

Activity Overview

Title: A Narnian Approach to Character Development

Target Virtue: Courage: Fortitude, Justice: Integrity, Love, Temperance: Self-control, Wisdom

Target Courses or Activities / Criteria: English Literature courses, Media Literacy courses, Ethics courses discussing moral dilemmas

Summary: Using selected chapters from *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis, students are challenged to identify, define, and reflect on 5 virtues as depicted in the novel. Knowledge and understanding of these virtues saw significant gains across multiple learning levels and therefore has the potential to lead to a positive change in behavior.

Key virtue outcomes: Pike et al. (2020), found that this intervention enhanced student understanding of the 5 key virtues (justice, wisdom, love, courage, and temperance) that led to positive changes in social behavior.

Citation: Pike, M. A., Hart, P., Paul, S. S., Lickona, T., & Clarke, P. (2020). Character development through the curriculum: Teaching and assessing the understanding and practice of virtue. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 53(4), 449–466.

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A Narnian Approach to Character Development

Students are tasked with reading *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis (1950) and asked to identify virtues and vices in order to gain understanding of the virtues Courage (Fortitude), Justice (Integrity), Love, Temperance (Self-control), and Wisdom.

Before You Start: Consider having your students complete the Defining Virtues quizzes and reflection (especially for primary virtues of interest) before completing this activity. It may also be helpful to provide students with [this infographic](#) about what virtues are and why they matter.

Materials: Copies of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis (1950) or copies of excerpts from selected chapters: Justice (Chapter 6), Wisdom (Chapter 6 and 17), Love (Chapter 13 and 14), Justice: Integrity (Chapter 3, 8, and 9), Courage: Fortitude (Chapter 12), Temperance: Self-control (Chapter 4). Red and Green Highlighters. Paper and writing utensil or computer for definitions, reflections, student-written 'Virtue Improvement Plan', and self-assessment. **Note:** Pike et al. (2020) provide definitions of these Narnian virtues and vices (provided below).

Implementation Suggestions: Adopt a book study procedure wherein students read one chapter at a time and discuss what happened in small groups (3 to 4 students) before identifying the virtue of the chapter or taking turns in the "hot seat".



Procedure:

Part 1. Students are tasked with reading *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* in its entirety or in selected chapters.

Part 2. Definitions and discussion. As a class go over the definitions of the 5 key virtues (Pike et al., 2020 definitions included below). In small groups, ask students to share examples of behaviors that embody each virtue from their own lives, the lives of others close to them, or something they have seen in media (books, TV, or films). After discussion, ask students to list the 5 virtues and define them in their own words.

Part 3. Virtues and Vices. As a class define what a vice is and have students share examples of vices they have seen portrayed in their lives. Using red and green highlighters, ask students to highlight sections of selected chapters using green for virtues and red for vices. This can be done on photocopies of the book, or within their own copy. Prompt students to prepare for Part 5 by asking them to consider which virtues they believe they embody and virtues they would like to aspire to.

Part 4. Character “Hot Seating”. From the selected chapter have students “become the character” featured and have them describe to the class what happened from their character’s perspective. Then ask, “can you tell me why you did what you did? What were you feeling? What did you think might happen? What would you have done differently if given the chance?” This exercise challenges the students to empathize with the character and think through behavioral alternatives to the actions portrayed.

Part 5. ‘Virtue Improvement Plan’. Using the students’ own virtues definitions, ask them to identify 2 virtues they believe they embody and to describe an example of how they personify each. Next, ask students to select 2 virtues they would like to improve on and describe how they might behave in a virtuous manner in their lives whether that is in their personal lives, academic lives, or professional lives, or all three. Each virtue described should be at least one paragraph.

Part 6. Reflection. Ask students to write a reflection on how their understanding of virtues and vices has changed their thinking on what “good”, moral behavior looks like. This reflection should be at least 600 words.

Part 7. Self-Assessment. Towards the end of the term or at the conclusion of reading the novel, ask the students to refer to their ‘Virtue Improvement Plan’ and write out the four virtues they selected. Next to each virtue, ask students to score themselves on their performance of embodying the virtues, from 1 (very little) to 5 (virtuous behavior). The students are then asked to defend their ranking by writing an example of how

they adopted the virtue. Depending on time this exercise can be a short paragraph for each virtue or expanded to 3-4 paragraphs (approximately 600 words) per virtue.



Definitions

Six 'Narnian' Virtues and Vices Defined by Pike et al. (2020)

Wisdom—The habit of exercising good judgement; being able to see what is true and good and choosing the best course of action.

Love—The habit of acting selflessly for the good of another, without seeking recognition or reward; willingness to sacrifice for the sake of others by putting their well-being ahead of our own; doing good for others by being kind, caring, generous and loyal.

Integrity—The habit of being true to ourselves and truthful with others; standing up for moral principles and following our conscience; not engaging in self-deception, such as telling ourselves that it's OK to do something that, deep down, we know is wrong.

Fortitude (Courage) —The habit of doing what is right and necessary in the face of difficulty; the mental and emotional strength, the 'inner toughness', to endure suffering and overcome adversity; exhibiting qualities such as confidence, courage, perseverance and resilience when challenging circumstances demand them.

Self-Control (Temperance)—The habit of self-restraint; the mastery and moderation of our desires, emotions, impulses, and appetites; resisting temptation; delaying gratification in order to achieve a higher goal.

Justice—The habit of treating everyone with equal respect and fairness; fulfilling our responsibilities; taking responsibility for our actions, sincerely admitting when we've done wrong, and making amends; recognizing that no one— including ourselves—is 'above the law'.

Vice— a bad or undesirable habit, action, or trait. It can also refer to a moral failing or weakness. Examples of vices: lying, cheating, dishonesty, smoking, alcoholism, drug use, and gambling.

Virtues by Selected Chapter

Virtues taught through extracts from *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* as identified by Pike et al. (2020)

1. (Justice) Integrity: 'Lucy was Very Miserable' from chapter 3 of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* where Lucy is true to herself and refuses to lie even though this costs
2. (Temperance) Self-control: 'Edmund and the Turkish Delight' from chapter 4 of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* where Edmund does not resist enchanted Turkish Delight
3. (Temperance) Self-control: 'Edmund Wants More Turkish Delight' from chapter 4 of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* where Edmund is manipulated by the White Witch
4. (Courage) Fortitude: 'Lucy Sticks to Her Story' from chapter 5 of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* where Lucy endures suffering for telling the truth
5. Wisdom: 'Peter and Susan Seek Advice' from chapter 6 of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* where they ask the Professor for advice about their sister
6. Justice: 'Mr. Tumnus' Home is Wrecked' from chapter 6 of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* where Lucy finds her friend's home ransacked by the Secret Police
7. (Justice) Integrity: 'Edmund Betrays Them' from Chapters 8, 9 of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* where Edmund deceives himself and deserts his siblings, wanting the White Witch's Turkish Delight and revenge on Peter
8. Justice: 'Peter Owns Up' from chapter 12 of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* where Peter admits to Aslan that he has been unfair to his brother Edmund
9. (Courage) Fortitude: 'Peter Did Not Feel Very Brave' from chapter 12 of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* where Peter faces his fears and fights the Maugrim the wolf (the Chief of the Secret Police)
10. Love: 'Edmund is Forgiven' from chapter 13, *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* where Aslan, Lucy, Peter and Susan forgive Edmund for being a traitor

11. Love: 'Aslan Instead of Edmund' from Chapters 13, 14 of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* where Aslan takes Edmund's place and suffers instead of him
12. Wisdom: 'It Was All Edmund's Doing' from chapter 17 of *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* where Edmund fights and defeats the White Witch.

Extensions:

At CultivateCharacter.com our approach to virtue cultivation is grounded in the belief that when students encounter virtue content through multiple modalities, it is more likely to stick. Below are potential extensions of the empirically-grounded virtue activities described above to help stretch your assignments and enhance the likelihood that your classroom cultivates character.

Possible Extensions:

Environmental – Ask students to read silently to themselves either in the classroom or at home, and then again in a group setting, taking turns reading aloud. Ask students to reflect on how the shift changed their impact on their reaction to the story. Did reading aloud versus silently have a greater impact of identifying virtues and vices? Why or why not?

Cognitive – Ask students to reflect on the negative consequences of vices in their own or the characters' lives. Ask students to reflect on the positive consequences of living virtuously in their own or the characters' lives.

Behavioral – Ask students to list out examples of vices they can think of from their life experience, either in their own or behavior from someone they know. Then ask students to act out the scenario, making sure to highlight the possible consequences of that vice through small group discussion. Next, ask students to repeat the scenario but this time choosing virtuous behavior.

Affective/Somatic – Ask students to reflect on how they feel when acting virtuously or witnessing virtuous behavior in others. Does seeing or reading about another being doing something good evoke specific emotions or motivations to act similarly?

Motivations – Ask students to write out why it is personally important to them to adopt virtuous behavior. What is their bigger why? This might be a religious belief or a social justice issue or something else that connects them to a greater good that serves something or someone beyond themselves.