



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
EXTENSION

Helping You Put Knowledge to Work



### **Ideas for High Schools To Help Students Become People of Good Character**

1. Emphasize non-controversial ways of teaching non-controversial values.<sup>1</sup> For example, using the Six Pillars of Character<sub>sm</sub>. The Six Pillars of Character are a service mark of the Character Counts<sup>®</sup> Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics.
2. Discuss/debate controversial issues using the Cooperative Learning model by Johnson and Johnson [Assignment, Planning, Advocacy, Position Switch, and Reaching Consensus]<sup>2</sup>.
3. a) Learn the facts about the controversial issue, b) consider all points of view and identify assumptions behind the different viewpoints and values behind the assumptions, and c) research the backgrounds of the persons who held the different views.<sup>3</sup>
4. Form a character team where students are chosen because of their character and leadership skills, one per advisory group from the same grade level. These teens conduct character lessons.
5. Form teams to develop lessons for each character trait. Teams are made up of faculty, support staff, students, and community members.
6. Reward high school students for positive acts of character with special parking privileges, free pass to school events, \$5.00 gift certificate (for food or gas) from local business.
7. If high school students don't warm up to a poster contest, consider one school's success with a door-decorating contest.

### **Ideas for Specific Classes**

#### **Science**

1. Consider "socially responsible science education".<sup>4</sup>
2. Discuss what responsibilities a citizen has for water pollution, recycling, composting, etc?
3. Check into the National Science Foundation's in-service training on decision making model with human genetics and bioethics<sup>5</sup>.
4. Discuss why it is important to report experiments truthfully and the possible consequences of untruthful reports.
5. Discuss what responsibility each person has if a finding is not accurate.
6. Make sure every person is treated with respect, caring, etc., when a topic/issue is controversial.



## Math

1. Write problems to reflect the Six Pillars. Trustworthiness example: Have students find the cost of a box of paper clips from an office supply catalog. Calculate the cost to the company if each employee took home one box of paper clips, staples, etc. each month or quarter for a year.
2. Trustworthiness: Discuss the importance of trustworthiness when checking papers.
3. Respect: Students survey students, faculty, and staff about respect in the school. Students then summarize data to report information gleaned. (mean, mode, median; charts & graphs)
4. Fairness: Calculate the probability of winning the lottery. Discuss the fairness of the fact that most who buy lottery tickets are low income.
5. Fairness: Make sure your grading scales, weighted grades, etc. are fair. Initiate this discussion with students.
6. Fairness: Work with programs that calculate insurance rates: for example auto insurance for boys versus girls. Discuss whether these rates are fair.
7. Caring: Calculate volunteer service hour records for a service organization.
8. Caring: Volunteer your math class to keep track of measurable progress of the school's community service project. For example, the number of pounds of food collected or glass recycled, etc.
9. Citizenship: Work with counting votes and census numbers.

## English/Literature

1. Consider using the Moral of the Story: Literature, Values, and American Education, (New York: Teachers College Press, 1982)<sup>6</sup>
2. Use character quotes as prompts for writing assignments.<sup>7</sup>
3. Read and discuss Aesop's Fables, including how they relate to the six Pillars and students' daily lives.
4. Discuss how plagiarism affects others.
5. Add appropriate questions about the character of people in literature.
6. Ask questions about the outcome of stories based on the moral decisions of characters in the literature.



## History/Social Sciences

1. See "Integrating Ethics into History," by Carol Nysten, *Ethics in Education*, 3 (March, 1984)<sup>8</sup>
2. Study an issue in its historical context, debate and resolve it – without knowing the actual outcome, and then after students reach their resolutions, look at decisions of historical figures involved and compare the merits of the two resolutions.<sup>9</sup>
3. Discuss current political figures and character traits.
4. Visit and review city council, county board, or state or national legislature debates and meetings. How could the Six Pillars be applied to these decisions/debates?
5. Read and analyze newspaper articles on current events. Who are the stakeholders in the event? What are the ethical implications (effects on the stakeholders)?
6. Highlight the Pillars (character traits) shown by individuals honored during national holidays (Columbus, Memorial Day, Veterans Day, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Thanksgiving, etc.)
7. Discuss or assign essays about the importance of each of the Six Pillars in a democracy.
8. Research how laws and mores differ in different countries (e.g., laws about trustworthiness, respect, etc.
9. Tie current events to negative and positive examples of the Six Pillars of Character.

### **Art, Music, Drama**

1. Tie all musical or drama performances with the Six Pillars of Character, e.g., provide explanation in the program of how character traits are portrayed.
2. Ask students to identify songs that illustrate the Pillars. Play those songs in class or report.
3. Make sure selections/try-outs in fine arts are fair.
4. Encourage responsibility in preparing for performances.



### **Sports**

1. Discuss why rules are an important aspect of sports and games.
2. Emphasize the Six Pillars of Character as an important part of your team's philosophy.
3. Consider when an excused absence from practice is fair.

### **Physical Education and Health**

1. Emphasize respect and responsibility for one's body to help maintain health and fitness.
2. Develop classroom rules that reflect the Six Pillars of Character.
3. Utilize non-competitive games.
4. Emphasize good sportsmanship for both player and spectators.
5. Emphasize responsibility for personal health and fitness.

### **Library**

1. Display the Six Pillars and establish a companion reading list for words of the week and the Six Pillars.

### **Work Force Preparation**

1. Stress how important a person of good character is to employers. Invite an employer to speak.
2. Stress how important being a person of good character is to specific jobs, including:
  - Falsification of information or issues
  - Sex, age, disability, size, race, and other job discrimination
  - Hiring firing and promotion practices
  - Workplace language and jokes
  - Safety and health issues in the workplace
  - Sales and marketing practices
  - Falsifying expense reports
3. Develop a resume based only on character traits.
4. Check into *Character at Work*, National 4-H Curriculum Collection, published by Colorado Extension, for 16 – 18 year olds.
5. Use *Workplace Ethics: Lessons to Strengthen Character*, published by Louisiana Extension, for high school youth if you're focusing on the Six Pillars of Character.
6. Discuss patent laws and their fairness in entrepreneurship.
7. Discuss how important each pillar is for building a strong family.

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<sup>1</sup>Lickona, Thomas. *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*. (New York, Bantam Books, 1991) p. 283.

<sup>2</sup> Lickona. p. 282.

<sup>3</sup> Lickona. p. 270.

<sup>4</sup> Lickona. p. 275.

<sup>5</sup> Vincent, Dr. Phillip. *Promising Practices in Character Education, Nine Success Stories from Around the Country*. (Character Development Group 1996) p. 90.

<sup>6</sup> Lickona. p. 174.

<sup>7</sup> Turner, Dr. Ginny. *Promising Practices in Character Education, Volume 2: Twelve Success Stories from Around the Century*. (Character Development Group, 1996) p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Lickona. p. 168.

<sup>9</sup> Lickona. p. 172-173.

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