

What's Your Word Worth?



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Good character is required if people are to lead purposeful, productive lives, yet the daily news bombards us with accounts of business dealings that reveal a lack of ethics or, at the very least, a beginning slide down a slippery slope. If we accept the economics principle that “the consequences of our decisions lie in the future,” then careful investigation of our past would seem crucial. It behooves educators to offer direct instruction in character education to arm our students with the tools they will need to rise above the fray and base their future decisions – both business and personal – on the ethical foundations of integrity, honor, respect, and responsibility. The following lessons are designed to help fourth-graders see the connection between economic decisions and ethics from the perspective of nineteenth-century Americans.

objectives

- [] Students learn that people often make economic decisions based on the word or promise of individuals, groups, or institutions.
- [] Students discover insights into the character of several nineteenth-century Americans through their words and actions.
- [] Students learn about supply and demand during the period of westward expansion in America during the nineteenth-century.
- [] Students demonstrate an awareness of the power of persuasive advertising in economic decision making.

time required

Four to five days

materials

- [] Posters illustrating economic concepts
- [] A student-generated poster defining the concept of ethics
- [] Primary and secondary source information on Americans involved in westward expansion, immigration, and/or the emerging nation
- [] Poster board, construction paper, and markers
- [] Handout 1: *Evaluation Rubric*
- [] Handout 2: *Nineteenth-Century Americans Speak*
- [] Handout 3: *Now You Speak*
- [] Box of teacher-made cards inscribed with the single word of either “Ethical” or “Unethical”

economic concepts

- Barter.* The exchange of one good for another, without the use of money
- Demand.* The willingness and ability of a consumer to purchase a good or service at a certain price
- Goods.* Objects that satisfy people’s wants and needs
- Services.* Work or productive activities that are generally used or consumed immediately
- Supply.* The amount of goods and services that producers are willing and able to provide for consumption

The handouts for this lesson plan can be found in the supplemental items section at the back of this book.



teaching activity

Day 1: A Firm Foundation: abcs of Ethics
Ethics can be a rather elusive concept for young students. Develop a class-generated poster to define and illustrate the term. Begin with definitions from a variety of student dictionaries; then expand on individual components of the broader concept – especially honor, respect, and responsibility. Follow with age-appropriate selected readings on these topics to reinforce the students’ understanding of what it means to be an ethical individual. (See the list of *Additional Resources*.)

Day 2: Nineteenth-Century Americans Speak
Through social studies lessons, the students encounter Americans who shaped the country’s history with their words and actions. This phase of the unit offers students a chance to look more closely at selected individuals and to evaluate their words. Individuals whose words and actions provide interesting ethical and economic connections in nineteenth-century America might include Meriwether Lewis or William Clark, Narcissa or Marcus Whitman, Tecumseh or Chief Joseph, Andrew Jackson or Davy Crockett, Alexander Hamilton or Thomas Jefferson, or others involved in the development of the Oregon Trail or the California Trail. The students will consider the economic consequences of an individual’s words, as well as the ethical intent of the messages.

Divide the students into groups of three or four for this activity. One person from each group takes on the persona of an American historical figure and delivers a brief speech to other members of the small group. Teachers should provide the exact text of a speech for each figure, if primary source documentation is available. If the source cannot be located or the language is too challenging for the group, teachers may paraphrase or construct a “typical” speech or conversation for the historical figure. (Direct quotations from Chief Joseph are provided in the *Background material*.)

Once the historical figure delivers his or her speech, members of the group discuss and answer basic questions about the speaker’s message. Questions should include economics connections whenever possible. Posters or a glossary of terms will facilitate understanding of new economics concepts. (Follow-up questions for the Chief Joseph group, with sample student responses given in italics, may also be found in *Background material*.)

When the students have finished, gather the groups together to hear an additional speech. This may be delivered by the teacher or read by a selected student. Distribute a copy of Handout 1, the evaluation rubric, to each student. As a class, discuss the speaker’s character, as demonstrated through his or her words. Next, using the rubric guidelines, award 1, 3, or 5 points each for honor, respect, and responsibility. Finally, total the points to determine the value of the speaker’s words. (Students will follow this same procedure in their groups on Day 3.)

Day 3: What Was Their Word Worth?
In this lesson the students evaluate the character of their group’s historical figure. Reconvene the groups from Day 2. Distribute copies of Handout 2 to students in each group. Using the evaluation rubric from Day 2, group members consider their historical figure’s words. They award points for honor, respect, and responsibility. The total of these points determines a value for their speaker’s word.

The students repeat this procedure for each of the historical figures, generating an array of scores that will enable them to compare the value of their speakers’ words. Speakers deliver their messages to each group in turn. Continue until each group has evaluated the historical figures. (Group members may wish to swap roles, each taking a turn as the historical figure.)

Gather as a class to discuss the different historical figures and the “worth of their words.” Is there consensus in the findings? Engage the students in further discussion about the economic implications of the speeches. How might growth in America have been different if an individual had been more or less ethical?

*Days 4 and 5: Now You Speak –
What is Your Word Worth?*

Once the students have explored the link between economic decisions and the ethics of well-known nineteenth-century Americans, it is their turn to be evaluated. They become nineteenth-century entrepreneurs, advertising goods or services that were needed or wanted by consumers involved in westward movement or immigration. The students work individually or in pairs. They are assigned a role or suggest one of their own. Possibilities might include a guide or shopkeeper on the Oregon Trail, an assistant to John Sutter or a merchant during the California Gold Rush, a ship's captain or a representative of a shipping company traveling between Europe and America, or a Pony Express rider or stationmaster.

After determining their roles, each student takes a card from a box of cards provided by the teacher, containing one of two words – “ethical” or “unethical.” The card each student draws dictates the approach she or he must take in preparing an advertisement for the group. Have research materials available so the students can determine fair market prices, supply, and demand for goods and services of the time period.

Individuals or pairs prepare a poster, brochure, or speech to advertise their particular good(s) or service(s). Using Handout 3 and the rubric, classmates evaluate one another, following the procedure used on Day 3. How did their ethics compare to those of the famous Americans of Day 2? *(If time permits, the students may wish to prepare both an ethical and an unethical version of their advertisement.)*

conclusion

Economics and ethics are not limited to the world outside the elementary classroom; rather, they are deeply rooted in our daily social studies and literature explorations. When they actively engage in role-playing and simulations, students are better equipped to make important conceptual connections across the curriculum. A firm foundation will enable our students to begin to understand more fully the consequences that their decisions will have on their future.

background material

Sample of a primary-source speech text:

(Chief Joseph, whose Indian name means Thunder Rolling Down the Mountain, succeeded his father, Joseph the Elder, as chief of the Nez Perce in 1871. While Chief Joseph was not born until 1840, long after the Lewis and Clark expedition, he heard stories of the expedition from his father. For years he was a strong supporter of positive relations between the Indians and the whites.)

Chief Joseph: The first white men of your people who came to our country were named Lewis and Clark. They brought many things, which our people had never seen. They talked straight and our people gave them a great feast as proof that their hearts were friendly. They made presents to our chiefs, and our people made presents to them. We had a great many horses of which we gave them what they needed, and they gave us guns and tobacco in return. All the Nez Perce made friends with Lewis and Clark and agreed to let them pass through their country and never to make war on white men. This promise the Nez Perce have never broken.

For a short time we lived quietly, but this could not last. White men had found gold in the mountains around the land of the Winding Water. They stole a great many horses from us and we could not get them back because we were Indians. The white men told lies for each other. They drove off a great many of our cattle. Some white men branded our young cattle so they could claim them. We had no friends who would plead our cause before the law councils. It seemed to me that some of the white men in Wallowa were doing these things on purpose to get up a war. They knew we were not strong enough to fight them. I labored hard to avoid trouble and bloodshed. We gave up some of our country to the white men, thinking that then we could have peace. We were mistaken. The white men would not let us alone. We could have avenged our wrongs many times, but we did not. Whenever the Government has asked for help against other Indians we have never refused. When the white men were few and we were strong, we could have killed them off, but the Nez Perce wish to live at peace.



follow-up questions

1. How did the Nez Perce treat Lewis and Clark? They treated them as friends. They respected them as allies. They gave or traded things they would need to survive on their expedition.
2. Does bartering horses for guns and tobacco seem like a fair and equitable trade? Yes, because the Nez Perce had more than they needed and they knew the explorers would need them to survive. The guns were probably new and exciting to them.
3. What did the Nez Perce promise Lewis and Clark? They promised to let them travel through their land peacefully.

4. Did the Nez Perce keep their promises? Yes, they never broke their word.
5. What did you learn about the actions of the white people who came to the Nez Perce land? They weren't respectful. They just came and took over.
6. Why did the Nez Perce give away some of their land? They thought they could sacrifice a little to bring about peace.
7. Which group in the passage acted with honor, character, and respect? The Nez Perce did. They honored their promise even when it caused problems for them.

additional sources

Bennett, William. *Book of Virtues*. Simon and Schuster, 1993.

Betz, Adrienne. *Treasury of Quotations for Children*. Scholastic, Inc., 1998.

Fee, Chester Anders. *Chief Joseph: The Biography of a Great Indian*. Wilson-Erickson, 1936.

Johnson, Ann Donegan. *The Value of Respect: The Story of Abraham Lincoln*. Value Communications, Inc., 1977.

Lickona, Thomas. *Character Matters*. Touchstone, 2004.

www.tolerance.org/storybooks/three_loaves/index.html

www.kidseconposters.com



words of other leaders:

Meriwether Lewis, on the occasion of the first peace council near Omaha, Nebraska on August 3, 1804.

Whenever we could, Clark and I held peace councils with the Indian tribes in an effort to win their loyalty to the United States. In order for the expedition to be an economic and political success, it was important to win the respect and friendship of the Indian tribes we met.

When we met with a chief of a large tribe, there was often a ceremony lasting several hours. During this ceremony, we would try to impress upon the chief the importance of making and keeping peace. If the chief would promise to be under the rule of the “Great Chief” – President Jefferson – and if he would agree to make peace with all of the other tribes in the area, we would give him a peace medal as a symbol of our agreement.

This day we meet at a place called Council Bluff for a peace council with six Oto and Missouri chiefs. Since this was our first Indian council, we spent the night with every man on his guard and ready for anything. We didn’t know what to expect, but we treated the Indians with dignity. President Jefferson’s instructions had been very clear. We were to act as ambassadors.

William Clark, upon entering the Northern Great Plains of the Missouri River in 1804. On October 8, the expedition came to the villages of the friendly Arikara Indians. They were farmers rather than hunters and lived year round in earthen lodges. Those people are dirty, kind, poor, and extravagant. They gave us to eat bread made of corn and beans, also corn and beans boiled, a large bean which is rich and very nourishing, also squashes and all tranquility.

The Indians were much astonished by York our black exploration party member, who did not lose the opportunity of displaying his powers of strength. This nation never saw a black man before. York was very strong and intelligent. He roared at the Indian children who screamed delightedly.

When George Washington was named first President of the United States, he selected Alexander Hamilton to serve in the Cabinet as his Secretary of the Treasury. At the same time, Washington’s longtime friend, Thomas Jefferson, served as Secretary of State. Hamilton and Jefferson were almost constant rivals, agreeing on very little.

While Mr. Jefferson and the attorney general have charged that my recommendation for a national bank is unconstitutional, I state that they are completely incorrect. Since our constitution grants the government the power to collect taxes, a national bank and national coinage are most logical, agreeable plans. Perhaps Mr. Jefferson’s upbringing as a farmer makes such a comprehensive business plan beyond his realm of understanding. He states that farmers have no need for a bank. How utterly shortsighted! Does he not want more for his future countrymen?

Contrary to Mr. Jefferson’s dreams, America is not destined to remain a land of rural farms and agricultural endeavors. We will grow and flourish, with bustling cities and industry looming in our future. We must prepare for the economic needs of the wealthy entrepreneurs who are to come, and not settle for the backwards ways of our country’s simple farmers. I fear how long I will be able to stay in this service however, as this bitter political rivalry and personal financial hardship proves wearying.

After leaving public service, I was urged by Aaron Burr to cast votes in support of his candidacy to defeat my long-time rival, Thomas Jefferson. I refused to become a party to such a plan, thus ensuring the election of Mr. Jefferson as our third President.

Narcissa Whitman and her husband Marcus set out for Oregon in February of 1836. Their goal was to establish a mission among the Cayuse Indians, and Narcissa was to be the first white woman to cross the Rocky Mountains.

When we first arrived at Waiilatpu in the Willamette Valley the Cayuse Indians welcomed us. The chief gave us land on which to build our mission. We planted a garden and an orchard, built a schoolroom, and held religious services for them. Marcus taught the Cayuse how to plow and plant, so they didn’t have to wander to find food. This was an important step in helping them to become self-sufficient. Before long they were growing corn and wheat, which they brought to our mill to be ground into flour. They seemed to be beginning to appreciate the value of land ownership.

As more and more white emigrants came to the Willamette Valley, however, the Cayuse became resentful. They did not want to lose their hunting grounds. In 1842 the mission board suggested our mission be closed, but Marcus disagreed. He believed our work was important for both the Indians and the emigrants, and he also thought it gave the United States a stronghold in the Oregon Territory.

Handout: Evaluation Rubric

	5pts	3pts	1pt
honor	<hr/> <i>The speaker seems to be completely honest and trustworthy in what he/she says or promises.</i> <hr/>	<hr/> <i>In general the speaker seems honest, but he/she tends to exaggerate some facts to be convincing.</i> <hr/>	<hr/> <i>The speaker seems willing to say almost anything to convince his/her listeners, whether it is true or not.</i> <hr/>
respect	<hr/> <i>The speaker appears to truly appreciate and value the culture and customs of his audience.</i> <hr/>	<hr/> <i>The speaker appears to pretend to understand and care about the culture of his/her audience, but only to be convincing.</i> <hr/>	<hr/> <i>The speaker shows very little understanding or regard for the culture of his/her audience.</i> <hr/>
responsibility	<hr/> <i>The speaker shows that he/she feels an obligation to help his/her audience.</i> <hr/>	<hr/> <i>The speaker shows he/she wants to help others, but only if he/she will gain something in return.</i> <hr/>	<hr/> <i>The speaker does not seem to care that his/her words will create a hardship for others.</i> <hr/>

Notes

Handout: What's Your Word Worth

members of our group

Now it's time to determine the value of your words. Choose one of the roles below, or you may create one of your own. Then select a card from the \checkmark or \times box (*ethical or unethical*). This will indicate whether you will present your persuasive advertisement in an ethical manner or in a way that shows a lack of character. Remember that your audience will make important economic decisions based on your words. You will be evaluated on honesty, respect and responsibility.

List the values you believe are appropriate (1pt, 3pts, or 5pts) for each of the three character traits. Add to find the total value or worth of each speaker's words. Who do you feel was the most ethical? Who was the least ethical?

speaker	honor	respect	responsibility	total
<i>Oregon Trail Guide</i>				
<i>Merchant at Fort Kearney</i>				
<i>John Sutter's Assistant</i>				
<i>Ship Captain in Ireland</i>				
<i>Pony Express Station Master</i>				

Comments/Observations

Handout: 19th Century American Speak

members of our group

Your group will use the evaluation rubric to assess the character and ethics of each speaker. Remember that many individuals and groups who listened to these speakers made economic decisions based on their words. Just what do you believe their word was worth? You will evaluate the speakers on honesty, respect and responsibility.

List the values you believe are appropriate (1pt, 3pts, or 5pts) for each of the three character traits. Add to find the total value or worth of each speaker's words. Who do you feel was the most ethical? Who was the least ethical?

speaker	honor	respect	responsibility	total
<i>Meriwether Lewis</i>				
<i>William Clark</i>				
<i>Alexander Hamilton</i>				
<i>Alexander Jackson</i>				
<i>Narcissa Whitman</i>				
<i>Chief Joseph</i>				

Comments/Observations
