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CHARACTER MATTERS

R. E. Myers

 GOOD YEAR BOOKS



Dedication

In loving memory of my parents, who did their best to make me a better citizen.



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CHARACTER MATTERS

Personal Growth

This first section about personal growth offers a variety of concepts for your students to consider, from honesty with oneself to independence. The emphasis is on moral growth. The approach is to personally involve each student with a moral issue. For example, in the activity "Personality," most students will not give honest answers to all six questions. In the second part of the unit, they are asked to reflect on their answers a week later and to record differences in their answers. The experience should be instructional to those students who have already begun to deceive themselves. (Of course, we all do, to some extent.)

If such units as "Cheating the Cheater" and "Selfish Giving" are too sophisticated for your class, they can be presented later, after your students have worked on "Honest to Goodness," "Fake," and "Reversal" and have thereby learned more about their own behavior.

CHARACTER

Honest to Goodness



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Ohmigosh!" exclaimed Mr. Abtin. He turned around and went back into the post office. The clerk was finishing a transaction with a customer, and Mr. Abtin waited until she was done.

"I think a mistake was made when I was here a minute ago," Mr. Abtin began. The clerk's expression changed slightly, but she waited for Mr. Abtin to explain.

"If I'm not mistaken, you gave me change for five dollars, but I'm sure that I only gave you a dollar bill for that thirty-two-cent stamp. I remember having only a dollar on me when I came in."

"Oh, thank you very much. You must be right," the clerk said, with an embarrassed smile.

Mr. Abtin's behavior wasn't unusual. When most people realize that something doesn't belong to them, they will return the money or property.



When the teacher asks who threw the spitwad and no one answers, is the guilty party being dishonest or just cowardly—or maybe just protecting himself or herself? Explain your answer.

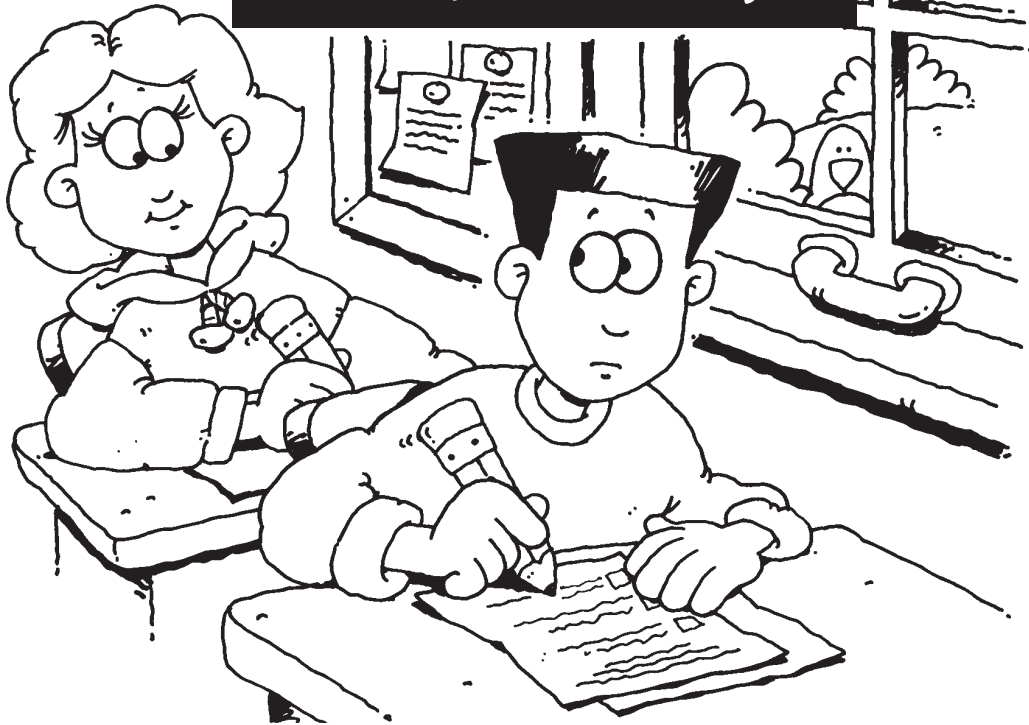
If you see a person in line ahead of you at the supermarket drop a five-dollar bill, is it dishonest to pick up the money and put it in your pocket?

When you write a report, is it dishonest to copy what the encyclopedia said about a subject without putting quotation marks around the words you have copied?

Does honesty mean giving a full day's work when you are hired to work eight hours cleaning up a house to be rented? Aren't you entitled to goof off a little?

CHARACTER

It's Your Life



Occasionally, we do or say something that isn't quite right, but we figure it's what lots of people do or that it won't make much difference to anyone if we behave that way. Sometimes it happens in a game, when we cheat a little; and it can also happen when the temptation is too strong to resist, like when we look over the shoulder of someone who has the answer on a test. Often we resist the temptation because if we are caught, the price will be too high.

Are the following actions dishonest? Explain why you think they are or are not.

Saying you took one piece of candy when you really took more.

Having someone at home do most (or all) of a homework assignment for you.

Fibbing about your age to get into a movie.

Saying you've done something you haven't done.

Taking money from your parent's wallet, and telling yourself you'll put the money back later.

Telling your parents it was someone else's idea when your gang got into trouble, even though you were all for it.

Not returning money when a clerk gives you back too much change.

Let's consider some of these situations in more depth. Have you ever said that you took just one piece of candy or only one cookie when you really took two or three? If so, what prompted you to say that you took only one?

Are you more likely to fib when you think no one can really know if you are telling the truth? Are you more likely to stretch the truth when you think people would disapprove of your behavior if they knew what you did?

Is it very wrong to take money from your mother's purse? Why?

If you need a little money, what are some ways of getting it?

What you say or do affects other people as well as yourself. Would you say that the greatest harm in being dishonest is that it injures your self-pride? Or would you say that the harm comes from deceiving others? Take a position, and write down the main points of your argument. Then find someone with an opposing view, and debate the matter.

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Personality




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Each of us has an idea of the kind of person he or she is, and this sense of ourselves increases as we interact with people. Occasionally, we'll be one way in one situation and quite a different way in another situation. Most of the time, however, we are fairly consistent.

To see what kind of person you are, give forthright answers to these questions.

Do you enjoy being the center of attention, or would you rather just be someone in the group?



Would you rather make new friends, or would you prefer to be always with people you know very well?

Are you more comfortable telling someone how to do something or receiving instructions yourself?

Is it easier for you to make up an excuse or to apologize when you've made a mistake?

Which do you enjoy more—finding someone else's mistake, or discovering a mistake you have made and correcting it?

If you had your choice, would you rather flip a coin to see who will be the winner or compete with someone to determine who wins?

Put this sheet of paper some place where you won't lose it. In one week, reread the questions and your answers. Do you still want to respond to the questions in the same way? Write "yes" or "no" after the questions below. If you have changed your mind, explain why.

Do you enjoy being the center of attention, or would you rather just be someone in the group?

Would you rather make new friends, or would you prefer to be always with people you know very well?

Are you more comfortable telling someone how to do something or receiving instructions yourself?

Is it easier for you to make up an excuse or to apologize when you've made a mistake?

Which do you enjoy more—finding someone else's mistake, or discovering a mistake you have made and correcting it?

If you had your choice, would you rather flip a coin to see who will be the winner or compete with someone to determine who wins?

The exercise you have just completed is about only you, but it indicates how you interact with other people. How you have responded to it is a matter of how honest you are with yourself—how well you know yourself. If you didn't change any of your responses, either you know yourself well or you are kidding yourself. You might ask someone who knows you well if you have been honest with yourself.