</sup> [http://discuss.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/zforum/01/world\\_murphy120401.htm](http://discuss.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/zforum/01/world_murphy120401.htm), accessed February 18, 2002

<sup>13</sup> "The Buck Stops Here" desk sign, Harry S. Truman library <http://www.trumanlibrary.org/buckstop.htm>, accessed February 8, 2002



## Writing or Discussion Topics

\*\*It is said that when Lincoln was asked to take a drink, he refused. When asked why, Lincoln replied that it was because of a promise made to his mother. *Are we accountable for the promises that we make? What promises have we made? To whom have we made promises? What are the consequences of keeping and breaking our promises?*

\*\*As a class, read Peppe the Lamplighter by Elisa Bartone. (This is a Caldecott Honor Book about an immigrant boy who with his family discovers that his menial job of lighting the lamps is important.) Have students discuss with their parents about how accountability is important in the work place. Then have students write a story about an employee at their parent's place of work learning the importance of being accountable. *What are the benefits of acting responsibly?*

\*\*A few years ago, vandalism caused an estimated \$20,000 in damage to the landscaping at Mountain View High School when 15 established trees were cut down. *What does vandalism have to do with accountability? How will the acts of these vandals touch the lives of other people, the environment, as well as the vandals' own future?*



## Role Plays

\*\*It is Monday. Susan has a spelling test on Friday. *What are the consequences if she studies a little bit every night during the week? What are the consequences if she waits until Thursday to study?*

\*\*Sherri is a new girl in class who does not have any friends. *What are the consequences if Alayna invites her to play jump rope with the rest of the girls? What happens if Alayna ignores Sherri? What if the entire class ignores Sherri?*

\*\*The teacher leaves the classroom. Suddenly Billy tosses a gum wrapper onto Jill's desk. *What could be the immediate consequences of Billy's behavior? How is Billy accountable for what happens in the room?*

\*\*George is walking home from school. He takes the uneaten granola bar from his lunch out of his backpack. He unwraps it, takes a bite, and the wrapper falls unnoticed to the ground. *What are some possible short term and long term consequences of George's behavior? What happens if everyone lets their litter fall unnoticed to the ground? Steven, who cares about the environment, is a few yards behind George and notices the wrapper drop. What could Steven do?*



## Book List

Bennett, William J. The Children's Book of Virtues "the Little Hero of Holland" (page 12) *Peter's finger stops the water from coming through the hole in the dike.*

Hoban, Russell Bedtime for Frances *Frances learns that it is her job to go to bed.*

Bartone, Elisa. Peppe the Lamplighter Lothrop, Lee and Shepard Books. *Peppe learns that his job of lamplighter is important.*

Berenstain, Stan and Jan The Berenstain Bears Don't Pollute (anymore) *The Bear family learns that it is everybody's responsibility to keep the earth clean.*

De Paola, Tomie Strega Nona's Magic Lessons *Big Anthony learns that practicing magic requires following directions or disastrous consequences occur.*

Gikow, Louise Muppet Kids in Piggy Gets the Jitters *Miss Piggy learns that it is practicing, not avoiding the piano that will help her perform well at the recital.*

Potter, Beatrix Tales of Peter Rabbit and His Friends "The Tale of Peter Rabbit" *Peter ignores Mother Rabbit's warning and finds disastrous consequences for his visit to Mr. McGregor's garden.*

Mayer, Mercer All By Myself *A rather humorous look at what can happen when we take responsibility before being capable.*

April: Self-Control

May: Worth and Potential

June: Family Spirituality

Name \_\_\_\_\_

### Scrambled Word Puzzle

Unscramble the words. Use the circled letters to make the word:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14  
\*\*\*\*\*

1. EBCLAAP    \_ \_ 1 \_ \_ 8 \_ \_ \_ \_

2. OGITBNLOIA    4 9 \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ 7 \_ \_ \_ \_

3. BEILAL    \_ \_ 10 \_ \_ \_ \_

4. AWLBERAENS    \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ 11 \_

5. YIBIENSIOLRSPT    \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ 14

6. SEQEUNNOCCE    2 \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ 5 \_ \_ 3 \_

7. TMECONTMIM    \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ 6 13

8. IMOREPS    \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ 12 \_ \_

**Word Bank**  
responsibility  
consequence  
liable  
obligation  
capable  
promise  
answerable  
commitment