

Character Quotations

Activities That Build
Character and Community



Tom Lickona & Matt Davidson



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Chapter “1”

USING CHARACTER QUOTATIONS TO BUILD CHARACTER AND COMMUNITY

The Need for Character Education

Through history, and in cultures all over the world, education has had two great goals: to help students become smart and to help them become good. They need character for both. They need character qualities such as a strong work ethic, self-discipline and perseverance in order to do their best in school and succeed in life.



They need character qualities such as respect and responsibility in order to have positive interpersonal relationships and live in community.

The signs of a renewed concern for character education are many: a spate of character education books and curricular materials, funding for character education, the introduction of character education mandates, reports on how to prepare future teachers to be character educators and an explosion of grassroots character education initiatives.

The return to character education appears to be driven by several factors: (1) the weakening of the family as a moral socialiser; (2) the increasing pervasiveness of the media culture as a shaper of youth values; (3) the public's perception of societal moral decline, including youth trends showing high and often rising levels of crime, bullying, incivility, cheating, materialism, substance abuse and sexual activity; and (4) educators' realisation that relativistic values education methods—ones that told students to “make your own decision” without grounding them in an understanding of the content of character—have been part of the problem.

Whatever the causes of our current social-moral problems, and regardless whether one perceives the problems as worse today than in the past, there is now widespread agreement that character education should be at the centre of every school's mission. The question before schools is not whether to use character education, but rather how to do it effectively.

Dedication

To the John Templeton Foundation, with gratitude for its support of our Centre's work and its commitment to the power of wise words to build good character.

Using Quotations in Character Education

I can live for two months on one good compliment.

—Mark Twain

It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness.

—proverb

Character is what you do on the third and fourth tries.

—James Michener

A single twig breaks, but a bundle of twigs is strong.

—Tecumseh

What is it about quotations like these that make them so appealing?

- They are memorable—making an important point in an original, pithy or provocative way.
- They are enduring—expressing a timeless truth about human nature or the human condition.
 - They come from many cultures—showing that wisdom transcends societal and religious diversity.
 - They stimulate thought—leading us to ponder why the quote is true and how it might apply to our own experience and help us in our life.



Why are quotations like these a valuable character education resource?

- They offer insights into character—the inner strengths of mind, heart and will that enable us to lead purposeful, productive and fulfilling lives.
 - They offer opportunities to develop moral awareness, perspective and conscience.
 - They provide a call to moral action.
 - They offer wisdom from important role models.
 - They provide cognitive shortcuts to complex moral concepts.
- They provide memorable maxims, which over time are continually accessible to young people and can guide their decision-making.
 - They provide meaningful entry points into literary, historical and moral content.

In this book, we have provided 180 character quotations (5 for each of 36 weeks) that we think are a good developmental match for young people in years 3 to 8. Building on our research to promote character development in year six students,¹ we have attempted to develop a multidimensional teaching guide that can be used to foster character development in diverse educational settings, including the classroom, school, family and youth development programs.

The Content of Character

We've chosen quotes with an eye on diversity—representing men and women, ancient sages, contemporary figures and cultures from around the world. We've tried to cover a wide range of human virtues that nearly everyone would consider important to success in school and success in life.

We define character to include both “performance character” and “moral character”. We've therefore chosen quotes that relate to: (1) virtues such as effort, work and perseverance that make up performance character, and (2) virtues such as kindness, tolerance and honesty that are part of moral character.

Performance character helps young people excel in their schoolwork, extra-curricular activities and outside-of-school responsibilities. Moral character helps youth show respect and responsibility in their interpersonal relationships.

A word about terminology: Some character educators use the word “value” rather than “virtue”. Some prefer “character trait” or simply “word of the week (or month)”. In this book, we use the term virtue to mean a “value in action”, since the ultimate measure of our character is what we actually do. However, each school has to decide what character language best fits its school and community culture.

The Organisation of This Book

We've organised the quotations around a weekly virtue, such as kindness, perseverance or honesty. For some virtues, we've provided a week's worth of quotes; for others there are two weeks' worth, at different places in the school year.

The weeks generally alternate between performance character and moral character, conveying the message that we need character both to do well and to do good. We begin the school year with the performance virtue of effort—appropriate, we think, for helping each student start the year on the right foot.



The organisation we've proposed, however, is only one of many possible schemes. Schools engaged in character education may have target character traits already assigned to a particular timetable and may wish to rearrange our suggested sequence of weeks. A school that focuses on perseverance for a whole month, for example, might wish to bring together four weeks of quotes dealing with that theme and related virtues, such as effort and work.

Reflection Questions on the Quotes

For each quote we've suggested at least one reflection question which can be used as a writing prompt or discussion starter. The reflection questions are meant to unpack the quote by challenging students to interact with the statement, reflecting on their own experiences and the experiences of others. Over time, opportunities to reflect on character quotations can provide students with a moral compass that will help them navigate the rapids of an often complex moral world.

Some teachers have each student keep a Character Quotes Journal in which he or she copies down the daily quote and enters reflections on it. Says one teacher who has done this, "I see kids who still have their Character Quotes Journal years later. It's something they really value." Personal written reflection on character issues provides students with significant opportunities to develop a lasting moral identity.

Different Ways to Use the Quotes

We believe that any teacher, regardless of subject area, can use character quotes to create "an environment of character" and help students become more committed to character. Some teachers simply like to display quotes—and perhaps leave certain ones posted—even if they don't have much time for writing or discussion. There is nothing wrong with this approach; simply making these concepts continually accessible to students is an important first step. Other teachers post the quotes and ask students to copy them down, taking time every so often for a brief discussion.

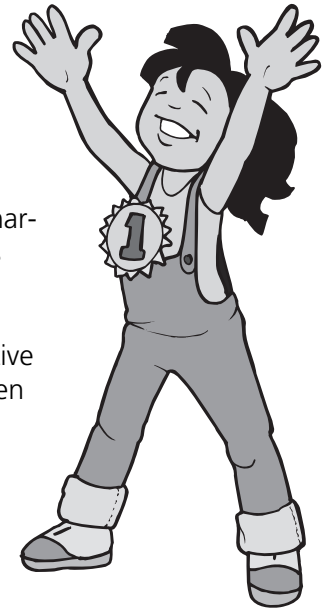
Chapter 2 by Miguel Kagan describes how to use various cooperative learning structures to create focused and productive discussion of the quotes, weekly virtues and the general concept of character. Structures such as Timed-Pair-Share, Team Statements and Jigsaw will help spark lively exchanges among students.

Moving from Awareness to Action

Teachers who want to get the most developmental mileage out of a quote must look for ways to help students internalise and act upon it. As a character development strategy, quotations are most effective when they move students from awareness to action—when they influence the choices they make in their own lives.



Toward that end we've provided weekly "action assignments"—varied activities that help each student make the lesson of a quote part of his or her personal character. Many of these activities challenge students to set goals and assess their progress toward attaining them. These assignments are intended to bring home the idea that character development is not a spectator sport. Some sample assignments include:



- **Positive Attitude**—Find and interview a person who shows a positive attitude. Ask that person, "How do you keep a positive attitude, even when things go wrong? How does a positive attitude help you?"
- **Fortitude**—Make a list of things that are particularly difficult or challenging for you. Choose one and make a plan for meeting that challenge. Share your plan with a partner.
- **Generosity**—Put everybody's name in a hat. The name of the person you draw out is your "secret friend" for that week. As a class, generate a list of nice things you could do for your "secret friend". Each day do something nice without your friend knowing it was you.
- **Responsibility**—As a class, select and discuss a classroom, school or community problem that the class might help to solve. Make an action plan and carry it out.
- **Forgiveness**—Write about a time when somebody forgave you; describe how you felt. As a class, discuss, "What feelings often make it hard for us to forgive another? What are some things we can do to overcome those feelings?" Decide as a class how you will "let bygones be bygones".

Character education is sometimes criticised as "being a kilometre wide and a centimetre deep". Posters, slogans and even good quotes can be used superficially in a way that may be dismissed as "bumper sticker morality".

Action assignments, however, go a long way toward ensuring that character education is truly transformative. In combination with the content of the character quotes and reflection questions, weekly assignments that require students to engage in deliberate moral action have the potential to: (a) develop the three parts of individual character (knowing the good, desiring the good and doing the good), and (b) develop the character of the classroom and school.

When students, individually or as a class, plan and carry out ways to act upon a virtue, character comes to life in the culture of the school community. Therefore, we strongly encourage educators to use these character quotes in a way that engages each student in meaningful action that can make a difference in the person he or she is becoming.



CHEERFULNESS

THE QUALITY OF EXPRESSING
OR PROMOTING GOOD SPIRITS.

WEEK 27

TUESDAY
2

The best way to cheer
yourself up is to try to cheer
somebody else up.

—Mark Twain

Reflection Question

- If someone is feeling sad, what are some things you could do to cheer up him or her?

MONDAY
1

Your smile is the most
important thing you wear.

—anonymous

Reflection Question

- Why is your smile important?

ACTION ASSIGNMENTS

- This week, do the following experiment: Smile at everyone you see. Notice people's responses. Also notice how smiling at others makes you feel.
- As a class, discuss the results of this experiment and the power of being cheerful.

WEDNESDAY
3

We may never know all the good a single smile can do.
—Mother Teresa

Reflection Questions

- *Why do smiles make us feel so good?*
- *How do they affect the people around us?*

THURSDAY
4

Turn your face to the sun and the shadows fall behind you.
—Maori proverb

Reflection Question

- *What does this mean? (Put it in your own words)*

FRIDAY
5

Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves.
—James Barrie

Reflection Question

- *What are two things you can do to make those around you feel better?*

27.1
QUOTE OF
THE DAY



CHEERFULNESS

**Your smile is the most
important thing you wear.**

—anonymous

Cheerfulness