

Book of Heroes

American Acts of Heroism

Through their study of history, students discover role models of character traits they admire and want to have. As a class, they compile a book of Heroes over the course of the year.

TIME	20 minutes first time 5-10 minutes intermittently through the year
SUBJECTS	History, Language Arts, Civics
STRATEGIES	Class participation independent research, oral presentation
TAGS	Character, character traits, role models, value of history, civic duty, hero, greatness, heroism
LESSONS	Social Studies – all chapters; Language Arts – research and presentation; SEL – character development; Civics – developing good character; all subjects as outstanding people are featured

Teaching Materials Included in Lesson Plan

Questionnaire master

Teaching Materials Needed

Loose-leaf binder entitled “American Acts of Heroism” containing numerous questionnaire pages

Summary

This lesson is based on two tenets: Each person develops his or her own character one decision at a time, and that one reason studying history is crucial is the opportunity to learn from what happened in the past. It introduces the practice of identifying character traits and civic principles followed by people from history. Students can decide which of these behaviors and their guiding principles they admire and wish to follow. In the process, through the rest of the school year the class will create a book of American role models whose actions they admire and

whose examples each can turn to when developing his own character one action at a time.

Glossary

- Character – the moral and mental qualities of a person; ex: an honest, dependable, and kind character
- Civic principle – a guiding tenet for behavior as part of society; ex: treating everyone with respect
- Fame – the state of being known or talked about by many people
- Heroic act – act done for the good of others or in defense of a nation or ideals in the face of known danger
- Noble – having or showing high moral qualities
- Tenet – basic belief or principle

Lesson Objectives

- Fame means being known or talked about by many, not necessarily for noble character traits or admirable acts
- A person of great character or who has done outstanding, noble acts may never be famous for those traits or act
- As individuals are introduced in any subject, students will learn what they can about that person's character traits and the principles that guided his/her acts.
- Students will identify character traits they wish to develop in themselves.
- Students will identify civic principles that are for the good of others more than self.
- The teacher may, at the end of the year, provides each student with a copy of the book they will have created, giving them a lasting treasure trove of role models to help guide their actions.
- Original text of the Bill of Rights

Setting the Stage

In your own words, explain the following:

While learning about the early history of the country, you are reading and hearing about many individuals. Some of these men, women, and children acted for the good of others or in defense of ideals they believed to be noble, some even when doing so was very dangerous. There are many more people from all walks of life that

did this than we have time to learn about, for one of the characteristics of Americans is that we are at our best when conditions are at their worst. Some tried to do this throughout their lives. Others rose to selfless acts upon occasions. Still others chose only to benefit themselves.

You are already facing decisions on about how you will behave every day and choosing well is not always easy. But those decisions matter because with each decision you are building your own character.

By learning about people from history, as we learn what they have done we can often see some of their character traits and come to conclusions about their reasons for doing what they did. We can identify civic principles that will guide our own behavior and character traits we admire and want to develop in ourselves.

We are going to start collecting people from American history whose actions we admire. We'll make a class book of as many of these people as we can over the next months.

So that we all know that we mean the same thing when we use certain words, as we look at these people, we'll use these terms: "great person" and "heroic act."

What is a great person?

A great person is someone who consistently tries to live his or her life according to noble ideals and principles and in many ways succeeds, not just when it is convenient but also when it is difficult.

What are some examples of noble character traits?

Honesty, protecting or defending the dignity, health, reputation, or rights of another person, humility, serving the community or nation, generosity, forgiveness, responsibility, kindness, courageousness, dependability, giving one's best effort.

What is a heroic act?

If, knowing the dangers, a person willingly places himself or herself at risk of great harm for the good of another, in service to country, or in defense of noble ideals, that person is performing a heroic act.

Explain the Process of Analyzing the Actions of Historical People

Binder and Questionnaire

Show students the loose-leaf binder containing many questionnaires pages

Use and discuss the following example of questions and answers.

Example

Show the questionnaire included in the lesson plan and discuss using the questions and answers in the example below.

John Adams

Who was this person and what was the setting for what he or she did?

John Adams was a respected, young Massachusetts lawyer and Patriot whose first historically significant act was in 1770 when the Boston Massacre occurred, during which the British soldiers were attacked by a mob and in the fighting five colonists were killed by British soldiers. There was such widespread American resentment of the British that when time came to put the British on trial, no one would defend the soldiers as their attorney in trial.



What did this person do in this situation?

John Adams decided he would defend the soldiers.

What were the risks that this person knew about when he made his decision?

At this time, John Adams was married to Abigail and had children. Because many Bostonians were anti-British and angrily believed the rumors that the fight and deaths were completely the fault of the British soldiers, he and Abigail believed that

if he were to take this case, at the very least, it would probably mean his ruin as a lawyer. He also knew it could mean the destruction of their home by an angry mob or even worse, physical harm to himself and his family.

What principles guided this person to do what he did? What were the results of the decision?

John Adams believed that in a free country everyone accused of a crime should have a right to be defended in a court of law. The civic principle of a defendant's right to an attorney when in trial for a crime guided him, and he defended the ideals and reputation of his country by taking the case to ensure that their rights were upheld. During the trial, he presented the testimony of people who were there, and they told the truth. The soldiers were found to be only acting in self-defense against an angry mob. As the truth became known across the city, John Adams gained the respect of many for what he had done. In time he became one of the most highly respected and sought-after lawyers in Boston.

What outstanding character traits did this person exhibit?

Bravery – good; defense of others – good; service to civic principle of fair trials – good

Exercise 1

Through discussion, have the class answer the questions on the questionnaire page about Paul Revere when he knew the British wanted to arrest him, yet he rowed under the prow of the British ship to get out of Boston and then fled British soldiers as he rode to spread the message about the coming raid to militiamen in towns between Boston and Concord, April 19, 1775.

If the students conclude that the character traits he showed were noble or even heroic:

Select someone to be scribe.

Formulate together the answers to the questions

Have the scribe write the answers.

Exercise 2

Go through the same process with Sybil Ludington.



Statue of Sybil Ludington, by artist Anna Hyatt Huntington, near Carmel, NY.

Continuation

Over the course of the school year, whenever someone from American's past is introduced in any subject along with enough information to analyze their actions, ask the questions, and if students believe his or her actions showed noble and desirable character traits or heroism, enter the person into their book.

Extension

Students can select and report on individuals from American history to the class, and then the class can fill out the questionnaire. (The Why America Is Free Curriculum includes an immense list of outstanding men, women, and children participants who contributed to the struggle for independence and/or the founding years of the nation - Patriot, Loyalist, British, Native American, Enslaved, Free Black, Hispanic, French, and other.)

Master for questionnaire is on the following page

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American Acts of Heroism

Name: _____

Who was this person and what was the setting for what he or she did?

What did this person do that was noble and extraordinary?

What risk(s) if any did this person knowingly take by making this decision/taking this action?

What principles guided this person to make this decision? What were the results of the decision?

What outstanding character traits did this person exhibit?