


## *Community & Character*


Your character  
shapes  
your future.

“Character is formed  
by doing the thing we  
are supposed to do,  
when it should be  
done, whether we feel  
like doing it or not.”

~ Father Flanagan ~



August Character Connection Theme:  
A Community of Character



## Definitions

**Community** is a group of people living in the same locality and under the same government. It is a group or class that have common interests.<sup>1</sup>

**Character** is the combination of qualities that distinguish one person, group, or thing from another. It is the combined ethical structure of a group. One's character is one's moral or ethical strength or reputation.<sup>2</sup>

On June 19, 2002, President George W. Bush spoke at the White House Conference on Character and Community. Among his comments were these:

“. . . Education should prepare children for jobs, and it also should prepare our children for life. I join you in wanting our children to not only be rich in skills, but rich in ideals. Teaching character and citizenship to our children is a high calling. . . Our children must learn to make a living, but even more, they must learn how to live. . . I love what Martin Luther King Jr. said about this. He said, ‘Intelligence is not enough. Intelligence plus character, that is the goal of true education.’ And I want to thank you for joining that true goal of education.”<sup>3</sup>

## Quotes

"Character is the result of two things — mental attitude and the way we spend our time." --Elbert Hubbard

"Personality is a gift; character is victory."--Taylor Hartman

"Character isn't inherited. One builds it daily by the way one thinks and acts, thought by thought, action by action." --Helen Gahagan Douglas<sup>4</sup>

"The first requisite of a good citizen in this republic of ours is that he should be able and willing to pull his weight." -- Theodore Roosevelt <sup>5</sup>

"I am responsible. Although I may not be able to prevent the worst from happening, I am responsible for my attitude toward the inevitable misfortunes that darken life. Bad things do happen; how I respond to them defines my character and the quality of my life. I can choose to sit in perpetual sadness, immobilized by the gravity of my loss, or I can choose to rise from the pain and treasure the most precious gift I have – life itself." —Walter Anderson

"The best index to a person's character is (a) how he treats people who can't do him any good, and (b) how he treats people who can't fight back."--Abigail Van Buren

"Our character is basically a composite of our habits. Because they are consistent, often unconscious patterns, they constantly, daily, express our character." – Stephen R. Covey<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> from The American Heritage Dictionary

<sup>2</sup> from The American Heritage Dictionary

<sup>3</sup>"President Speaks at White House Conference on Character and Community,"

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/06/20020619-22.html>, accessed July 12, 2003

<sup>4</sup>"Integrity and Character," <http://www.quotedoctor.com/integrity.htm>, accessed July 12, 2003

<sup>5</sup> "Citizenship" <http://www.theotherpages.org/topic-c2.html#character>, accessed July 12, 2003

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.cyber-nation.com/victory/quotations/subjects/quotes\\_character.html](http://www.cyber-nation.com/victory/quotations/subjects/quotes_character.html), accessed July 12, 2003

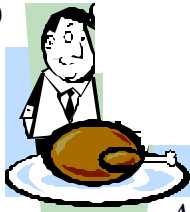
"This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man." --William Shakespeare

## Activities

\*\* Divide students into groups of 7-10. Give each group of students nametags with names of community members such as policeman, principal, mayor, engineer and 3 citizens. Blindfold those students that are "citizens." Give the group of blindfolded students in the group an envelope with the letters that spell "community" on 3x5 cards. Have the non-blindfolded group members direct the "citizens" (using only voices) to arrange the cards to spell "community." Talk about ways that the city engineer or mayor sees the whole picture. A great community is made when we work together to solve a problem.

\*\*Assign students to ask their parents which character traits they feel are most important in a good community. Make a graph of responses.

\*\*Community responsibility also means serving others. As a class, choose a service project to work on throughout the year. (The service project could be something like writing letters to rest homes, picking up litter in a certain area. . .)



## Stories

### **The Belly and the Members<sup>7</sup>**

*An Aesop fable about working as a community*

One day it occurred to the Members of the Body that they were doing all the work and the Belly was having all the food. The Members held a meeting, and after a long discussion, decided to strike work till the Belly consented to take its proper share of the work. For a day or two, the Hands refused to take the food, the Mouth refused to receive it, and the Teeth had no work to do. However, after a day or two the Members began to find that they themselves were not in a very active condition: the Hands could hardly move, the Mouth was all parched and dry, while the Legs were unable to support the rest. Thus they found that even the Belly in its dull quiet way was doing necessary work for the Body, and that all must work together or the Body will go to pieces.

### **A Community Working Together<sup>8</sup>**

Coolah is a small town of about 900 in New South Wales, Australia. It provides social, civic and economic services for smaller communities and villages in the Coolah Shire. First beset with agricultural difficulties, then the closing of the sawmill (the town's largest employer), Coolah faced extinction. Nevertheless, after two years of surveying, analyzing, designing, raising funds and selling subscriptions, Coolah's Community Telecentre opened its doors to provide local-call access to the internet. It was an amazing feat that rescued the town from economic disaster.



And how was such a feat possible? When former Coolah Land Care Coordinator, Susie Brown, analyzed the city, she found Coolah was rich in social capital. In a crisis the town pulled together. For instance, when a house burned down, within two days, the family had second-hand furniture, linen and crockery to start their life again. When a rancher's cattle were stolen, various farms in the community each contributed a beast to replace those stolen. There is a feeling of trust and concern for another's welfare. Despite laws that require car owners to lock their doors, a May 2000 survey pointed out that 17 of 20 cars parked on the main street were still not locked. In fact, many cars had the keys in the ignition.

*Coolah is an example of the success that a community of character can have when it faces challenges.*

Read more about the social capital in Coolah's story at

[http://www.regional.org.au/articles/development/coolah\\_revitalisation.htm](http://www.regional.org.au/articles/development/coolah_revitalisation.htm)

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/Aesop/Aesops\\_Fables/The\\_Belly\\_and\\_the\\_Members\\_p1.html](http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/Aesop/Aesops_Fables/The_Belly_and_the_Members_p1.html), accessed August 12, 2003

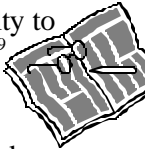
<sup>8</sup> [http://www.regional.org.au/articles/development/coolah\\_revitalisation.htm](http://www.regional.org.au/articles/development/coolah_revitalisation.htm), accessed August 12, 2003

## Writing or Discussion Topics

\*\*Colin Powell said, "What is it, this things we call character? It's simply nothing more than teaching youngsters and, for that matter, ultimately adults to do the right thing when no one is looking, when you don't need to, when there is no reward for doing the right thing; knowing and acting, and acting on the simple difference, that is always inside your head, between right and wrong.

"Character means having a conscience, a conscience that is always present, that is always acting, that is always guiding you. It's an internal moral compass that is always pointing in the true direction, always keeps you on track, gives you the strength to stay away from the temptations that come along. It reflects a set of ethical values that we believe in and we want all of our children to have, a set of ethical values that begins with honesty. If you can be trusted always to be honest, to do the right thing, you can then be counted on to be a fair person, always considerate of others, always doing unto others as you would have done unto yourself."

Have students write their own definition of character. Secretary of State Powell went on to say, "Fairness, honesty, caring respect for others, selflessness, willing to give to others. . . self-respect, believing in yourself, loyalty to others, all of it adding up to creating something that young people need, and adults need even more: a reputation."<sup>9</sup> Discuss the benefits of having a good character and reputation.



\*\*Horace Greeley was an editor, politician and founder of the New York Tribune. In his newspaper, he took a stand on the moral issues of the day, opposing alcohol, tobacco, gambling, and prostitution. He especially campaigned for the abolition of slavery.<sup>10</sup> Greeley said, "Fame is vapor, popularity an accident, riches take wings. Only one thing endures and that is character."<sup>11</sup> In 1869, *Harper's Weekly* praised him as "the most perfect Yankee the country has ever produced."<sup>12</sup> Clarence Darrow, in *The Story of My Life (1932)* wrote, "From my youth I was always interested in political questions. My father, like many others in northern Ohio, had early come under the spell of Horace Greeley, and, as far back as I can remember, the *New York Weekly Tribune* was the political and social Bible of our home. I was fifteen years old when Horace Greeley ran for the presidency. My father was an enthusiastic supporter of Greeley and I joined with him; and well do I remember the gloom and despair that clouded our home when we received the news of his defeat."<sup>13</sup> As a class, discuss character issues of the community. (These may include driving the speed limit, conserving water, shunning plagiarism) Make a class newspaper with advertisements for character, and student written articles on having values in the community.

## Role Plays

\*\*Matthew and James are two of seven people in a group doing a report on Africa. Matthew is really busy with soccer and music and wonders if just this one time, it would be alright to just "slide" through his part of the project. *If you were James, what would you say to Matthew?*

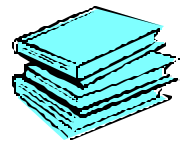
\*\*Carley has given her word that she will volunteer as a ticket taker for the local hospital carnival and information fair. At the last moment her friends ask her to go to a movie. *What should Carley do?*

## Book List

The Tale of the mandarin Ducks by Katherine Paterson, Illustrated by Leo & Diane Dillon (*Yasuko and Shozo help two mandarin ducks who in return help them.*)

Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel, story and pictures by Virginia Lee Burton (*The entire community comes to cheer on Mike Mulligan and his steam shovel because, "We always work faster and better when someone is watching us."*)

The Yellow Star, by Carmen Agra Deedy and illustrated by Henri Sorensen (*"What if every Dane, from shoemaker to priest, had worn the yellow Star of David?"*)



September: **Steadfastness**      October: **Honesty**      November: **Citizenship**  
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<sup>9</sup>The White House Conference on Character and Community hosted by Laura Bush, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/character/character-community-conf.pdf>, accessed July 12, 2003

<sup>10</sup> "Horace Greeley," <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAgreeley.htm>, accessed July 12, 2003

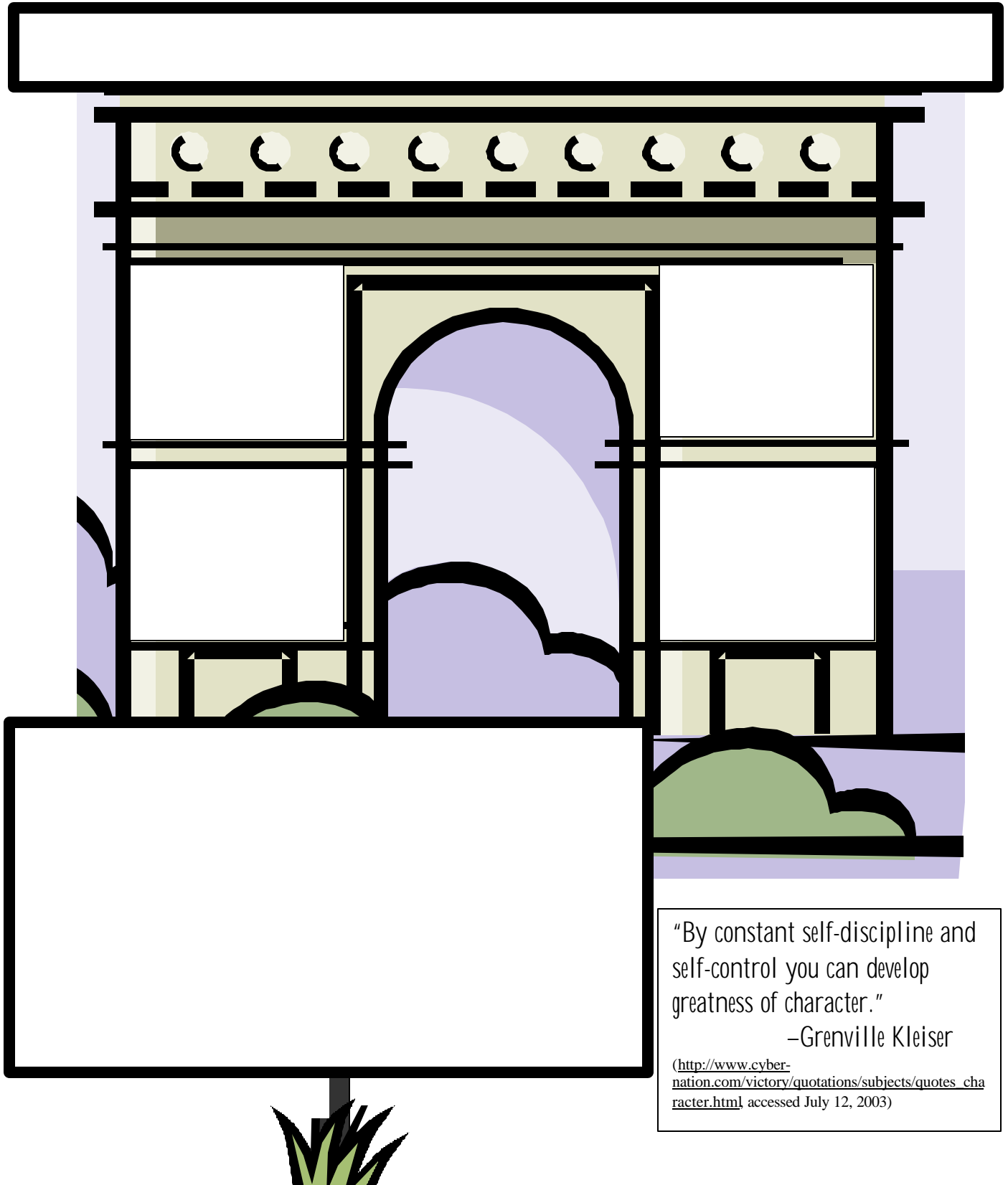
<sup>11</sup> "Integrity and Character," <http://www.quotedoctor.com/integrity.htm> accessed July 12, 2003

<sup>12</sup> "Horace Greeley 1811-1872," <http://www.npg.si.edu/exh/brady/gallery/16gal.html>, accessed July 12, 2003

<sup>13</sup> "Horace Greeley," <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAgreeley.htm>, accessed July 12, 2003

# A Community of Character

Imagine that ten years have passed. You have developed a character that is above reproach. When your community was faced with a challenge, you acted with courage and integrity. Now, a monument is being erected in your honor. Add decorations and inscriptions to your monument. On the plaque that is placed in front of the monument, write the story of the important decisions that helped to make yours a life of integrity and good character.



"By constant self-discipline and self-control you can develop greatness of character."

—Grenville Kleiser

([http://www.cyber-nation.com/victory/quotations/subjects/quotes\\_character.html](http://www.cyber-nation.com/victory/quotations/subjects/quotes_character.html), accessed July 12, 2003)