

Unit 1: Lesson #2

Character Traits

CCSS: ELA- SL.7.1, L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3, L.7.4, L.7.6, RI.7.3, RI.7.4, W.7.10

Essential Questions: What are character traits?
What are character traits that you value?
Which character traits do you want others to see in you?

CASEL Competency: Self-awareness, social awareness

Objective: By the end of this lesson, students will be able to identify what character traits are, which character traits they would like to have themselves, and character traits they value in others.



Activity #1: Teach the Concept

Approximate Time: 30 mins.

Key Vocabulary: character traits, values

Materials:

- Student Guide, page 5

Warm Up: (5 mins.) *Think of a character in a book that you have recently read or a movie that you have recently watched. What words would you use to describe them?*

Display the *Warm Up* questions and have students write their responses in their *Student Guide* or on a piece of paper. Ask student volunteers to share their responses. Write student responses on the board or a piece of chart paper.



Discuss: (20 mins.)

Explain: *The words that we used to describe characters in books or movies are called **character traits**. Everybody has a unique set of character traits that we develop throughout our lives. Character traits describe who we are and are shown to the outside world through our actions and words. Just like characters in stories, we have character traits that are positive and negative, and just like characters in stories, our character traits can change over time.*

Ask: *If we take a look at our list of character traits that we created during our warm-up, which are positive character traits, and which are negative?* Accept student responses and discuss any disagreements students may have. Record a + or - sign next to each trait on the list. Some traits may have both + and -. *Which of these character traits would you look for in a friend? Why?* Accept student responses.

Detail: *Often times when we are very young, we learn from the people around us such as parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and siblings. Our character traits develop starting at a young age depending on what we believe and how we view the world. As we get older, we are exposed to more people such as friends, classmates, and co-workers. When we grow up, we can begin to choose who we spend our time with. As teenagers and grownups, we are able to surround ourselves with people who share similar beliefs and values. By choosing to be around people who have positive character traits we are better able to develop our own positive character traits. Developing positive character traits is important because it will not only help us to grow as a person but having positive character traits allows us cope with life challenges and have a better outlook for the future.*

Model: *For example, let's think about your life as a garden. Show "garden" picture from the Student Guide. When planting a garden, we need to think about what type of garden we want - flowers, vegetables, or herbs? What the garden will need to grow strong roots - how much sunlight, soil, and water? and what conditions will help to sustain that growth - does the garden do best with heat, humidity, or dryness? In life, we need to think about what type of life we want - what are our goals? What do we need to accomplish those goals - which character*

**Discuss:** (cont.)

traits will help us to achieve those goals? And what conditions will help us to be most successful - what type of environment will allow us to continue to grow? Now imagine that your garden gets a parasite. A garden that has had a chance to develop strong roots and has been surrounded by the type of environment that has sustained that growth has the best chance of surviving. A parasite in a garden is like a life challenge or tricky situation. How are strong roots in a garden similar to positive character traits in life? Accept student answers. *You can see how our choices and development of positive character traits help us to grow and be successful. Knowing what our values and goals are and what character traits will support those values and goals can help us to set ourselves up for success!*

Try: *I'd like you to turn to your Student Guide. Think about 2-3 short-term or long-term goals you have and think of one positive character trait that is important to develop for achieving each goal. Feel free to use our character traits list that we came up with at the beginning of this lesson.* When students are done, have volunteers share their responses.

Wrap Up: (5 mins.) *What new information did you learn about character traits in today's class? Why are character traits important?*

Display the *Wrap Up* questions and have students write their responses in their *Student Guide* or on a piece of paper.

**Extend the Lesson**

If time permits, the online Support Materials contain videos and additional resources on this topic.

English Language Learners (ELL) Tip

There are different character traits that are valued more depending on one's culture and where they come from. For example, some cultures value individuality and being outgoing and expressive while other cultures value humility and modesty. Discuss some character traits that might be valued in specific students' cultures and highlight that there are always similarities and differences in character traits from culture to culture, region to region, family to family, and individual to individual.

**Activity #2: Self-Regulation Strategy**

Approximate Time: 30 mins.

Key Vocabulary: none

Materials:

- SCOPE Poster
- *Student Guide*, page 6

Warm Up: (5 mins.) *Think of 2-3 negative character traits that you have (for example: impatient, argumentative, selfish etc.) How do these character traits affect you? How do these traits affect others around you?*

Display the *Warm Up* questions and have students write their responses in their *Student Guide* or on a piece of paper. Students do not need to share their responses. This activity is just to get them thinking about areas that they may want to improve with self-regulation strategies.

**Discuss:** (20 mins.)

Explain: *Everybody has both positive and negative character traits. Today we are going to talk about how self-regulation can help us to manage our negative character traits. You probably remember from our last lesson that self-regulation is the ability to stay in control of your thoughts, feelings, and behavior in order to make good decisions. How can learning self-regulation strategies help us with our negative character traits?* Accept

**Discuss:** (cont.)

student responses. *We all have areas that we can work on to become better students, friends, and human beings. In the last lesson we learned about the SCOPE Strategy:*

1. **S**top and take some deep breaths.
2. **C**onsider how we are feeling and why.
3. **O**ptions – what can we do?
4. **P**lan – what are the steps?
5. **E**valuate the outcome.

Today we will focus on the first two steps and how we can use these steps to become more aware of our emotions and patterns of thinking. Often we can engage in patterns of thinking that lead to behaviors that go against what we want. Our negative thoughts and behaviors can become a vicious cycle that makes us feel like we have little control over our emotions. But the good news is that you do have control over your emotions, and the first two steps of the SCOPE Strategy can help!

Ask: *Why do you think the first step is the SCOPE Strategy is to stop and take some deep breaths?* Accept student responses.

Detail: *When we stop and take some deep breaths when we are faced with a challenging situation, we give our brain and body time to cool down. Taking a few moments to engage in deep breathing makes a HUGE difference in our ability to calm down and think. This leads to step 2 in the SCOPE Strategy, which is consider how we are feeling and why. Now that you have a better understanding of what is happening in your body during challenging situations, you have the power to move on to this important step.*

Model: *Let's think of an example to illustrate this process a little better. I know that one of my negative character traits is that I am very critical of myself. If I am faced with a situation that I will be judged by others, I automatically think the worst. When I have to be evaluated each year as a teacher, this causes me a great deal of stress. By using the first step of SCOPE, I can begin to calm my body down by taking deep breaths. Once I take some deep breaths, I can move on to the second step of SCOPE in which I can consider how I am feeling and why. Over the years, Once I take some deep breaths, I can acknowledge that I am worried about failing, but that doesn't mean that I am going to fail. It's just a negative thought and I can choose to believe it or not.*

Try: *Now work with a partner to describe a scenario in which someone is faced with a challenging situation due to a negative character trait. Describe what the feelings and thoughts that the person may have and what effect these thoughts and feelings have on their brain and body. Describe how this person can use step 1 and 2 of the SCOPE Strategy to self-regulate. Discuss your ideas with a partner and fill in your answers on page 6 of your Student Guide.* As students work on this activity, walk around the room, providing suggestions as appropriate.

Wrap Up: (5 mins.) *Think about one of the negative character traits that you listed at the beginning of this lesson. How can steps 1 and 2 of the SCOPE Strategy help you with this?*

**Extend the Lesson**

If time permits, the online Support Materials contain videos and additional resources on this topic.

Differentiation Strategy

As students identify self-regulation strategies that work best for them, encourage them to add them to the Additional Strategies list on page 146 of the Student Guide.

Embedded Professional Learning

Read this article about why teaching teens about their developing brains is important and then answer the questions that follow.
<https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/05/15/609769519/why-teenagers-should-understand-their-own-brains-and-why-their-teachers-should-t?>

- Why should teenagers learn about their developing brains?
- What will you teach students about their developing brains and why?
- How will this new information help your students?

**Activity #3: Gratitude Challenge**

Approximate Time: 30 mins.

Key Vocabulary: none

Materials:

- *Student Guide*, page 7



Discuss: (30 mins.)

Explain: *This week, our gratitude challenge will be focused on a person. You probably remember that when we show **gratitude**, we express our thanks for something. Today you will have the chance to thank someone for being someone you look up to, someone you can count on, or someone that you aspire to be like. Expressing gratitude to someone is one of the greatest gifts you can give. This is a chance for you to make someone's day. This activity will also give your mood a huge boost because it feels good to do something nice for someone else.*

Ask: *Begin to think of some people in your life that have positive character traits. What are some of those character traits that you value in others?* Accept student suggestions.

Detail: *Today we are going to write a letter to thank someone who we feel grateful for. This person can be a peer, family member, community member, or someone who has positively impacted your life. This letter should detail what is about that person that makes you feel grateful to have them in your life. You can write about 1 or 2 positive character traits that this person has and how those traits have made a difference in your life. Being specific about what you're grateful for and giving examples of which traits this person has that you value will help your letter to be more personal and genuine. The choice will be yours whether to give the person your letter or not, but if you decide not to give the person your letter you should consider telling them how you feel. You never know how meaningful your words of kindness could be to someone.*

Model: Model writing a short letter of thanks to someone in your life on the board or on large chart paper. Include a greeting at the beginning, list two positive character traits and examples of how the person has impacted your life (big or small!), and close out the letter with a signature. Leave your example up for students to use as a reference.

Try: *Now, turn to page 7 in your Student Guide and start a rough draft of a letter thanking someone for making a difference in your life. It doesn't have to be anything big or dramatic. You could thank someone for being a good listener or for believing in you. Remember to be specific and tell them which character traits you see in them that you value.* When students are done, they can choose to write a final draft on a piece of paper that they can give to the person.

**Extend the Lesson**

If time permits, the online Support Materials contain videos and additional resources on this topic.

Interdisciplinary Activity

If students have selected someone in the classroom or school as the recipient of their letter, you may want to suggest creating an ongoing pen-pal/letter exchange.

**Activity #4: Socratic Seminar**

Approximate Time: 30 mins.

Key Vocabulary: remorseful

Materials:

- Copies of *Peak*
- *Student Guide*, pages 7-8
- Graphic Organizers (optional, from online Support Materials)

Peak, Lesson 2 Discussion Questions (Chapters 4-6)**Chapter 4: Circling the Drain**

Peak's lawyer tells him to act remorseful. Have you ever had to pretend to feel something that you did not? Was it difficult? Did others believe you? When might it be in your best interest to act the way that others expect you to act, even if it is not how you really feel?

Peak lets the reader know that he has not seen his father in 7 years, but he is court ordered to go with his father and must leave New York City immediately. How does Peak feel about his father? How do you know? Have you felt emotions before that might be opposite to each other?

Peak sentence is probation until he reaches the age of eighteen, a fine of \$150,000.00 (refundable if he fulfills the terms of his probation), and has to leave the state of New York with his father. Do you think this is a fair punishment? If you were the judge, what punishment would you have given Peak?

Chapter 5: The Twins

If you were Peak, how would you feel leaving your family so quickly? What emotions come to mind?

Peak is a good big brother and he loves his little twin sisters. He says that they are "...the best birthday presents..." he ever received. He feels badly that he's not going to be there for them. Do you have younger siblings that you are responsible for? What sorts of things do you do for them? How does this make you feel?

Peak comments on his step-father several times in this chapter. How do you think Peak feels about living in a "blended" family? What challenges might exist? What benefits?

Chapter 6: Rock Rats

Peak mentions that his mother packed him clothes that she likes, not necessarily ones that were his favorites. Do you have a sense of style that you feel might be underappreciated by your family? In what way does this style reflect who you are? In what way does it conflict with your family's values/concerns?

This chapter talks about Peak's father, Joshua Wood and Peak's step-father, Rolf. Compare and contrast the characters. What do you think that Peak has learned from each of them?



Activity #5: Reflection

Approximate Time: 30 mins.

Key Vocabulary: none

Materials:

- Student Guide, page 8



Discuss: (20 mins.)

Explain: *Throughout this lesson, we've been learning about character traits and how character traits impact our thoughts, behaviors, and decisions. We have learned that character traits can change over time and that we can build more positive character traits if we work at it. In the coming lesson, we'll continue to learn more about being self-aware and recognizing our strengths and weaknesses and how to use that awareness to our advantage. You've done a lot of thinking this week about character traits within yourself and within others. Today we will take some time to reflect on what we may have learned about ourselves. You probably remember that when we reflect, we take time to think carefully about something.*

Ask: *Were you surprised by anything that you learned this week?* Accept student responses.

Detail: *As we think and learn more about our emotions and patterns of thinking and behaving you may have some "aha moments." This means that you may suddenly realize something important about yourself that you hadn't really thought about before. These moments help us to understand ourselves on a deeper level and are part of growing up and becoming more mature. Your journal is the perfect place to record these "aha moments" and to explore those moments more in depth. Sometimes when we write it can help us to organize our thoughts and better integrate new information that we learn.*

Model: Explain an "aha moment" that you've had that helped you to better understand something about yourself or someone else. Explain how this "aha moment" changed your thinking. Ask student volunteers to share an "aha moment" they've experienced.

Try: *I'd like you to take the next 10 minutes or so and respond to the journal prompt in your Student Guide. Remember that what you write here is private and I won't read it unless you want me to. If you would like me to read your response you can show me by folding the top right corner of your reflection in your Student Guide or notebook. Remember to be mindful of what you write and don't include anything in your journal that would make you upset if someone else sees it!*



Home Connection

Refer students to the Home Connection box in the *Student Guide* Practice journaling at home. You can choose to free write, make a list, draw, or sketch on a piece of paper at home this week. You do not have to turn in your work but think about whether journaling is something that you'd like to do more regularly at home. It can be a great tool for calming or working through complex thoughts and feelings.