

Building Character through Characters

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Introduction and Rationale

A small snippet of the social aspects of my third grade classroom throughout a typical week could go as follows. Monday afternoon, during a social studies lesson involving candy to teach rights, responsibility, and privileges, “Kate ate my Starburst!” says Joe. “She ate mine too!” cries Matthew. “Kate, did you eat your classmates Starbursts?” I ask. Kate shakes her head no vehemently while voicing she absolutely did not eat their candy. She only ate her own piece. After checking the desk, three Starburst wrappers are found instead of just one. Not only did Kate lie and lose some trust from her teacher, but she also lost some trust from her classmates since she stole their candy. At recess Wednesday before lunch, “Steve hit me!” proclaims Jenna. “You kicked me first!” defends Steve. “I only kicked you because you called me a mean name!” says Jenna. Neither Steve nor Jenna were respectful to each other through their words or actions. Thursday at dismissal, Pam falls on her untied shoelaces. The hallway of third graders all stand by and laugh. Pam could have hurt herself when falling. Rather than ask if she was okay or offer to help her up to show they care, everyone laughed.

Third grade is a big transition year in elementary school. Students go from learning to read to reading to learn. The text, expectations, material, and many other aspects of school become more difficult. Students at times find themselves giving up easily when it comes to the challenges of third grade. In addition to the academic transition, the students are still growing children with developing characters. In this unit, character will be thought of in the context described in the book *A Call to Character*. In the book, character is described as, “the constellation of values that lead to self-respect, dignity, reverence, and concern for the lives of others.”¹ The book goes on to refer to the importance of children and building character with the following:

“Character first emerges in relation to children’s feelings and evolves in relation to their immediate social world and then to the larger world beyond family and friends. To an important degree young people build their own characters and choose the kinds of people they become...discussion and storytelling rather than

preaching or didactic teaching are the appropriate ways to help children as they learn to make these choices.”²

Character takes on a different meaning in relation to fiction. In fiction, character is defined as, “a person (though not necessarily a human being) depicted in a narrative or drama.”³ Throughout the children’s stories selected for this unit, “Character (traits) is revealed by how a character responds to conflict, by his or her dialogue, and through descriptions.”⁴ My hope is through the emphasis on character traits in literature and the situational aspects that made the characters display such examples or counterexamples of the traits in the stories, my students will begin a reflection of their own actions and development of the person they are becoming.

Character education has become a large focus within my own classroom and the school as a whole. With our school being low-income and my student’s family lives being very diverse, teaching character becomes a job for the school rather than home in some situations. “Interest in character education is reemerging in light of apparent increases in disaffected students, school violence, voter apathy, declining test scores, and disinterest in community involvement. Character education integrated into the school community is a strategy to help re-engage students, deal with conflict, keep students on task in the learning environment, and reinvest the community with active participation by citizens in political and civic life.”⁵ We want the students to focus on knowing, understanding, and displaying desirable character traits. This is described well by Thomas Lickona as follows:

“Character must be broadly conceived to encompass the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of morality. Good Character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good. Schools must help children understand the core values, adopt or commit to them, and then act upon them in their own lives.”⁶

The character traits which will be the specific focus of this unit are trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, citizenship, caring, and fairness. These are identified as the six pillars of character from the program Character Counts which provides guidance in incorporating teaching character in schools.⁷

It is evident that character education needs to be taught in school; especially in instances where it is not being taught at home. School is the “where” for character education, but the next area to address would be the “how”. In the article *This is How*

Literary Fiction Teaches Us to Be Human, the author makes the point that “literacy itself has proven key to a person’s ability to function in modern society.”⁸ The article goes on to discuss a field being studied by scientists called Theory of Mind, which is described as “the human capacity to comprehend that other people hold beliefs and desires and that these may differ from one’s own beliefs and desires.”⁹ Researchers have found that reading literary fiction has proven to increase the likeliness of people having Theory of Mind. Literature is the medium in which students should be educated about character traits at a young elementary level which will then build the foundation for theory of mind as schooling continues. They will have a greater understanding when first looking at the traits through the lens of a character in a story before applying those traits to real life.

This unit will be taught to a group of Tier 1 reading intervention students as it lends itself better to a small group of students. Tier 1 reading intervention in my school allows teachers more room to explore at a higher order level of thinking with students of similar ability levels. The beginning unit in third grade presents itself as a perfect opportunity to integrate this unit as it focuses specifically on characters. Students will have the opportunity to dive deeper into literature rather than the normal summarization of main characters, problem, setting, and solution. The students will be analyzing the characters for the six pillar traits they have been taught through the examples and non-examples presented in the stories we read. Additionally, the writing emphasis of the first unit of third grade is on writing narratives. Writing for students is difficult especially in third grade when they are now expected to provide more in their writing. They are expected to provide details, explain their thinking, and produce a variety of writing types. Our first writing piece of the year is a narrative which tends to be easier for students compared to other writing styles. After reading several books and having discussions surrounding traits, students should have a better understanding and feel more confident to produce a narrative for a character which we have already read and discussed or produce a personal narrative. Writing a narrative is the last piece as it is storytelling. As discussed in seminar, storytelling can be found all throughout; not just in books. Politicians tell stories, commercials tell stories, TV series tell stories, and businesses tell stories. One article titled *Why Storytelling Will Be the Biggest Business Skill of the Next 5 Years*, suggests the idea, “Good stories surprise us. They have compelling characters. They make us think, make us feel. They stick in our minds and help us remember ideas and concepts in a way that numbers and text on a slide with a bar graph don’t.”¹⁰

The classroom and school wide emphasis on character traits will solidify the importance of recognizing such traits in stories we read and in real life situations. At such

a young age, just 8 or 9 years old, my students are still very much developing their own character.

Demographics

The elementary school where I teach, Castle Hills Elementary School in Colonial School District, is composed of a variety of students in terms of race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, English language ability, and special education classification. In the 2015-2016 school year, our school had an enrollment of 609 students. Our school services students from kindergarten through 5th grade. In the third grade, we currently have four classrooms. Three of the classrooms are Single Approach to Mastery (SAM) and one is a Team Approach to Mastery (TAM). I teach as the special education teacher in the TAM classroom. Each school year I have approximately 24 students in the classroom, with roughly 6-8 of those students being identified as special education students. The special education students could have classifications ranging from mild intellectual disabilities to orthopedic impairments. The students will range in ethnicity as well as socioeconomic status. Primarily, my classroom will consist of low-income families, however all socioeconomic status groups will be represented. The families are not typical mom, dad, and children but rather a mixture of aunts, uncles, grandparents, godparents, foster parents, and other individuals caring for the children.

My co-teacher and I teach all subjects in the classroom, specifically, these subjects are ELA (reading and writing), math, science, and social studies. Being able to teach and plan for all subjects allows for cross-curricular incorporation in our lessons. In addition to the normal subjects, we also have our own reading and math intervention groups. Our school uses the Response to Intervention (RTI) model for both math and reading. As a group, which consists of the grade level teachers, reading interventionists, and our building literacy coach, we meet to discuss student progress and make decisions of where to place the students to target specific needs. We use many data points including benchmark tests, teacher observations, formatives, and classwork to determine areas of need for the students and place the students in those groups. We have three reading interventionists who typically work with the Tier 3 students which have the highest level of reading needs. These needs are usually in the areas of phonemic awareness. As well, depending on the number of students in need of Tier 3 intervention, a classroom teacher could have a group of Tier 3 students as well. The Tier 2 students work on areas such as fluency and comprehension. Tier 1 students can work on novel studies, research, or other projects which further focus on the grade-level standards. All of the students in third

grade are broken into approximately 8 groups. The Tier 3 groups have no more than 5 students with the intent being a strong emphasis on small group instruction. Tier 2 groups have usually no more than 12 however the number varies depending on the needs of the students. Tier 1 groups can have usually around 20 students, again depending on the number of students and their specific needs.

In the past, as the special education teacher, I have usually taken the Tier 3 students and worked on areas such as vowel teams, phonetic skills, decoding skills, and other beginning reading skills. With this unit, I will work with the Tier 1 students. These students already have basic reading skills and therefore will not be hindered by decoding words or their fluency level. Their main focus will be on the concepts of character traits and the aspects of this unit. By working with this group of students, I have the ability to dig deeper into their understanding of stories and additionally will have a change in my own teaching by working with students using higher order thinking skills and strategies. The Tier 1 group will meet each day for approximately 45 minutes. The unit will first be taught whole group to those students and then break into group, partner, and independent activities.

Objectives

The Common Core standards for third grade ELA have been broken down by our Curriculum and Instruction Department into six units to be taught throughout the school year. The first unit surrounds the idea of characters. I chose character traits to address the standards as I felt traits are what make up the character. They make the character who they are and do what they do, so they therefore address the standards of how characters are described and how their actions impact the events in the story.

There are five objectives that I intend to accomplish with the implementation of this unit. The first objective is for the students to be able to define the aspects of each trait. When defining the aspects of each trait, students should be able to give an accurate description in their own words of the meaning of the trait and some examples to support their definition. For example, students could define trustworthiness as being able to be relied on to do the right thing and support it with the example of helping a friend with a project after committing to help. Students understanding of character traits will aid in their ability to meet the standard of describing characters in a story based on traits and motivations and how that affects the plot of a story. In relation to that standard as well, students will work on accomplishing the second unit objective of identifying examples

and counterexamples of each trait in literature. The identification of traits as displayed through characters in literature will occur throughout several forms of collaborative discussion. A speaking and listening standard of third grade is to effectively participate in a range of collaborative discussions. Students will have conversations with small groups, one partner, and whole group when identifying examples and counterexamples of the character traits in the books discussed.

The next two objectives are not in relation to academic standards but rather standards that the students should hold themselves and others accountable to live up to in life. Students will be expected to identify real life examples of the character traits when displayed by others. Additionally, they will be expected to embody those traits themselves in their daily lives. As mentioned in the beginning, these children are still very much developing who they will be in their life. By practicing actions to display the traits of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, citizenship, caring, fairness, the hope is the actions will become ingrained in who they are and no longer be practiced but rather their actual being and way of living.

The final objective of this unit is for the students to be able to write their own stories using example scenarios which clearly display the traits. Writing their own narrative allows for creativity to employ the traits in whichever context the students can imagine. In writing the narrative, another third grade standard is addressed. According to the standard, students should write a narrative to develop real or imagined events using characters, dialogue, and descriptions of actions to organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.

The progression of the objectives is based on scaffolding of the learning experience with character traits and building character themselves. It also correlates to the order and purpose of each classroom learning activity.

Content

Character Counts recognizes trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, citizenship, caring, and fairness as the six pillars of character. Each of these traits will be taught through definition, descriptors, literature, real-life scenarios, and narrative writing.

Trustworthiness

As defined by Merriam-Webster, trustworthiness is, “able to be relied on to do or provide what is needed or right; deserving of trust”.¹¹ The Character Counts gives descriptors of the pillar character trait which include, “be honest; don’t deceive, cheat, or steal; be reliable-do what you say you will do; have the courage to do the right thing; build a good reputation; be loyal”.¹² Two books will be used to discuss trustworthiness, *The Boy Who Cried Wolf* by B.G Hennessy and *Ruthie and the (Not So) Teeny Tiny Lie* by Laura Rankin.

The Boy Who Cried Wolf by B.G Hennessy

In this story, a shepherd boy who watches over his sheep all day begins to get bored. He tries to entertain himself by teaching the sheep some activities but they have no interest in learning. He decides that something that would bring excitement would be to tell all of townfolk that there is a wolf after his sheep. All of the townfolk coming running to his aid and search for a wolf only to find nothing. Since the shepherd boy found this so entertaining, he decides to try it again the next day. This time, he runs into town claiming that two wolves are after his sheep. Again, the townfolk run to help him and spend time searching for the two wolves who were never there to start. On the third day, three wolves truly do show up to go after the shepherd boy’s sheep. When he runs into town yelling about three wolves chasing after his sheep, no one believes him and nobody goes to help. The shepherd boy has to search for his sheep alone. The shepherd boy is a non-example of trustworthiness and the implications of being untruthful to people. If one continues to lie, eventually no one will believe that person even if they are speaking the truth.

Ruthie and the (Not So) Teeny Tiny Lie by Laura Rankin

Ruthie loves collecting teeny tiny things. One day while at recess, she spots a teeny tiny camera. She picks it up and begins taking pictures. She enjoys the camera very much. Then, another student, Martin sees her and tells her that the camera belongs to him. Ruthie lies and claims it as her own. She and Martin continue to argue until the teacher, Mrs. Olsen intervenes. She holds onto the camera until the next day when they will discuss it again. Ruthie knows she has done the wrong thing and feels guilty, especially at home. Ruthie’s parents notice a change in her and finally Ruthie confesses to them what she has done. It begins to weigh on her conscience that Mrs. Olsen and Martin may not forgive her for being untruthful. Finally, Ruthie tells the truth and rather than getting in trouble, Ruthie is praised by Mrs. Olsen for coming forward with the truth. After confessing, Ruthie feels much better and has a great rest of the school day. This book

displays both examples and counterexamples of trustworthiness. In addition, it has the added aspect of explaining how the decisions made weighed on the character, Ruthie. In classroom discussions, we will talk about how individuals and others around them are affected by the desirable or undesirable character traits displayed through actions and words.

Respect

Respect is defined as, “a feeling or understanding that someone or something is important, serious, etc. and should be treated in an appropriate way.”¹³ Some descriptors from Character Counts include, treat others with respect; be tolerant and accepting of differences; use good manners, not bad language; be considerate of the feelings of others; don’t threaten, hit or hurt anyone; and deal peacefully with anger, insults, and disagreements. The stories *Miss Nelson is Missing* by James Marshall and *The Recess Queen* by Alexis O’Neill provide examples and counterexamples of respect.

Miss Nelson is Missing by James Marshall

This story begins with a teacher, Miss Nelson, who has a classroom full of students making faces, making funny noises, refusing to complete assignments, and not listening during story hour. All of the actions of the students serve as non-examples of respect. Miss Nelson does not return to school one day and instead Miss Viola Swamp shows up to teach the class. It is implied at the end of the story that Miss Swamp is in fact Miss Nelson in disguise. Miss Swamp remains the teacher during the duration of Miss Nelson’s absence. The students quickly realize how much they dread having Miss Swamp as their teacher and anticipate Miss Nelson’s return. Upon returning, the students listen attentively to Miss Nelson and no longer are disruptive. Such behaviors are examples of respect.

The Recess Queen by Alexis O’Neill

Mean Jean is the Recess Queen. Nobody does anything until Mean Jean does it first. They don’t kick a ball, swing a bat, or run around until she does. Mean Jean pushes down and bullies all the kids on the playground. It’s just the way things are until a new student, Katie Sue shows up to school. Katie Sue does not know that this is how things go at recess. When recess begins, she runs out and does everything before Mean Jean. Mean Jean attempts to set Katie Sue straight about her being the Recess Queen. Katie Sue tells

Mean Jean she's bossy and then goes off to continue playing despite anything Mean Jean had to say. To everyone's surprise including Mean Jean, Katie Sue asks Mean Jean to jump rope with her. This is the first time anyone has asked Mean Jean to play. She jump ropes with Katie and has a great time. From then on, Mean Jean is not so mean anymore and plays with her new friends at recess. Throughout the story, Mean Jean was not being respectful to her classmates. By the end, Mean Jean does begin to show respect.

Responsibility

Responsibility is, "the state of being the person who caused something to happen" or "a duty or task that you are required or expected to do."¹⁴ Descriptors of responsibility from Character Counts would be: do what you are supposed to do; plan ahead; be diligent; persevere; do your best; have self-control; be self-disciplined; think before you act; set an example for others; and be accountable for your words, actions, and attitudes. In addition to being taught responsibility as a character trait through this unit, students in third grade will be familiar with the term through the social studies curriculum. The pre-selected books for the character trait of responsibility are *Strega Nona* by Tomie dePaola and *Just A Dream* by Chris Van Allsburg.

Strega Nona by Tomie dePaola

Strega Nona is the old lady in town that all the people go to when they have troubles since it is believed she has powers. She hires Big Anthony to help her keep up with her house and garden. Big Anthony has been warned to never touch the pasta pot. One day when Strega Nona leaves, Big Anthony sings the song that makes the pasta pot magically fill with pasta. All the townspeople go to eat the pasta but once finished, Big Anthony realizes he does not know how to make the pasta pot stop. The town begins to be overtaken by pasta. Strega Nona returns just in time to stop the pasta from taking over. She decides Big Anthony's punishment will be to eat all of the pasta that he has created. Big Anthony's actions would be a non-example of responsibility.

Just A Dream by Chris Van Allsburg

The story begins with Walter taking a jelly-filled doughnut from a bag and throwing the bag on the ground. His next door neighbor, Rose is watering a tree that was just planted for her birthday. Walter tells Rose that he would not want a dumb plant for his birthday. Walter then throws all of the garbage into one can rather than taking the time to sort it

into the individual cans for bottles, cans, and then everything else. After watching TV about an airplane, a robot, and a small machine, Walter falls asleep wishing he lived in the future. The story continues with examples of the future which are not what Walter had imagined for the future. At one point, he wakes up in his dream with his bed on a huge trash dump. In another dream, he wakes up in his bed in a tree that is being cut down for toothpicks. In yet another, he wakes up on top of a giant smokestack. Upon waking up in the morning, Walter realizes how his actions in the present can affect the future. Since he has not been responsible with things such as littering, recycling, and taking care of the environment, he is not contributing to a great future. Immediately, Walter takes action and begins to be more responsible. He picks up his doughnut bag from the ground, sorts through the garbage to recycle properly, and gets a tree to plant for his birthday. The story ends with Walter dreaming again about another future. In this future, there are plenty of trees and clean air. Walter shows both examples and counterexamples of responsibility in this book. As well, the story describes the implications of Walter's irresponsibility.

Citizenship

Citizenship is defined as, “the qualities that a person is expected to have as a responsible member of a community.”¹⁵ The pillar of citizenship from Character Counts has the following descriptors: do your share to make your community better; stay informed-vote; be a good neighbor; obey laws and respect authority; protect the environment; and volunteer. Citizenship will be taught as a character trait through this unit to the Tier 1 students. In addition, students will be exposed to this concept in a different context through the social studies curriculum. This first unit of social studies focusing on citizenship coincides with the first ELA unit focusing on characters. The books which have been selected to teach and discuss the trait citizenship are *City Green* by DyAnne Di-Salvo-Ryan and *The Quilt Maker's Gift* by Jeff Brumbeau.

City Green by DyAnne Di-Salvo-Ryan

In this story, an old building has been knocked down on a city street leaving a big empty lot. The lot is an eyesore for many that live in the neighborhood as well as a bother to those who used to live in the building and are upset about it being torn down. A young girl, Marcy and an older woman, Miss Rosa decide one day to do something with the vacant lot. With the help of those in the neighborhood, they rent the lot from the city and begin to clean it up. It is a community effort to clean the lot. Once clean, members of the

community choose an area and plant whatever seeds they want to grow. All this time, Old Man Hammer is against the building of this community garden referring to the lot as being good for nothing. Eventually, when the garden begins to come together, Old Man Hammer sneaks out late at night to plant his own seeds. By the end of the book, the empty lot has been transformed into a beautiful community garden used by many. The efforts of the neighborhood and particularly the actions of Marcy and Miss Rosa are exemplars of the trait of citizenship. They have done something to better their community and were all active in the process.

The Quilt Maker's Gift by Jeff Brumbeau

There is a magical quilt maker who lives high up in the mountains. She makes the most beautiful quilts for the poor and needy. One quilt was given away late at night to someone without a home shivering in their sleep on the street. Though many people have tried to get a quilt from her, she refuses to sell them for any amount of money. The greedy king demands gifts from everyone he rules over and has even made his birthday happen twice a year to have extra gifts. Though he has everything he could ever need, he is still not happy. Upon finding out that he does not have a quilt from this magical quilt maker, he demands one from her. She refuses to give him one saying again that she only makes them for the poor and needy. The quilt maker agrees to make a quilt for the king if he gives away all of the things he owns. He refuses. The king tries to force the woman into making a quilt by putting her in a cave with a bear and stranding her on an island. Each time, the quilt maker makes the best of the situation and is helped by the bear and a swarm of sparrows due to the kindness she showed them. The quilt maker tells the king again that he can have a quilt if he gives away all of his wonderful things. He finally agrees and finds a tiny marble that he can bear to part. The happiness the tiny marble brings to a young boy is enough to make the king want to continue giving to the needy. He gives away coats to those dressed in rags, frees rare fish, and presents his merry-go-round with real horses for the children to enjoy. Seeing the joy he is bringing to his community, the king begins to feel happiness himself. He travels the world to trade his belongings for smiles from others.

After all of his possessions were gone, the quilt maker kept her promise and had given the king a beautiful quilt made just for him. They both began working together as the quilt maker made quilts by day and the king went around at night giving them away to the needy. This book demonstrates citizenship in the sense of the king and quilt maker

doing their share to make their community better by providing quilts to those who need them and being good neighbors or community members.

Caring

Merriam-Webster defines caring or care as, “effort made to do something correctly, safely, or without causing damage.”¹⁶ The descriptors from Character Counts include, be kind; be compassionate and show you care; express gratitude; forgive others; help people in need; and be charitable and altruistic. *Thank you Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco and *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson are the books that will be used to teach caring.

Thank you Mr. Falker by Patricia Polacco

The story begins with Trisha and her family going through a tradition. The promise to read is finally hers and soon she will begin school and learn to read. Nothing makes Trisha happier than the hope to learn to read soon. After beginning kindergarten, Trisha learns that she is great at drawing and sees the first graders learning how to read. Some of her kindergarten classmates began reading by the end of school but not Trisha. In first grade, Trisha has great difficulty with learning to read. Throughout the years, Trisha pretends that she is reading and somehow tricks lots of teachers and students into thinking she can; however Trisha still is unable to read. After moving to a new state and new school, Trisha is teased by her classmates for her inability to read. In the fifth grade, a new teacher, Mr. Falker, finally stands up to the other students for Trisha and everyone stops except for one student. Trisha is teased and bullied relentlessly by a boy named Eric. Eric has targeted Trisha and is mean to her whenever he has the chance. One day, Mr. Falker catches Eric in the act and sends him off to the principal. He realizes that Trisha cannot read and makes the promise to her that he will work with her until she can read. The story continues with Mr. Falker taking the time after school each day with another teacher to teach Trisha how to read. By the end of the book, Trisha is able to read. As well, it is revealed that Trisha is in fact the author of the book, Patricia Polacco and the story is her own true story. This book displays examples of kindness through the actions of Mr. Falker in several ways. As well, it provides examples of not being kind through Eric’s actions and how that makes others feel.

Each Kindness by Jacqueline Woodson

A new girl named Maya arrives to school. Her clothes are from a secondhand store and she does not have the nicest or newest toys. Though she tries to be friendly towards other students in the class, a girl named Chloe in particular, nobody is kind back to her. Chloe and her group of friends refuse Maya's offers to play. Rather they whisper about her behind her back. Chloe does not know why exactly she will not smile at or say hello to Maya. One day, Maya does not show up to school. That same day, there is a lesson in class on kindness and how even small acts of kindness go out like a ripple into the world. When asked to say a kind thing they have done, Chloe has no reply. She begins to regret not showing even a bit of kindness to Maya and decides that when Maya returns to school, she will smile back. Maya never returns to school though as her family has moved away. Chloe regrets all of the opportunities she had to show kindness to Maya and how she will never have the chance to make amends even through the smallest act. *Each Kindness* can provoke a discussion about how not showing kindness can make both people feel, the one not showing it and the one not receiving. Maya was saddened by Chloe and her friends not taking her offer of friendship and eventually stopped offering. Chloe now has to live with the regret of not showing kindness towards Maya when there was never a reason not to have been kind.

Fairness

As defined by Merriam-Webster, fairness is, "agreeing with what is thought to be right or acceptable" or "treating people in a way that does not favor some over others."¹⁷ Play by the rules; don't take advantage of others; take turns and share; be open-minded; listen to others; don't blame people carelessly; and treat all people fairly, are all descriptors of the pillar of character fairness from Character Counts. The two stories that will be used to address fairness are *The Little Red Hen* by Jerry Pinkney and *The Berenstain Bears No Girls Allowed* by Stan Berenstain.

The Little Red Hen by Jerry Pinkney

Little Red Hen finds wheat seeds one day and decides to plant them to make bread. She asks the goat, rat, dog, and pig for help with making the bread. They all reply with, "Not I" when asked who will help plant the seeds, thresh the wheat, take the grain to the miller, and bake the bread. Once the delicious bread is fresh out of the oven, the aroma fills the barnyard. The goat, rat, dog, and pig all say they will eat the golden bread. Little Red Hen reminds them of how nobody helped her while making the bread and therefore none of them will get to eat the bread. Little Red Hen enjoys the bread with only her chicks. This

story is an example of fairness. The other animals did not help in the process of making the bread and therefore it would not be fair of them to eat and enjoy what they refused to help make.

The Berenstain Bears No Girls Allowed by Stan Berenstain & Jan Berenstain

Sister Bear has always tagged along with Brother Bear and his group of friends. His friends are all boy cubs like him. At first they only minded a little bit that Sister Bear was tagging around. Eventually they started to mind a lot more when Sister Bear began winning every game or activity they played. Though the boy cubs could be sore losers, Sister Bear was not the most modest winner either. She would make a big deal about her victories which did not make the boy cubs feel any better about losing. One day, Sister Bear cannot find the cubs. By the third day of them not being around to play, she does in search for them. The boys have created a clubhouse that is just for them complete with a sign saying “No Girls Allowed.” Sister Bear is very upset by this and runs home to tell her parents how mean and unfair it was of Brother Bear and his friends. Mama and Papa Bear agree that it is not fair. Mama Bear says, “The important thing is not whether you are a boy or a girl but rather the sort of person you are.” Rather than making the boys allow girls in their club, Mama Bear and Papa Bear help Sister Bear make her own club. In this club, all cubs are allowed regardless of being a boy or girl. They have a celebration with food for their start of her new cub and the boys join along. They then decide to invite the girls back for dessert and have changed their sign from, “No Girls Allowed” to “Girls Welcome”. Not allowing Sister Bear in their club just because she is a girl isn’t fair. Just as Mama Bear said, it should not matter whether someone is a boy or girl, but the only thing that matters is the sort of person they are. The boys did not show fairness since they treated some people differently than others. The girls club did show fairness though by allowing everyone to join in the celebration and treated everyone the same.

These specific books were chosen as I felt they were good children’s books. I came up with my idea of a good children’s book after reading an article in which a good children’s book was defined at one point as a book that would, “promote [the child’s] ability to find meaning in life...It must stimulate his imagination; help him to develop his intellect and to clarify his emotions; be attuned to his anxieties and aspirations; give full recognition to his difficulties, while at the same time suggesting solutions to the problems which perturb him.”¹⁸ Though each book has been chosen to teach a specific character trait, there are examples of more than just that one trait in the books. Students should be able to notice

examples of the other traits which been discussed in addition to the specific trait associated with the book. When they begin to notice the examples on their own of the various traits, which will display a deeper understanding of the traits.

Classroom Strategies

The big push in third grade is to have the students start taking control of their own learning. When they do so, the content they are learning becomes more meaningful to them. They are making the connections themselves or with a peer and coming to their own conclusions; with guidance from me as the teacher; in turn, solidifying their understanding of the content. With that in mind, I will provide initial modeling for the lessons and often take more of a facilitating role as students participate in discussion throughout the learning activities.

Collaborative Discussion

There will be collaborative discussion occurring throughout the entire unit. Students will learn how to ask and answer questions and develop an understanding of how doing so builds a deeper knowledge of the material. Questioning has become a focus in our school. Specifically, the questions we want students to begin asking of one another and themselves include, “what do you think; why do you think that; how do you know this; can you tell me more; and what questions do you still have?” As students begin asking questions, they take over the discussion and allow the teacher to facilitate. They can ask clarifying questions to better their understanding. If a lull in conversation occurs, I would refocus the discussion on a new aspect of the stories.

Read-Aloud

This unit focuses on using twelve books to provide examples of literary characters displaying examples or counter-examples of the pillar character traits. Since it is unlikely I will have a copy of each book for every student, I will read the story aloud to the class. Students will also have the opportunity to re-read the story with a partner or in a small group. Third graders still very much enjoy a read aloud of a great book.

“I do, We do, You do.”

Another strategy I will incorporate is, “I do, We do, You do”. In this gradual release of responsibility model, I will first provide direct instruction; establish the purpose of the activity, model, and think aloud during the learning activity. Then, we would move to interactive instruction in which the students and I would work together while still providing additional modeling, checks, and prompts. Eventually, the responsibility would become that of just the students where they will work either independently or collaboratively depending on the activity. At this point, my role is to provide feedback and support, determine levels of understanding, and clarify any confusion.

Classroom Activities

My unit will consist of five learning activities to meet each of the five objectives of this unit. The objectives are: define the aspects of each trait; identifying examples and counterexamples of each trait in literature; identify real life examples of the traits as demonstrated by others; embody the traits themselves in daily living; and write a narrative providing examples of three of the traits being displayed through a character. Each one will be covered with the Tier 1 reading students during a nine week reading intervention cycle. There is flexibility in the amount of time provided for each objective. There will be approximately 45 minutes allotted daily for reading intervention.

Aspects of Character Traits

I will give the students a brief overview of the entirety of the unit. By doing so, I hope to have the students invested from the beginning; as well they will know the expectation for the end result and can keep that in mind throughout our nine weeks together. After the brief overview including an introduction the traits of trustworthiness, respect, fairness, caring, citizenship, and responsibility, we will work together to develop a working definition of the first trait; trustworthiness. This will be a working definition in the sense that it can be refined and adapted as new ideas and discussions occur. In addition to this, we will also provide examples of the trait in order for clarification. Throughout the rest of the week, we will work to define and provide examples of the remaining character traits. On the final day, the definitions will be finalized. The traits, definitions, and examples will be posted visibly in the classroom for students to be able to reference as needed. As well, on the final day of the lesson, there will be an informal assessment. I will provide the group a variety of scenarios one at a time. After each scenario, students will be cold-called to say which trait they best believe describes the scenario and justify their

reasoning. Through this brief informal assessment, I will be able to tell if any re-teaching needs to occur prior to moving forward with the next activity.

Identify Examples and Counterexamples in Literature

At this point, the students should have an understanding of each of the character traits after the previous week's discussion. This part of the unit involves reading each of the books designated for each character trait. This activity is to be repeated for each book and character trait with the exception that after the initial two books the work moves to "You do" with the students performing the bulk of the work.

The second activity begins by reading aloud the book *Miss Nelson is Missing* by James Marshall. The first read will be uninterrupted so the students get to hear the entire story. After reading, I will have a discussion with the students and emphasize the point that this book was chosen to teach the trait of respect. We will review the definition of respect and examples we came up with as a group. Next, I will read the story again modeling my think aloud as I read sections of the book that are either examples or counterexamples of respect. Students will have the opportunity to contribute their thoughts during my think aloud as well. In this book, it begins with a counterexample of respect as the students of Miss Nelson's class are constantly showing disrespect by making faces, making funny noises, refusing to complete assignments, and not listening during story hour. Miss Nelson did not return to school one day and instead students spent a bit of time with Miss Viola Swamp. After their time with Miss Swamp and upon Miss Nelson's return, the students are now displaying actions to show their respect towards their teacher. As well, I will model the connection of the characters actions directly towards the definition. I would say, "In the beginning of the story, the students in Miss Nelson's class did not have an understanding that Miss Nelson was important and should be treated as such. By the end of the story, they did come to the realization that Miss Nelson is important and should be treated in such a manner to show their feeling that she does matter and is serious." Students will have the opportunity to take notes and record their thoughts about respect in relation to this book in particular on a graphic organizer.

The next day will very much mimic the first day of the lesson with the exception of the teaching strategy moving from, "I do" to "We do". Again, I will read the story aloud to the class. The story for this day will be *The Recess Queen* by Alexis O'Neill. The students and I will work together to identify instances of respect or disrespect in the story.

Part of the discussion will center on how those scenarios affected the characters and how the characters actions impacted the events in the story.

Identifying Examples in Real Life as Demonstrated by Oneself and Others

The students will be expected to begin looking for real life examples when they see others displaying the character traits. In addition, they will display the character traits themselves in their day to day interactions. Students will have the opportunity to discuss with the class the examples they saw and decide whether or not they agree on such example displaying the trait described. If students are in agreement, then the real life experience will be written on a sticky note and put on display in the classroom. Each character trait will have a specific color designated for use. Trustworthiness could be blue, fairness could be yellow, and respect could be pink, and so on. If the student's example described trustworthiness, they would write it out on a blue sticky note. Students should be conscious of looking for their specific peers in the group to be displaying the traits. If Kate tells the group that James took turns with her on the swings on the playground; that would be proof that James is demonstrating being fair.

Writing a Narrative

The final objective will be addressed through students writing a narrative involving the character traits they have learned. Students will have choices with their narrative writing assignment. They can choose to either use an already established fictional character, create a new character, or use themselves as the main character in their narrative. Students will be expected to write a narrative using three character traits of their choice. Their narrative should include events which clearly portray their understanding of the traits. After completion of the narrative, students will identify the parts of their stories that they intended to incorporate events which would demonstrate the character trait. As with the previous activity, each trait is associated with a specific color. If a student's narrative includes a character displaying trustworthiness, they will underline that section of the story using a blue colored pencil, highlighter, or crayon. They would repeat the underlining with the specific colors for each trait.

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Appendix A

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.3

Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events. *Students will address this standard as they investigate the character traits displayed by the characters in the books. The character's examples or counter-examples of the traits will be shown through their actions. The students will discuss how such actions and displaying of the traits contributed to what happened in the story.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 3 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. *Students will participate in a wide range of collaborative discussion amongst themselves and with me.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences. *Students will be expected to write a narrative as one of their objectives for this unit. Their details will be necessary to convey the character traits they have selected to work with for their writing.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.A

Establish a situation and introduce a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally. *Characters are essential to this unit and the students will have choice in which character(s) they use in their narratives. Their knowledge of how character action contributes to the events of a story should prove helpful while making their own events unfold naturally.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.B

Use dialogue and descriptions of actions, thoughts, and feelings to develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations. *Students will provide sufficient detail and description in their narratives that aid in the reader's understanding of how characters feel and how their actions are affecting others.*

Notes

¹ Colin Greer and Herbert R. Kohl, *A call to character: a family treasury* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1997), 2.

² *Ibid*, 3.

³ Ginny Wiehardt, "The Many Different Types of Fictional Characters," *The Balance*, accessed December 19, 2016, <https://www.thebalance.com/the-definition-of-character-in-fiction-writing-1277093>.

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED444932> (accessed October 7, 2016).

⁶ Thomas Lickona, "The Return of Character Education," *Educational Leadership* 51, no. 3 (November 1993): accessed January 8, 2017, <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/nov93/vol51/num03/The-Return-of-Character-Education.aspx>.

⁷ "The Six Pillars of Character®," CHARACTER COUNTS, accessed October 7, 2016, <https://charactercounts.org/program-overview/six-pillars/>.

⁸ Tom Blunt, "This is How Literary Fiction Teaches Us to Be Human," Signature Reads, September 15, 2016, accessed January 8, 2017, <http://www.signature-reads.com/2016/09/this-is-how-literary-fiction-teaches-us-to-be-human/?ref=PRH558846040332&aid=randohouseinc22769-20&linkid=PRH558846040332>.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ "Why Storytelling Will Be the Biggest Business Skill of the Next 5 Years," HubSpot Blog Homepage, accessed January 8, 2017, <https://blog.hubspot.com/opinion/why-storytelling-will-be-the-biggest-business-skill-of-the-next-5-years>.

¹¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trustworthiness>(accessed October 30, 2016).

¹² "The Six Pillars of Character®," CHARACTER COUNTS, accessed October 7, 2016, <https://charactercounts.org/program-overview/six-pillars/>.

¹³ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/respect> (accessed October 30, 2016).

¹⁴ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/responsibility>(accessed October 30, 2016).

¹⁵ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/citizenship>(accessed October 30, 2016).

¹⁶ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/caring>(accessed October 30, 2016).

¹⁷ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fairness>(accessed October 30, 2016).

¹⁸ Adam Gidwitz, "What Makes a Children's Book Good?" The New Yorker, October 03, 2016, accessed January 8, 2017, http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/the-goosebumps-conundrum-what-makes-a-childrens-book-good?mbid=social_facebook.