You'll Stumble in My Footsteps: Character Traits, Choices, and Outcomes in Literature

Introduction

Middle school, for many, is often a time of uncomfortable self-discovery and a yearning to fit into a socially acceptable group. Thinking back to this time in my life, I am reminded of the lyrics to "Walking in My Shoes" by the popular English electronic band, Depeche Mode.

```
 Now I'm not looking for absolution Forgiveness for the things I do But before you
come to any conclusions Try walking in my shoes You'll stumble in my footsteps Keep
the same appointments I kept If you try walking in my shoes
```

As a teacher in an urban middle school, I often observe the social nuances that go on around me and wonder how our students survive in a technologically advanced environment filled with innumerable social media and networking sites. Decision making for our students is no longer centered on what outfit to wear for the day or what table to sit at during lunch. Instead, the decisions they are pressured to make have the potential to leave deep-rooted scars of vulnerability and judgment. I watch as my students struggle with being the center of judgment because of the decisions they choose to make, but then flip around and judge someone else because they don't agree with the decisions being made. I am often filled with stories of peer pressure, deceit, self-loathing, and heartbreak from students who just want to fit into the middle school culture.

August Boeger Middle School sits at the base of the eastern foothills of San Jose, California. The school houses grades six to eight, and has a population of approximately 75% Hispanic/Latino, 15% Asian, and 10% White or non-Hispanic. 74% of the population is socio-economically disadvantaged, with a comparable percentage of students being English Learners. The area around the school is known for increased gang activity between two rival gangs, Nortenos (northerners) and Surenos (southerners). In the past, August Boeger housed a larger population of Nortenos. With the change in economy and the transience of families, students from Sureno backgrounds have moved into the area, causing more tension and stress for the community. This social strain inevitably spills onto the campuses within the neighborhood, creating an uneasy environment for academic success.

I currently teach two sections of 7 th grade CORE (English/History). Every student in our district is required to take one hour of English Language Development (ELD) instruction a day. At the middle school level, that ELD

instruction is either a part of the student's CORE class or taken as an elective. ELD instruction focuses on vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing. This type of instruction is successful in helping students break down word meaning, generate answers to basic comprehension questions, and write coherent simple sentences. However, due to differing ability levels and social backgrounds, students have difficulty analyzing a piece of literature and understanding the process a character goes through to make choices in order to resolve conflict, be aware of judgment from outside forces because of his/her choice, and accept outcomes of what the choices bring to him/her in the story.

This unit will encourage my students to analyze text in a way they have never done before. They will be able to take a piece of text and dissect the traits, personalities, and actions of a character and connect those factors to the choices he/she makes in solving the conflict. They will be able to analyze a better process for decision-making and apply that to major characters in a novel. Through literature, I also want my students to feel compassion and understanding in the choices that characters make and be able to apply that to real life situations amongst their peers. I hope my students recognize that strength in personal character will give them strength in making choices; that in the end, acceptance doesn't come from their peers, but comes from the confidence of living up to the outcomes of their choice.

Rationale

Through this unit and using various types of texts, I am hoping to bridge the gap between content curriculum and character education. One of my passions in education has been creating safe, positive school environments for students with an emphasis on spirit and involvement. I believe the school can be a place where students excel not just academically, but socially, physically, and emotionally if given the proper opportunities and resources. With the support of the administrators and staff, a fellow teacher and I built a strong, student-led Leadership program that allows students to get involved and feel like they are in some way a part of the school culture. I was, however, naïve in thinking that the program would solve all the problems on our campus. Through reflection, I learned that Leadership could not fix the lack of respect students and teachers had for one another, the blatant disregard for common courtesy, unwillingness to accept responsibility for unwanted actions, and the overall unconcerned feelings students had about what it meant to have "good" character. These were things we couldn't, as a program, provide for the students. We needed to supplement our program with something that would address and help resolve these issues.

Character Education and the PeaceBuilders Program

Character education programs are evident in almost every school, at every level across the nation. Programs such as these serve as a catalyst to help move schools towards fostering ethical, responsible, and caring individuals by modeling and teaching core universal values. [1] A school with a successful character education program is able to help students develop emotionally, ethically, and academically by instilling character development into all aspects of the school's curriculum and culture. [2] The Character Education Partnership conducted a study to determine what works in character education programs, and it was concluded that there are six guidelines for effective practice. Character education programs should be designed and implemented effectively, and it comes in varied forms that should be matched according to the need of the school. Next, programs affect different aspects of understanding (head), caring (heart), and acting upon core ethical values (hand). Effective programs are successful because they are implemented with the intent to last, with complete

devotion. Lastly, successful programs employ effective strategies to help assist in its growth. Some strategies include: professional development, peer interaction, direct teaching, skill training, explicit agenda, family/community involvement, providing models and mentors, and integration of academic curriculum. [3] Our district saw a need to adopt a character education program because there was an increase in bullying and disrespectful behavior. They looked for a federally funded program that would help turn violent environments into peaceful ones.

In 2009, the PeaceBuilders Program was brought to the staff of August Boeger Middle School. PeaceBuilders is a research-validated violence prevention youth program. It strives to create a safe and positive environment for every child through six basic principles: praise people, give up put downs, seek wise people, notice hurts, right wrongs, and help others. [4] Each day our students start the day by reciting the PeaceBuilders Pledge; this serves as a reminder to our staff and students the basic principles of the program. Praise Notes are also used to encourage desirable behavior and can be given to anyone from anyone on our campus. Every teacher is required to display a Praise Note bulletin board in his/her classroom, and is encouraged to post all Praise Notes given throughout the year. Our school also holds a rally at the beginning of the year to kick off a week dedicated to PeaceBuilders. During this week, teachers emphasize the six principles through lessons in their homeroom class, and the Leadership class organizes lunchtime activities and competitions to promote the positive behaviors associated with the program. It may be because it is still new, but I feel the absence of buy-in from staff and students has made it difficult for this program to successfully get off the ground.

Character education has always been important on our campus, but it has never been infused into the culture of the school. Most often, teachers at our school teach character-based lessons separate from lessons that are content focused. Integration is difficult because lessons are already prepared for teachers through state adopted curriculum, so bringing character education into lessons is left solely up to each individual teacher.

This unit will allow my students to use both canonical and contemporary literature to recognize the conflict characters face when presented with ethical dilemmas that have harsh moral, physical, emotional or social consequences. Through lessons, discussions, and activities my students will be able to apply what they have learned to decisions they have made in the past, and note the impact that decision had on their own personal character. Students will understand there is a level of judgment that people face when confronted with moral choices. They will analyze where that judgment comes from and discuss why people judge others' decisions when they often don't know the real reasons for why someone made the choice he/she did. Students will also develop skills that will help them make choices that will better strengthen their personal character.

Objective

There are several reasons why I feel it is important to connect character education with the current English curriculum. First, I would like my students to come away from this unit with a new set of skills that they can use when faced with a moral dilemma. I want them to understand that their character is directly correlated to the choices they will make in life. They will learn that there is a process to making decisions, and though pressure from outside forces will persuade them to make certain choices, they must determine the outcome and accept all responsibility for it. When faced with an ethical dilemma, I want them to put thought into their choice and make a decision they can own up to and be proud of. Along with making good decisions, I want my students to observe their own reactions and judgments of others when faced with a moral decision, and

understand where that judgment stems. In the end, I want them to accept their peers' decisions without judgment, but with support.

My second objective is purely selfish. I am doing this to become a better educator. I understand my strengths and weaknesses as a teacher. In my classroom, I teach character education separate from content. I choose to do this because I rely too much on state adopted curriculum to help teach both English and History. As an elementary trained teacher, I took general education classes that were not specific to one specialized subject area. Thus, I do not have the vast knowledge of one subject to stray far from the curriculum I am given. During the year, my time is limited and filled with many obligations; time to build this unit has allowed me to venture out of what I consider my "comfort zone." I understand state standards and know what my students need to learn, but my resources are limited because my knowledge is limited. This experience allows me to create a unit that incorporates character education that is rich in text and meaning not found in the state adopted curriculum I use every year.

Lastly, I will use this unit to reach out to other elementary teachers who, like me, do not feel comfortable in their ability or knowledge to stray away from state adopted curriculum to combine character education and content. I want teachers to use this unit as a springboard in creating lessons of their own that incorporate both areas of learning. Teachers often get comfortable with the resources used to teach, in what they teach, and in how they teach. Passion is derived from new experiences; teachers often lose the passion they once had for learning and bringing new ideas into the classroom. This unit serves as a reminder that learning is the most important aspect of being an educator.

Background

Berlin Model

At what point is there a breakdown in ethical behavior? This is a question I pondered while researching for this unit. Ethics is moral principles that include a code of values that drive our choices and actions. [5] Ethics involve understanding the difference between right and wrong. People with strong character will make ethical decisions based upon what they *ought* to do and not what they *want* to do. Being ethical often means forgoing personal happiness to sacrifice oneself for the common good. One can easily open a newspaper or turn on a television to see that there are many people who choose their own happiness and satisfaction over what is right. In the end, does happiness prevail? As educators, our job is to help guide our students towards making ethical decisions that will test their character, and to figure out where the breakdown of ethical behavior begins.

As adults, we view the decision-making process to be almost automatic. We look for solutions based on several key factors: how my decision will affect myself, how will it affect those around me, and what are the consequences. Seems simple enough, but often times, life will throw us curve balls that require making decisions which will ultimately test our character and values. We then become reflective and look to the past for guidance. We rely on our "wisdom-related knowledge and judgment" to help us cope with life's challenges. [6]

The concept of "wisdom-related knowledge and judgment" refers to the Berlin Model on the theory of wisdom.

This model defines wisdom as the expertise one develops through experience and knowledge. The model explains two types of knowledge: factual and procedural. Factual knowledge is that concerning human nature, development, and social norms. Procedural knowledge involves aspects of life that deal with planning, like setting goals or completing tasks. [7] Wisdom is a motivated process of learning that can develop over time to adult levels from early childhood and adolescence. Although age is an important factor in the development of wisdom, the adolescent's initial experience in responding to specific problems and issues also plays a significant role. Unlike adolescents, adults reach a sort of plateau in the wisdom gained, and along with character, they have the capacity and forthright to make such decisions and choices. [8] But what happens when adolescents don't have the experience to use wisdom to solve ethical dilemmas?

Ethical Decision-Making Model

As educators, we can teach the same kind of integrated approach to ethical decision-making that adults use in their careers. There is a model of the interrelationship of ethical principles, character and professional values that serves as a tool that professionals use in the work place when faced with ethical problems. [9] This model suggests that the ethical principles of beneficence, nonmaleficence, justice, autonomy, and fidelity sit at the core with character traits and values aligned accordingly. The study gives the example of fidelity. Fidelity, according to the sample, is defined as "issues of loyalty, truthfulness, promise keeping." This ethical principle is closely related to the character trait of trustworthiness and the professional value of truth. In bringing this back to my classroom, I would explain that if we choose the ethical principal of fidelity by being loyal to a friend in not divulging his/her secrets, we in turn have showed the characteristic of trustworthiness by being dependable and the value of truth by having the integrity to adhere to a friendship that we care about. Or, as a class, we would look at the ethical principal of autonomy. My middle school students are always discussing the need to make their own choices without being under the watchful eye of a parent or guardian. I would reveal that with freedom of choice come the feelings of respect and the value of individualization. If they want freedom to make autonomous decisions, they need to be considerate or respectful of the rules their parents/guardians have established for them and in return will gain the respect to grow as an individual. As educators, we can use this integrated model with our students to help them understand that all three go hand in hand; we can give them a clearer view of the bigger picture.

The study also provided practitioners a flow chart model of ethical decision-making that applies the integrated approach of principles, character traits, and professional values. The Ethical Decision-Making Model consists of a four-step process. The first step in the process is to clearly identify the problem to ensure that the final decision addresses the exact issue. A foundation for the problem has to be set with an understanding of the circumstances, the people involved, and the situational facts. This piece also includes an in-depth investigation of similar incidents and the outcomes and consequences of those incidents, along with potential risks that might result. The foundation, like a house, is the most important aspect of the decision-making process. Without a strong foundation, the process will falter. [10] This first step is the most difficult and the most time consuming part of the decision-making process. Students, at any level, may have a hard time with this piece because it forces them not only to be reflective and aware of past mistakes, but they must also be able to discern fact from hearsay. At this age, friendship and belonging take priority; however, if these get in the way of determining the circumstances and facts of a problem, students need to learn how to put them aside.

The second step of the process is to classify the problem to determine what ethical theme it addresses, or if there is in fact an ethical issue that needs to be addressed. To do so, you ask the following questions:

"Does this problem involve being honest with others?"

"Does this problem involve the right of others?"

"Does this problem involve being fair to others?"

"Does this problem involve acting responsibly?"

If the answer to any of the four questions is "yes" then there is an ethical issue that needs to be addressed. If the answer to all four of the questions is "no" then the problem is devoid of an ethical problem. [11] This step may be the easiest to teach students because the questions are very straight forward and to the point with very black and white answers. Students may be hesitant in answering these questions because it forces them to look at the problem with lenses they may not be comfortable wearing. Instead of hastily solving problems, they are encouraged to think about how the issue will affect other.

The next step in the process is to determine if "yes" is the answer to only one of the questions. If this is the case, then the path is straightforward. If there is only one ethical issue raised, then the choice becomes clear to do what is ethically right. [12] For example, if a student finds ten dollars on the floor of the classroom, it is clear that turning in the money would be the correct thing to do. Solutions become unclear when more than one question has a "yes" response. From the study, ethical dilemmas are described as "situations where two 'rights' vie...the resolution is a search to identify the path of greatest good." We go back to the previous problem of the student who finds money on the ground of the classroom. At this point the ethical problem is easy to solve; however, what if we change the scenario to include two people. Two students, who are best friends, find ten dollars on the ground of the classroom. Student A picks it up and is about to give it to the teacher, but Student B stops him/her, takes the ten dollars and says that he/she is going to keep the money. Student B proceeds to tell Student A not to tell anyone about the money. Now this problem has turned into an ethical dilemma for Student A. What does Student A do? The study suggests that one must "strive to balance the positive and negative outcomes connected with following each principle and choose the path of greatest good." For an adolescent in middle school, losing a friendship and being looked at as a snitch would outweigh the positive of doing good to benefit others. The path to making a decision like this would be difficult for students, but pride in outcome will come if they are informed of the interconnectedness of ethical principle, character traits and values in this situation. [13]

The last stage of the process ties in with stage three, and is the actual decision-making part of the process. At this point, the person has a good idea of the relevant principles, traits, and values associated with the problem, and this increases the possibility of him/her making a decision they can defend. [14] Being able to defend your choice plays a key role in taking ownership of the outcome and not allowing others to judge your decisions. People who are able to defend their decisions have shown to put some thought into the decision-making process and can be proud of their decision regardless of the outcome. If we look back to the previous example, Student A may not like the solution he/she ought to choose, but he/she will be proud that he/she will be associated with the character trait of responsibility and the value of freedom or being exempt from any external control that will later get him/her into more trouble.

Helping students understand the interrelationship of ethical principles, character, and professional values and teaching students to use the Ethical Decision-Making Model will give them the resources and skills when making decisions that may be life-altering as they develop into adults. As educators, we can only hope that what we teach will resonate with our students, and that in return they will take what is learned and use those skills in the future. I hope that by teaching my students skills to make ethical decisions, they will become students with stronger characters.

Strategies

I will start my unit with an anticipatory set to "hook" my students into the unit. The opening activity is important because it is the motivation and introduction to the following lessons. In order for them to be ready for this unit mentally and physically, they will draw upon imagination, discussion, and oral story telling.

I enjoy incorporating music into lessons because song lyrics can be considered a type of contemporary poetry. In many songs, there are strong messages that adolescents can relate to and interpret more easily. I also find using songs to be a great segue into looking at both modern and classical poetry. For this unit, I will start by introducing a song by Everlast called "What It's Like." This song deals with the hardships that people face and the judgment that comes along with it when no one really knows a situation. This song stresses that people are sometimes faced with choices in life that they feel they cannot control, so they should be free to make any choice without the fear of being judged. In class, we will read and discuss the lyrics before listening to the song. As students read the lyrics, they will be asked to highlight certain phrases that jump out at them, and will be asked to jot down any thoughts and feelings related to these highlighted phrases. Through discussion, they will share with one another their findings. We will listen to the song and discuss presentation of the message. I would like to find out from my students whether they think the message of the song could be presented in another form, and if so, in what form would they choose to present Everlast's message of judgment.

The next piece of text I will introduce to my students is the poem "A Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost. This is one of Frost's most popular poems and is studied at many levels. I chose this poem because of its literal and figurative approach to discussing a road. The poem is rich in imagery and the vocabulary is not too difficult that my students would get lost in word meaning. In this poem, the "road" Frost refers to, is a literal one that splits, and the narrator must decide which path to take. Figuratively, Frost alludes to the decisions we face in life that can have life altering outcomes. Students will relate to this poem because it deals with something that they are familiar with. They can empathize with the narrator's dilemma of making a choice without knowing what the true outcome will be. In the end, the narrator takes the "road less traveled," and is happy with his decision about taking the chance that the road will lead him down an acceptable path. However, this poem is narrated in the past tense, so the narrator is reflecting upon his decision about taking the right path. He can only accept that it is the right path because of where he ended up; had the path been the wrong one, the narrator might not have thought it to be such a defining moment in his life. Students will read and discuss this poem in depth. I will introduce several activities that will aim to enhance their understanding of figurative language, imagery, and meaning.

Once I feel students understand the concept of decision-making and judgment, I will introduce the interrelationship of ethical principles, character, and values and the Ethical Decision-Making Model. I will begin this section of the unit by introducing two picture books. The first picture book is *Three Questions* based on a story by Leo Tolstoy written and illustrated by Jon J Muth. In this story, a boy named Nikolai yearns to be a good person, but is uncertain about the right way to act. He wants to find the answer to three questions: When is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? What is the right thing to do? On his quest to find the answer, he runs into three friends, a heron, a monkey, and a dog. The answer each animal gives is reflective of his/her character traits. Nikolai knows these aren't the answers to his three questions. He decides to visit his friend the turtle. Through a series of events that starts with Nikolai helping turtle with his garden and ending in him helping a panda find her way back to her mother, Nikolai learns that his actions

have answered his questions. It is during the introduction of this picture book that I will introduce students to the interrelationship between character traits and values. We will discuss how decisions play a role in someone being judged because it is his/her character traits and values that come into question.

The next picture book I will present to my class is *Fox* written by Margaret Wild. In this story, a dog and a bird are both injured. They help each other compensate for their injuries. They become inseparable friends, but the fox is jealous of their closeness. He tricks the Dog into betraying the bird, and Dog then has to decide how to atone for his betrayal of his friend. This book will allow discussions and activities that surround moral judgment of others, as well as critical choice. At this point, I will introduce the Ethical Decision-Making Model to my class. They will apply this model to the book and figure out a better way for Fox to handle his jealousy. They will also look at Dog's choices and come up with a more ethical solution based upon the model.

The last text I will use with my student is the novel, *The Outsiders*, by S.E. Hinton. I chose this book because my students can relate to the characters and the storyline and I can get enough copies of this book for every student to borrow. The novel tells the story of a teenager named Ponyboy Curtis and his struggles with right and wrong in a society that places him and his friends as outsiders. Pony lives with his two older brothers, and along with his friends are considered greasers from the wrong side of the tracks. Greaser is a class term that refers to the poor side of town, which is on the east side. My students will connect with story right away because they too are from the east side of San Jose where there evidence of gang activity. In the story, the Socs are the rival gang who are from the upper class neighborhood on the west side of town. A couple members of the Socs confront Pony and his friend, Johnny, in park, and a fight ensues. Johnny sees Pony in trouble, takes out his switchblade, and kills Bob, a Soc. They consult their friend Dallas and decide to run away. While on the run, the boys find out that a girl from the Socs will testify that Bob was drunk and that Johnny was acting in self-defense. Johnny decides to turn himself in, but on the way home they see that a church is on fire and that people are trapped inside. Both boys go into the fire to help rescue the occupants. A wooden beam falls on Johnny, burning him and breaking his back. Johnny is not able to recover and dies shortly thereafter at the hospital. Dallas is so overcome with grief that he robs a liquor store, an action that ultimately gets him killed by the police. It ends with Pony writing a book about the past events to help him with his grief and frustration. [15]

This story fits perfectly with the theme of this unit because it deals with adolescents making harsh life choices that will make an impact on the outcome of the path they take in life. Students can pick any one of the main characters in the book and analyze the choices that he makes. Students will identify with the ideas presented in this story dealing with conformity/non-conformity, loyalty, identity (both personal and group), and personal conflicts that test character. My students will be attracted to this novel because it focuses on the two things they are most concerned with: friendship and loyalty. In class, students will discuss and analyze the choices made by each character and the role conflict resolution played in the decision-making process. Students will pick a character and his conflict, and apply the Ethical Decision-Making Model to find an alternative way of dealing with conflict that may have prevented the violence. They will compare and contrast the conflicts presented in the novel to modern day conflicts and present how this model can be used to solve modern day conflicts. Questions I would like my students to think about during discussions:

- At what point in the story did this character make a decision that would change his "path?"

- Do you see the choice as being justified? Why?

- Was this character judged in any way for his decision?

- What was the outcome of his decision?

- What character traits and/or values can be associated with his decision?

Students will be assessed on their learning in the form of a response to literature essay on conflict, choices, and outcomes. They will be given a piece of text and must apply what they learned from the unit to the text I will choose to give them. They will be asked to describe and analyze the choices a character makes, the outcome and judgments he/she faces, and then they must be able to apply the Ethical Decision-Making Model to come up with an alternative solution to the conflict. They must be able to provide examples drawn straight from the text and explain the importance of each example. The assessment will follow the guidelines set forth in the California's English Language Arts Content Standards for Grade Seven.

Classroom Activities

Activity One

Through this activity, students will understand the interrelationship between character traits and values. Give each student a post-it note. Say to the students, "Think about an animal. If you could match a personality trait with that animal, what would that trait be?" Give students the examples of a fox being sly and an owl as wise. Have students pair share ideas with each other. Students will write down an animal and the corresponding personality trait on the post-it and place it on a wall. Once students are done, give students approximately three minutes to walk around and look at what other students wrote down on the post-it notes. Lead a discussion with students asking them the following questions:

- Why did you associate that personality trait with your animal?

- What evidence or prior knowledge do you have that can help prove your example?

- Do we associate animals as being good or bad based on the personality traits given to them? Why?

Say to the class, "Think about the animal and its personality trait you gave at the beginning of class. If that animal were to answer the following three questions, what would its answers be? When is the best time to do things? Who is the most important one? What is the right thing to do?" Have students write their answers down on a piece of paper or in writing journals. Ask students to share their answers and the reasons why they chose the answers.

Introduce the book, *Three Questions* by Jon J. Muth. Read the story, but stop just before the three animals give their answers to the three questions. Discuss with students the personality traits for each animal then ask students to guess what each animal's answers will be to the three questions. Continue reading the story to see if students' answers matched those of the story. Once the story is read, lead a class discussion by asking the following questions:

- Why was it important for Nikolai to find the answers himself?

- Did Nikolai's actions reflect the answers the turtle gave at the end of the book?

- What kind of character traits would you say Nikolai possesses?

- Nikolai's goal throughout the book was to find the answers to his three questions. How might you perceive him had he not helped the turtle with his garden or helped the panda find his mother?

- Would his character traits change?

- Would he have faced judgment from readers if he chose to forge ahead to find the answers without stopping to help his friends? What kind?

Activity Two

Journal prompts are posted on the whiteboard everyday. Students keep a writing journal where they are encouraged to write freely without hesitation about the topics presented. Students have the choice to share journal entries with myself and/or their peers, but are not graded on what or how much they write. When students enter the classroom, the following journal prompt will be on the whiteboard:

- What is jealousy? Is jealousy considered a negative or positive character trait? Why? Give an example of a time when you were jealous. Explain the situation, your feelings, and what happened as a result.

Once students are finished with the journal prompt, the class will join in a teacher-led discussion. Students may share their thoughts and/or experiences with the class.

The following explanation will be presented to the class: Jealousy is a normal feeling, but that feeling can take on negative effects when a person acts on his/her jealousy to hurt others. Consequently, others may judge this person harshly regardless of what the situation may be. Feelings like jealousy, anger, and hurt can cause people to react to situations without thinking. They make decisions that may end up hurting someone they care for or themselves.

At this time, the Ethical Decision-Making Model will be presented to students through discussion and use of examples. To reinforce this model, the book *Fox* by Margaret Wild will be used. The book will be read aloud to the class and the class will discuss the conflict and the characters involved in the conflict. Once this is done, students will use the ethical decision-making model to come up with alternative choices that can be made by any of the three main characters.

Activity Three

It will take approximately one month to read *The Outsiders*. Students will engage in activities and lessons for each chapter of the book that focus on vocabulary, development of main characters, setting, and the overall plot. Discussion questions surrounding the conflicts of the characters can be found in the "Strategies" portion of this unit.

Students will choose one main character as a focus. They will start by creating a character board for that character. On a piece of poster board, students will write the name of the character in the middle. Magazines will be brought into the classroom and students will cut out pictures and words that represent the character's personality traits, feelings, and emotions throughout the story. These words and pictures will be glued around the name of the character on the poster board, leaving a one-inch border around the edges. Within the one-inch border, students will write the actions of the character that resulted from an event, emotion, or feeling. These actions represent the decisions the character made throughout the story.

Once the poster boards are completed, students will look at the actions they chose and match them with a personality trait, emotion, or feeling that they represented on the poster board. Students will choose one major decision made by the character and complete an ethical decision-making chart where students will explain the problem, decide what type of ethical issue was raised, and what the outcome should have been for the character (see Appendix I).

When students complete the ethical decision-making chart, they will share and explain their findings to the class. Through this process of discussion, students will think of real life conflicts that their peers face both in and out of the school environment. Working in pairs, students pick a conflict relatable to their peers and complete an ethical decision-making chart. They must include authentic conflicts and provide solutions that are practical for students at the middle school level.

Bibliography

Berkowitz, Marvin W. Ph.D. and Melinda C. Bier Ph.D. *What Works In Character Education: A research-driven guide for educators*. University of Missouri: Character Education Partnership, 2005. PDF e-book.

Friedman, Audrey A. and Christina A. Cataldo. "Characters at Crossroads: Reflective decision makers in contemporary Newbury books," *The Reading Teacher* 56, no. 2 (2002): 102 – 112. Accessed July 14, 2011. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20205160.

Haynes, Charles C., Oliver Thomas, and John Ferguson, ed. *Finding Common Ground A Guide To Religious Liberty in Public Schools*. Nashville, TN: First Amendment Center, 2001. http://freedomforum.org.

Humphrey, Elaine, Steven M. Janosik, and Don G. Creamer. "The Role of Principles, Character, and Professional Values in Ethical Decision-Making," *NASPA Journal* 41, no. 3 (2004): 675 – 692. Accessed July 13, 2011. http://www.journals.naspa.org.

Lewis, Paul. "Wisdom as Seen Through Scientific Lenses: A Selective Survey of Research in Psychology and the Neurosciences." *Tradition & Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodicals* 36, no. 2: 67 – 72. Accessed July 12, 2011. PDF. http://www.missouriwestern.edu

Pasupathi, Monisha, Ursula M. Staudinger, and Paul B. Baltes. "Seeds of Wisdom: Adolescents' Knowledge and Judgment About Difficult Life Problems," *Developmental Psychology* 37, no. 3 (2001): 351 – 361.

"PeaceBuilders Program for Safe, Positive Learning Environments." PeacePartners, Inc. Accessed July 14, 2011. http://www.peacebuilders.com.

Student Resources

Frost, Robert. "The Road Not Taken." In *Mountain Interval*, edited by Ian Lancashire, 9. New York:

Henry Holt, 1916.

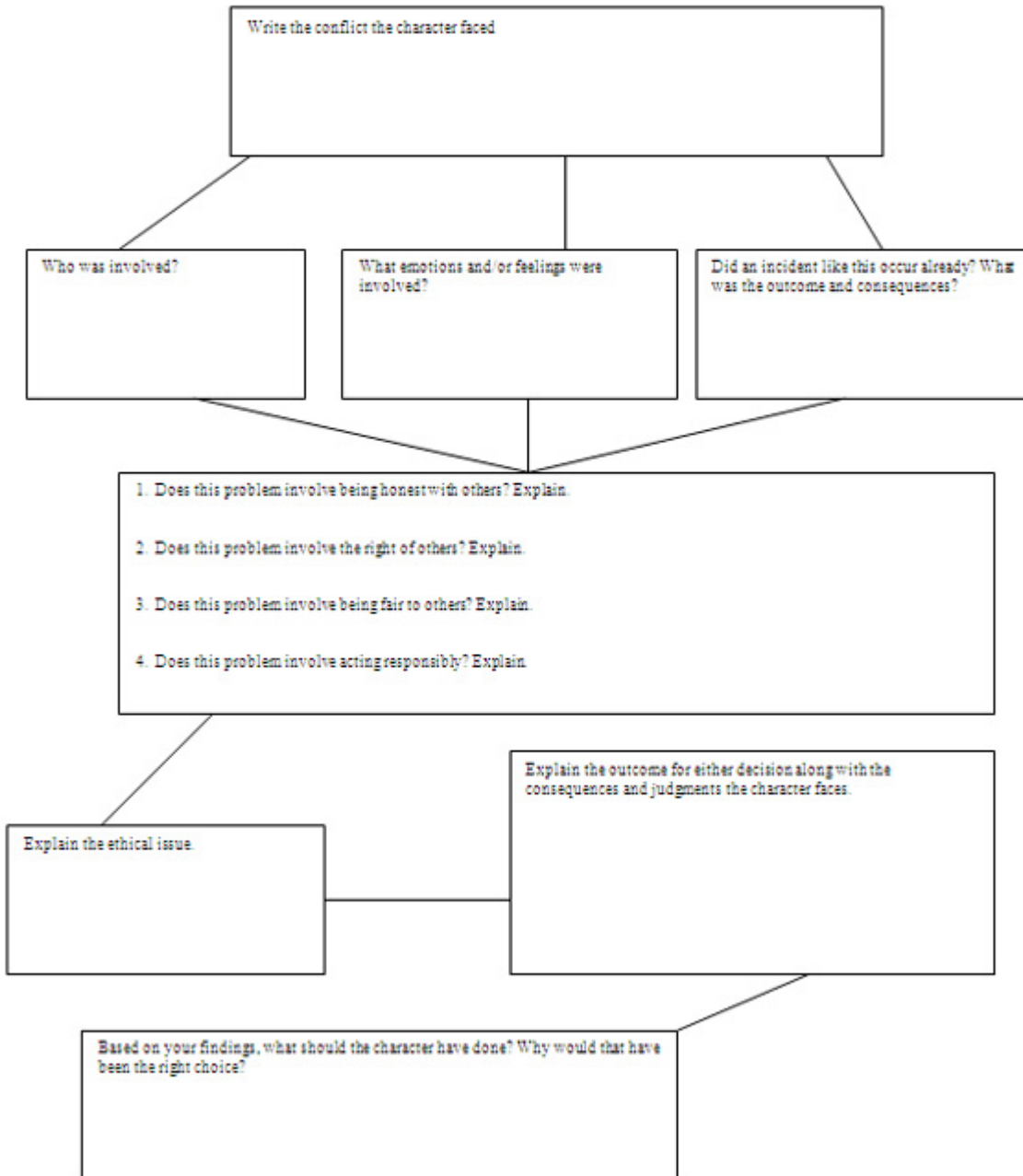Hinton, S.E. *The Outsiders*. New York: Viking Press, 1967.

Muth, Jon J. *The Three Questions (Based on a story by Leo Tolstoy)*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2002.

Wild, Margaret and Ron Brooks. *Fox*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000.

Appendix I

The Outsiders

Using the Ethical Decision-Making Model to change outcome

Write the conflict the character faced

Who was involved?

What emotions and/or feelings were involved?

Did an incident like this occur already? What was the outcome and consequences?

1. Does this problem involve being honest with others? Explain.

2. Does this problem involve the right of others? Explain.

3. Does this problem involve being fair to others? Explain.

4. Does this problem involve acting responsibly? Explain.

Explain the outcome for either decision along with the consequences and judgments the character faces.

Explain the ethical issue.

Based on your findings, what should the character have done? Why would that have been the right choice?

California English Language Arts Content Standards for Seventh Grade

3.0 Literary Response and Analysis

3.3 Analyze characterization as delineated through a character's thoughts, words, speech patterns, and actions; the narrator's description; and the thoughts, words, and actions of other characters.

3.4 Identify and analyze recurring themes across works (e.g., the value of bravery, loyalty, and friendship; the effects of loneliness).

I chose to focus on these particular standards because students at my school have difficulty responding to and analyzing pieces of text. An understanding of these two standards will give students the critical thinking skills to write clear, coherent response to literature essays.

Notes

---

1 Haynes, Charles C., Oliver Thomas, and John Ferguson, ed, *Finding Common Ground A Guide To Religious Liberty in Public Schools* (Nashville, TN: First Amendment Center, 2001), 151, http://freedomforum.org.

2 Haynes, Charles C., Oliver Thomas, and John Ferguson, ed, *Finding Common Ground A Guide To Religious Liberty in Public Schools* (Nashville, TN: First Amendment Center, 2001), 153, http://freedomforum.org.

3 Berkowitz, Marvin W. Ph.D. and Melinda C. Bier Ph.D., *What Works In Character Education: A research-driven guide for educators* (University of Missouri: Character Education Partnership, 2005), 18 – 20, PDF e-book.

4 "PeaceBuilders Program for Safe, Positive Learning Environments," PeacePartners, Inc, Accessed July 14, 2011. http://www.peacebuilders.com

5 Josephson Institute, *Exercising Character: A workout guide for teenagers who make character count with 11-13 year olds*, 1

6 Pasupathi, Monisha, Ursula M. Staudinger, and Paul B. Baltes, "Seeds of Wisdom: Adolescents' Knowledge and Judgment About Difficult Life Problems," *Developmental Psychology* 37, no. 3

(2001) : 353.

7 Lewis, Paul, "Wisdom as Seen Through Scientific Lenses: A Selective Survey of Research in Psychology and the Neurosciences," *Tradition & Discovery: The Polanyi Society Periodicals* 36, no. 2: 67 – 72, accessed July 12, 2011, PDF, http://www.missouriwestern.edu

8 Pasupathi, Monisha, Ursula M. Staudinger, and Paul B. Baltes, "Seeds of Wisdom: Adolescents' Knowledge and Judgment About Difficult Life Problems," *Developmental Psychology* 37, no. 3

(2001) : 353.

9 Humphrey, Elaine, Steven M. Janosik, and Don G. Creamer. "The Role of Principles, Character, and Professional Values in Ethical Decision-Making," *NASPA Journal* 41, no. 3 (2004): 680,

accessed July 13, 2011, http://www.journals.naspa.org.

10 Humphrey, Elaine, Steven M. Janosik, and Don G. Creamer. "The Role of Principles, Character, and Professional Values in Ethical Decision-Making," *NASPA Journal* 41, no. 3 (2004): 682,

accessed July 13, 2011, http://www.journals.naspa.org.

11 Humphrey, Elaine, Steven M. Janosik, and Don G. Creamer. "The Role of Principles, Character, and Professional Values in Ethical Decision-Making," *NASPA Journal* 41, no. 3 (2004): 682,

accessed July 13, 2011, http://www.journals.naspa.org.

12 Humphrey, Elaine, Steven M. Janosik, and Don G. Creamer. "The Role of Principles, Character, and Professional Values in Ethical Decision-Making," *NASPA Journal* 41, no. 3 (2004): 683,

accessed July 13, 2011, http://www.journals.naspa.org.

13 Humphrey, Elaine, Steven M. Janosik, and Don G. Creamer. "The Role of Principles, Character, and Professional Values in Ethical Decision-Making," *NASPA Journal* 41, no. 3 (2004): 683,

accessed July 13, 2011, http://www.journals.naspa.org.

14 Humphrey, Elaine, Steven M. Janosik, and Don G. Creamer. "The Role of Principles, Character, and Professional Values in Ethical Decision-Making," *NASPA Journal* 41, no. 3 (2004): 683 - 684,

accessed July 13, 2011, http://www.journals.naspa.org.

15 SparkNotes Editors, *SparkNote on The Outsiders*