

TEACHER PREPARATION

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Stories, both true and fictional, have great power to inspire positive moral choices and strong character.
2. Students are far more likely to keep the commitments they have made in this class if they are connected to a network of supportive accountability.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Grasp the importance of stories to convey and inspire positive character traits.
2. Choose at least one form of accountability to help them keep the commitments made in this course.
3. Write a personal story telling about one positive decision they have made during this course.
4. Share their story with at least one other person.
5. Write a short description of something they learned in each unit of the course.

MATERIALS / PREPARATION

In the Box: The Grandmothers' Letter. No object for this lesson.

If you have not already done so, make enough copies of the Table of Contents of this curriculum so you can give a copy to each of your students. If this is not possible, copy the Table of Contents onto a piece of large newsprint or a series of posters, one for each unit.

Have a piece of poster paper for each small group of four in your class and markers for the "Gallery of Learning" activity at the end of this lesson.

NOTE: If you are going to have a celebration (Lesson 33), make sure you are prepared to announce the details at the conclusion of this lesson.

Materials

- Students' notebook responses to "What Do You Want Most Out Of Life?" activity from Lesson 2
- Personal Journals
- Notebooks

LESSON

BEGINNING THE LESSON



STORY
3 MINUTES

[Read the following story.]

Tatyana Alexandrovna had her nose buried in the box when Sasha, Dima, and Natasha arrived.

“We’re getting close to the bottom of the box,” she said, without looking up. The three wondered how it was that teachers and mothers always seemed able to see through solid objects and discern what they were doing.

Closing the box, with a letter in hand, she smiled and said, “Let’s begin.”

Dear Ones,

Many folks look back on their lives with regrets and “if only . . .”. Things done and things left undone often haunt the corners of memories, both fresh and stale. No doubt the greatest regrets are those that fall under the heading of “unresolved issues between people.” For example, family members who choose to hang on to an offense and let go of the relationship; friendships that are crushed under the weight of unforgiveness or slowly starve to death in a sea of silence.

More than one reflective writer has put pen to paper to rewrite the past. Usually, it ends up as a list of reordered values. Here is a collection from our own lists:

If I had my life to live over –

1. *I’d laugh more in public.*
2. *I’d eat more ice cream and fewer beans.*
3. *I’d worry less about what my friends thought and more about what God thought.*
4. *I’d wait longer before rushing into things that I knew little about.*
5. *I’d listen more closely to what my elders were saying (instead of thinking I already knew).*
6. *I’d reveal my heart and not worry so much about getting hurt.*
7. *I’d say “I do!” to God much earlier in my life.*
8. *I’d live my life and not simply observe life in books or movies.*
9. *I’d learn to play some musical instrument well enough to perform.*
10. *I’d figure out some way to bless the beggars I see instead of pretending not to notice them.*
11. *I wouldn’t hold grudges a moment longer than it takes to drop them after noticing them in the first place.*
12. *I’d remind myself every day that “no” is a very freeing word that can be said in an inoffensive way.*
13. *I wouldn’t wait for others to take the first step in saying “I’m sorry”, “I love you”, or “Let’s talk”.*
14. *I’d write letters telling those I love that who they are is more important than what they do.*

Oh, wait, I guess we’ve done that one!

Our dear grandchildren, we are looking back on our lives and thinking about all we’d do differently if somehow we could return to youth. That gift has not been given to us, but it has been given to you!

Do you remember way back at the beginning of the year when we asked you to list your answers to the question, “What do you most want out of life?”

It is our hope and prayer for each of you that this year has resulted in some changes in your own dreams for your life. And we also believe you now have a much better idea what it might cost to reach your dreams. Our dream for you is that you will succeed in all you desire. But even more, we long for you to discover all that your loving Heavenly Father desires for you. We pray that His dream will become your dream.

We love you,
Your Grandmothers

 = 3 minutes

EXPLORING THE LESSON



LIFE STORIES ACTIVITY

22 MINUTES

We have seen that there is tremendous power in telling stories, whether fictional or nonfictional. As humans, we are emotional creatures who get strength and encouragement from listening to accounts of heroism, bravery, courage, honesty, and forgiveness. What do you think might be some reasons that stories can move us so deeply?

[Responses may include:

- *Stories touch our emotions, not just our minds.*
- *Stories are fun, so we pay attention to them.*
- *It is easy to put yourself in the place of the characters in a good story.]*

Most, if not all, of the world’s cultures use stories to convey patriotic, moral, and ethnic values. What are some of the stories in our own culture that encourage and motivate us?

[Facilitate a discussion of specific real-life and fictional stories that teach positive values. Focus on how the characters in these stories can serve as models and guides for students today. Real-life stories may be about athletes, political figures, religious figures, writers, and military figures.]

One of the attributes of a healthy community is the use of made-up and real-life stories that celebrate good and proper accomplishments. We practiced doing just that in this class during the year when one of us would share how he or she had made the right decision and took the right action.

You have also told a part of your real-life story when you made entries in your notebooks and Personal Journals, and shared them with people outside of the class.

Facilitate Discussion

Write a letter using the model of the Grandmothers' Letter.

Review notes from Lesson 2



= 6 minutes

Today, you are going to follow the model of the grandmothers and put one of your real-life stories into the form of a letter. Think about to whom you will address it. It could be a brother or sister, cousin, neighbor, or friend. Think about someone to whom you would like to “show the right way” and how you will tell him or her about your own challenges and triumphs, and the process by which you succeeded. You do not have to actually deliver the letter, but you may decide to do so. That will be entirely up to you.

The first step in this activity is for you to review your notes from Lesson 2 – the entries made in your notebook of your list of life goals and your entry in your Personal Journal regarding “What do you want most out of life?” These records will perhaps remind you of an important event or a right choice you made that may become the theme for your letter.

[After arranging the students into groups of three or four, ask them to review their own lists and then spend a few minutes sharing with each other:

1. *Any items they would remove from the list and why.*
2. *Any items they would revise or add to the list and why.*

Next, ask the students to:

1. *Consider what they have learned about abstinence from drugs, alcohol, and premarital sex this year and how that knowledge relates to accomplishing their revised goals and dreams.*
2. *How a trusted community of family and friends can assist in the process of fulfilling one’s goals and dreams.*

Ask for volunteers to share a few responses with the whole class.

Possible responses include:

1. *Provide support through encouragement for each other through difficult times.*
2. *Help hold each other accountable to positive actions and behavior.*
3. *Affirm each other’s accomplishments.]*



= 11 minutes

Allow ample time to draft letters. Provide an opportunity for volunteers to share the contents of their letters with the whole class.

Now you will work independently to write your letter. You will have 12 to 14 minutes to write your letter. Be sure to include the following elements:

1. To whom you are addressing the letter.
2. A clear description of the issue.
3. Specific details about the information you used to make your decision(s).
4. The steps you took to be successful.
5. How the classroom community contributed to your success.
6. How you hope that the letter will help the person to whom it is addressed.

The specific details about the information you used to make your decision could be taken directly from the lessons we had on drugs, alcohol, and premarital sex. Remember how the grandmothers used facts in their letters to bolster their propositions, suggestions, and convictions?

Also, when you describe how the classroom community contributed to your success, be sure to cite specific examples of what others did to assist, encourage, affirm, and support you.

Now you have a specific story to tell in which you are the hero or the heroine who triumphed! You can be a role model to someone else as much as one of the grandmothers may have been for you.

We have often talked about the people of high moral character in our lives to whom we look as role models. Now you may be able to encourage someone else by telling how you have decided to avoid using drugs and alcohol and participating in premarital sex.

You can decide whether you want to deliver the letter to whom it was addressed. I would appreciate hearing about it if you do decide to deliver it.

 = 25 minutes



HOW TO KEEP GOING DISCUSSION

3 MINUTES

Let's think for a few minutes about what happens next as we finish our year together as a true learning community.

What are some of the challenges you may face after leaving our healthy classroom community at the end of this school year?

[Responses may include:

- *No classes like this during the summer*
- *A different teacher(s) next year*
- *A different group of classmates next year*
- *New temptations]*

What are some ways that you can keep moving in a positive direction toward your dreams?

[Responses may include:

- *Go to places where I have trusted relatives or friends*
- *Avoid places where I know there will be strong temptations*
- *Plan activities with trusted relatives and friends*
- *Pray to God*
- *Stay in regular communication with trusted peers, role models, and mentors]*

One of the most effective means for maintaining high moral character is to stay in regular communication with trusted peers, role models, and mentors. They can provide a way to hold you accountable to the principles and values you have chosen to pursue, and you can hold them accountable in a mutual way. They can be a source of strength when temptation intensifies and can encourage you to remain faithful to the truth of your convictions. In the same fashion, you can be a trusted friend to others and a source of stability and reliability.

In 1996, in his book “Into Thin Air”, Jon Krakauer wrote about the deaths of several men on Mount Everest in one day. His account talks about how several men were separated from their partners and were killed by the elements, lack of oxygen, falling to their deaths, or all three.

This day was the worst day in the history of climbing Mount Everest.

Many changes have been made since this fateful day. One of those changes is the emphasis on climbing with a partner. Likewise, having someone to assist us in our new quest is very important.

Making the commitment to hold each other accountable is a powerful method for ensuring continued character development as you climb toward realizing your dreams. Climbing partners can help reduce some of the danger as you make your way to the summit.

We have come to know each other quite well over the course of this school year. We can continue these special relationships by planning ways to stay connected. What are some ideas about how we might do this?

[Write the following list of possible responses on the board:]

- Exchange phone numbers and plan to call on a regular basis.
- Establish a character club that meets regularly to do service projects for the school, neighborhood, church, or city.
- Plan reunions to celebrate the attainment of dreams.
- Create a “hot line” of e-mail or phone numbers to quickly notify each other when help is needed.
- Send greeting cards of encouragement to each other.
- Send letters like the ones we just wrote that tell additional new stories.
- Join an existing club, church, or team that upholds the traits of high moral character.

Some of you may be ready to do one or more of these activities to stay on a steady, healthy course of action. If so, the following activity will provide you an opportunity to take that important next step.

 = 28 minutes



PERSONAL JOURNAL ACTIVITY

3 MINUTES

You may recall from the last lesson that I told you we would be making another entry in your Personal Journal. We have come to the end of our class together, and you have at least one story to tell about being a person of high moral character.

It is again time to visit the list of dreams and any related obstacles that you wrote during the year on the first page of your Personal Journal under “My dreams . . .”, and the comments you made in the sections titled:

- “Stronger Together”
- “I Assert My Independence From Drugs”
- “I Assert My Independence From Alcohol”
- “I Assert My Independence From Premarital Sex”
- “I Responsibly Set Boundaries”
- “I Accept the Forgiveness Offered by God.”

Provide sufficient time for students to complete the tasks.

Take a few minutes to re-read your words and think about how they may have changed since then. If so, feel free to modify them in your Personal Journal.

Once you have completed reviewing the previous sections, you are ready to make an entry in the section titled “I Have a Story to Tell”.

Today, you have an opportunity to record that you have something important to tell someone else. The right decisions you have made place you closer to realizing your dreams. Take a few minutes to summarize the main points of your story, sign it, and date it. Be sure to leave enough room for a couple of signatures as you did in the previous sections.

 = 31 minutes

ENDING THE LESSON



CLOSING ACTIVITY

4 MINUTES

The next step is for you to share your story with other people. They can be the same people with whom you shared the previous section or someone else (a parent, grandparent, teacher, sibling, or friend) whom you can trust to be supportive.

There may be several of you in the room today who are ready to commit to each other as partners in holding each other accountable. Ask them to read the summary of your story and then to provide the remaining details about how your decision(s) can affect your dreams. Then, ask your partner(s) to sign their name in the “I Have a Story to Tell” section as a witness to your commitment. If you have the courage to take this step, you will be a very positive role model.

Provide sufficient time for students to complete the task.

 = 35 minutes



GALLERY OF LEARNING

10 MINUTES

Give each student a clean piece of lined paper, or ask each student to take one out of his or her notebook.

[Tell your students that you would like them to turn their attention to what they learned throughout the course. Give them each a copy of the course Table of Contents, or ask them to review the list you made on the large piece of newsprint.]

Ask your students to write at least one sentence describing what they learned from each unit. Tell them you will collect their papers when they finish, and they will have only 10 minutes to write their descriptions.

[Now, give each small group a piece of poster paper (or a clean sheet of paper) and a marking pen. Tell them to choose a recorder, and tell the recorders to title their posters “Gallery of Learning”.

Next, they are to choose one student’s description of learning for each unit and write it on the poster. They are to make sure that each student in his or her small group has at least one entry on their gallery, and that they have a description of learning for each unit of the course. Tell your students that these galleries will be posted for next week’s celebration session.

When they have finished, collect each student’s description of learning and each small group’s “Gallery of Learning”, and remind your students to bring their parents to next week’s parent-teacher conference, which will also be the celebration of your year’s work together as a learning community.

Dismiss your class.]

Before dismissing your students, remember to dictate the Parent-Teacher questions to them.



= 45 minutes

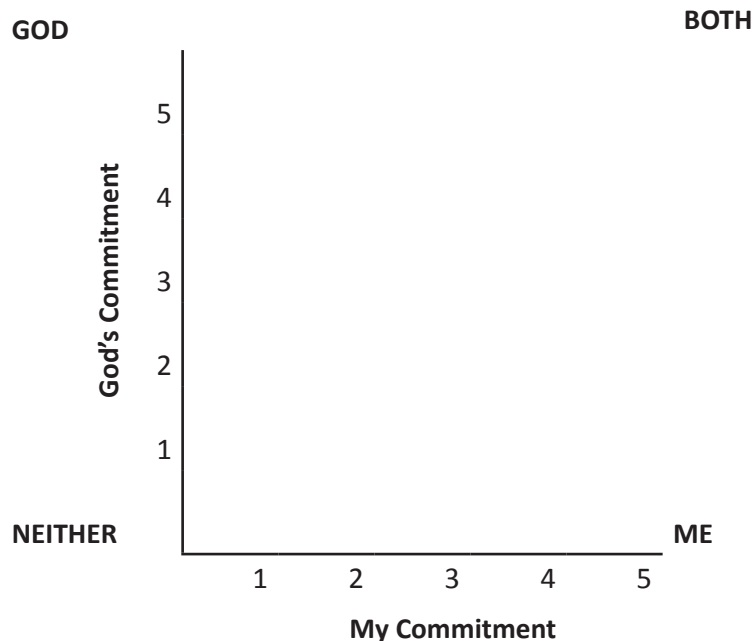
RESOURCES

GOING DEEPER

GRAPH GOALS ACTIVITY

Draw the graph on the board and instruct students to copy it into their Personal Journals.

One of the things you did today was to look back again at some of the dreams and goals you wrote down early in the course. I want you to take one to three of those goals and enter them on a graph. Please copy this blank graph that I have put on the board into your Personal Journals.



Let me explain the graph. The numbers 1-4 represent how committed you are to a particular goal – how certain you are that you want it to happen in your life.

0 means you are not at all committed.

You will probably not rate any of the goals you listed as a “0”. If you had cared that little about it, you would probably not have listed it as a goal!

2, 3, or 4 is a mid-range commitment.

You might like to see the goal happen, but your feeling is not so strong that it might not change. You may not have the commitment to see the goal through if it turns out to be really tough to achieve.

5 means you are deeply committed to the goal.

You've really thought it through, and you are certain that this is something you want to fulfill if there is any possible way to do it. You are willing to endure a lot of pain and hardship, if necessary, to achieve this goal.

You may or may not have any goals you would rate with a "5". It is likely that most of your goals will fall in the "1 to 4" range. Notice that at the lower-right corner of the graph the word "ME" appears. That is because the horizontal axis is where you would plot your own degree of commitment to a goal.

But you can see there is also a vertical axis. In the upper-left corner, you see the word "GOD". The vertical axis is for plotting how committed you think God is to your goal.

0 means you are pretty sure God does not want you to achieve that goal.

2, 3, or 4 would mean either that you are not sure how God feels about your goal or that you think God is neutral; He is not opposed to your goal but not committed to it either.

5 would mean you are quite certain God wants you to achieve a particular goal.

Now you are ready to begin plotting your goals on the copy you've made of the graph. If you had a "5" for yourself and God, your mark would be in the upper-right corner of the graph. If you had a "0" for yourself and God, your mark would be in the lower-left corner of the graph. If you and God rated the goal with a "2" or "3", then your mark would be somewhere near the middle of the graph.

So, take a few minutes to fill in your graphs. You can make a separate graph for each goal or put several goals on the same graph. These are for your benefit. You do not have to turn them in to me. While you work on these, I will be available to help you with anything that is not clear or any questions about what you are supposed to do.

[When it appears that most have graphed at least one goal, continue with your lecture.]

Our verse for today is Matthew 6:33.

[Read this verse from your Bible or read the following paraphrase, or both:]

"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."

Taken from the New Living Translation version of the Bible.

Perhaps some of you had difficulty putting a number on the vertical axis of the graph. You might be wondering, “How would I ever know if God is committed to my goals?” This verse gives you a clue. How can you be sure your goals are a “5” on both axes? According to this verse, the secret is to learn what God’s goals are for your life, commit yourself to them and make them your own goals.

Some of you may be thinking, “If I do that, I will miss out on too many of life’s good things.” But look what the last part of the verse says: If you put what God wants first, He will take care of all of your other needs as well.

Back near the beginning of this course, we looked at some verses that we should probably review now.

One was Jeremiah 29:11: “. . . I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

The other was Proverbs 3:5-6: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

So, according to these verses, if we commit our plans into God’s hands, if we concentrate on seeking what He wants for our lives, what will He do? It sounds to me as if He is promising that He will give us everything that is best for us. He will give us all the things that will truly make us happy.

FOCUS POINT

Be sure to leave time for discussion at the end of the learning activity so your students can discuss the connection between the learning activity and the lesson. Listen to see whether they seemed to understand the key points listed. If you sense that one or more of these points may have been lost, be sure to guide the discussion to make sure they get these main ideas.

1. If a particular goal is a part of God’s plans for us, it is something that will eventually bring us joy and fulfillment.
2. If one of our life goals is not something God desires, it would not bring us happiness or satisfaction, even if we somehow achieve it.

PARENT-TEACHER CONNECTION

For Family Discussion:

1. Ask your adolescent to share with you the story he or she wrote in class.
2. Talk about what this series of discussions together has meant to you and your adolescent.

