

Deference

Character... It starts with me!

MONTHLY EDUCATOR BULLETIN

FEBRUARY 2012

Vs. Rudeness

I WILL:

- Notice those around me.
- Respect the feelings of others.
- Not use offensive language.
- Not play loud music in public.
- Be careful how I dress.

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Limiting my freedom so I do not offend the tastes of those around me

Deference brings to mind the waiter rule. "A person, who is nice to you but rude to the waiter, or to others, is not a nice person." This was penned by Raytheon CEO Bill Swanson in a booklet of 33 short leadership rules he called Swanson's Unwritten Rules of Management.

Many rude people can justify their behavior because they aren't doing

anything "wrong" but Deference challenges us to do more "right". We may have every right to say offensive things but it doesn't mean it is the right thing to do.

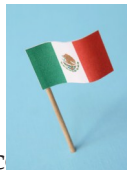
The character quality of Deference knocks the Me Generation down a notch or two. Where the Me Generation lives by entitlement, Deference requires the giving up of

pleasures if it offends others.



This month, practice Deference by being cognizant of those around us and taking responsibility for living together in harmony.

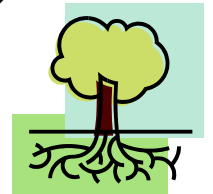
Deferencia vs. Descortesía



Limitar mi libertad con el fin de no ofender los gustos de quienes me rodean

Go to the Root

From the mid-15th century French *déferer* "to yield, comply strength or worth to another person." Can you see how deference is yielding to others?



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“ People will accept your idea much more readily if you tell them Benjamin Franklin said it first.” -David H. Comins

Character Quotables

There is no such thing as being a gentleman at important moments; it is at unimportant moments that a man is a gentleman....If once his mind is possessed in any strong degree with the knowledge that he is a gentleman, he will soon cease to be one.

~G.K. Chesterton

Every action in company ought to be with some sign of respect to those present.

~George Washington

Politeness and consideration of others is like investing pennies and getting dollars back.

~Thomas Sowell

No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.

~Aesop

Everyone has an invisible sign hanging from their neck saying, 'Make me feel important.' Never forget this message when working with people.

~Mary Kay Ash

The secret, Joey, is to know you're somebody without you're thinking you're somebody.

~Dennis the Menace

A person's a person, no matter how small.

~Dr. Seuss,

Horton Hears a Who

The nobler sort of man emphasizes the good qualities in others, and does not accentuate the bad. The inferior does the reverse.

~Confucius

Everyone hears what you say. Friends listen to what you say. Best friends listen to what you don't say.

~Unknown

Manners are a sensitive awareness of the feelings of others. If you have that awareness, you have good manners, no matter what fork you use.

~Emily Post

Good manners have much to do with the emotions. To make them ring true, one must feel them, not merely exhibit them.

~Amy Vanderbilt

Rudeness is a weak man's imitation of strength.

~Eric Hoffer

Why give in to rudeness, when you can fight back with kindness.

~Donna A. Favors

Curriculum Connection



History



Washington

Ironic History

George Washington led the American troops in fighting for the freedom of speech but in that same war, he admonished his troops for using profane language.

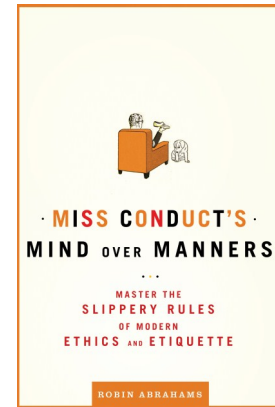
“ The General is sorry to be informed that the foolish and wicked practice of profane cursing and swearing, a vice heretofore little known in an American army, is growing into fashion. He hopes the officers will, by example as well as influence, endeavor to check it.”

Robin Abrahams, Hero of Deference

Robin Abrahams is the “Miss Conduct” columnist for The Boston Globe Sunday Magazine. In 2009 she wrote a book entitled Miss Conduct’s Mind over Manners, Master the Slippery Rules of Modern Ethics and Etiquette. The multitude of cultural shifts within the past few decades has left us in etiquette limbo. Emily Post and Miss Manners haven’t been in the situations we face today. Following the “rules” isn’t enough anymore. We have to think. A uniform code of conduct may have worked in the days when everyone agreed on the same set of

priorities but in today’s diverse communities, manners aren’t enough—we need to use our *minds*. This is the message that Ms. Abrahams speaks about in her book.

The foundation for acting appropriately needs to be based on respect. Sometimes there isn’t a rule about how to act because the circumstances are influenced by many factors. It requires being alert to what is going on around you so that you may choose the best way to respond and be respectful of those with whom you live and work.



“This etiquette manual is winningly fueled by common sense, flexibility, and a consistent emphasis on mutual respect.”—The Boston Globe

Team-Building Activity

Building a culture of good character requires building the class into a community. Here is this month’s teambuilding activity:

Human Scrabble

For this exercise you will need either children’s blocks with letters on them, magnetic letters or you may just write the letters of the alphabet on cardstock. Each student should have 1 - 3 letters. Encourage the students to mingle in order to create words. You can choose to score the game by the number of words in which they participate or you can allow each student to score points based on the number of letters in each word. For younger students, you may use a list of spelling or vocabulary words as a model from which to spell. For older students you can add a Math Curriculum Connection by adding the scrabble values to the letters to make the scoring more difficult. When the game is over, question the students on their scores. Ask about the differences in having vowels or less-used letters? How quickly did the one holding the “Q” connect with the one holding the “U”?



(Hint: You may want to arrange that the students who are not as popular get the vowels to ensure they are engaged in the game.)



Prized Possessions

Bring in something that is personal to you that is a prized possession but may not look valuable. A pair of well-worn slippers, an item belonging to someone who has since passed away or a gift from a treasured friend. Also bring in something with an obvious high external value that really means nothing to you, perhaps something that is headed for the Goodwill box, a cashmere sweater, a leather purse, etc. Without explaining what the items are, ask the class which has the greater value. They will choose the item with higher monetary value, not the one with the higher sentimental value. Explain why the other item is more valuable to you. Describe the difference in respect or deference that you have for the item on which you place the higher value. Ask the students to think of an item that they own that has great sentimental value. How would they feel if someone treated that item with disrespect? Relate these feelings to the value that we each have and the respect that we each deserve.



Sweet Words

This demonstration will show that how we speak and act will invite deference or respect to be shown to us. Fill a large shallow bowl or pan with water and sprinkle pepper onto the surface of the water. The pepper represents people around us. Explain that our words and actions will either draw people toward us to be our friends or will push people away. Imagine the bowl or pan divided in half. Pick a point that is in the center of one of the halves and touch a bar of soap to the surface of the water. The pepper will be repelled away from the soap just as others are repelled when we are rude. Now pick the point that is in the center of the other half of the bowl and sprinkle some sugar. The pepper will be attracted to the sugar just as people are attracted to our sweet words and kind actions.



It is Rude to . . .

Sometimes the best way to understand something is to understand what it is not. Begin this exercise by explaining some of the rude customs in other countries such as:

In Indonesia, *it is rude to show the bottom of your feet to someone.*

In Korea, *it is rude to receive or give something with one hand.*



Define Rude in your classroom by having the students list ways they are rude to each other in the classroom. Be sure to tell them this is not a time to name specific examples of rudeness by using someone's name or a real example. You can expand this list by including the school in general, not just the classroom. Branch out even further into at home, at sports, at clubs, etc. Once you have a list (it will probably be quite long) go through each item and ask for suggestions of how to turn that rude example into an example of deference. End the exercise by pointing out that they know the difference between deference and rude and to understand that each behavior is their choice whether to be respectful or rude.

Deference Detectives



Our society has become so casual that rudeness has become commonplace. This month, commission your students to become Deference Detectives. For younger students, you can have them make a detective badge to wear. For older students, you may want to create a "Commissioning Ceremony" where they each come forward and are "knighted" in some way using an item pertinent to being nice such as a large colorful lollipop (looking for sweet behavior) or a large magnifying glass (super powers of observation).

Use the discussion above as a starter to this exercise. Ask the students to be extra observant, looking for ways other people are polite or exercise good manners. Have them report each day or week what they witness. Discuss why these behaviors are important. Ask them to imagine what may have happened if a person had been rude instead of kind. You can choose to have them be observant of all manners or you may focus each day/week on a particular manner.

Sticks and Stones

Most children are familiar with phrase “Sticks and Stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.” Anyone who has been the target of a bully knows this to be anything but true. Teach your class a different ending to this phrase: “Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can break your heart.” Ask the students if they have ever had a broken bone. Ask them to share how long it took for their bones to heal. (Be prepared for some long answers.) Now ask them how long it takes a broken heart to heal - some will say a lot longer than bones and you may even get someone to say ‘never’. Explain that hearts need kindness to heal not just time. When we are rude to our classmates by calling them names or not letting them sit by us, we are hurting their hearts. We need to practice deference to help heal their hearts.



The Happy Meter



Sometimes we lash out at others when our own hearts hurt. It's important to recognize when we hurt and find ways to heal the hurt rather than cause others to hurt also. For this exercise, you will need to draw on the board two happy meters. You can do it as a number line from 1 to 10 or like a speedometer with the numbers in a semi-circle. Have two students volunteer to be the pointers, one on each meter. For the first meter, tell a fictional age-appropriate story about Suzy who is sad. Have the first student point to the #4 to indicate just how sad Suzy is. Next, ask the class if they feel differently when they are around sad people and happy people. They should respond that they feel happier around happy people and more sad around sad people. Suzy has a choice. She can be a bully and make the other kids sad, too (have the second volunteer also point to #4. Will being around these sad people make Suzy happier? No. If Suzy is nice to the others, (move the pointer to 7 on the second meter) then Suzy will be around happier people. Will Suzy be more happy or more sad? (move the first pointer to 6). When we are nice to people we feel good about ourselves so that can help us feel better, too. (Now move the pointer to 7.) Remind them that the next time they feel sad they should do something nice for someone and maybe they will feel a little better.

For the Family

We are studying the character quality of **Deference**: Limiting my freedom so I do not offend the tastes of those around me. The opposite of Deference is Rudeness.

To practice Deference I will:

- notice those around me
- respect the feelings of others
- not use offensive language
- not play loud music in public
- be careful how I dress



Family Activity:

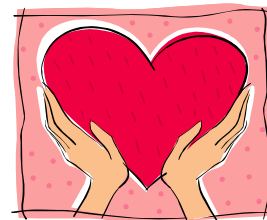
You will need to plan this activity around a family meal. You can make it a special meal by using the good china or serving special food. It can also be done at an ordinary family dinner. Put 5 chocolate kisses in front of each person's place setting. Explain that during dinner we will be practicing our table manners. Before the meal begins, ask for examples of good and bad table manners. Now tell them that if you see someone exercising bad table manners, you may kindly ask for a kiss. If you are caught and someone asks for a kiss you must hand one over nicely. At the end of the meal, you can see who has the most kisses. Each child gets to keep the kisses they won. You may also have a stash of extra kisses to hand out as a reward for exhibiting good table manners as you see them. When the meal is over ask why table manners are important. Is the meal more pleasant for everyone when we are mannerly? What would happen to a salesman entertaining a client at dinner, if he had poor table manners? What would happen if you are dining at a friend's house and you behaved poorly? What if it was a girlfriend's or boyfriend's house? Extend the discussion to other manners. What if your lack of manners showed up during a job interview? Be sure to remind them that pointing out someone else's lack of manners is not polite and that it was only done as part of a learning exercise during this meal. You may want to keep the extra kisses handy and reward mannerly meal behavior throughout the rest of the week.

Other ways to teach character in the home:

- Display the character quality and definition in a prominent place such as on the refrigerator or let each child decorate it for their bedroom door.
- At the dinner table ask if anyone noticed anyone (not just family members) demonstrating the character quality (or not demonstrating it).
- Point out news stories where character was or was not involved.
- Review the "I wills" and see if there are specific actions you can add to this list.
- During car trips, challenge the kids by describing scenarios and having them identify if it describes being the quality or being the opposite.
- Praise with character by recognizing the character quality involved rather than the achievement.
- For more ideas visit www.charactercincinnati.org/education.html

Character
Education
Opportunities

In February



Valentine's Day, February 14

In the classroom, Valentine's Day should be about celebrating friendships. You can use the following connection exercise to make everyone feel special. Use a ball of pink or red yarn for the holiday. Have everyone sit in a circle. Start the ball of yarn with one student. They should hold onto the end of the yarn and toss the ball to someone sitting across the circle. (It's best to unravel a bit before throwing). The person who catches the yarn ball needs to say something nice about the person who threw the ball. Then they hold onto a piece of the yarn, unravel a bit and then throw the yarn ball to someone else. Continue around the circle throwing it to someone who hasn't had it yet. When everyone has had a chance to get the yarn ball, it needs to go back to the person who started it. Now that you have them all connected into the web, discuss how as a group we need to support each other and to act with deference toward our classmates.

Other Day's You Can Use To Teach Character This Month

1 National Freedom Day - anniversary of President Lincoln signing the 13th amendment outlawing slavery

2 Ground Hog Day

5 Super Bowl XLVI

12 Abraham Lincoln's Birthday

14 National Organ Donor Day

14 Valentine's Day

17 Random Acts of Kindness Day (also Random Acts of Kindness Week)

17 National PTA Founder's Day

20 President's Day

21 Mardi Gras

22 Inconvenience Yourself Day - put others ahead of yourself today

22 George Washington's Birthday - use with Curriculum Connection p.2

22 International World Thinking Day - a Girl Scout observance originally intended to encourage girls around the world to learn about each other is now about learning about girls' health issues.

26 Academy Awards Night - host your own awards day using character as the theme

29 Leap Day - once every four years

Second full week in February is Celebration of Love Week. The last full week in February is International Friendship Week.

The Month of February is American Heart Month and Black History Month.

An annual observance sponsored by the nonprofit My Stuff Bags Foundation, **National Mend a Broken Heart Month** encourages individuals and groups to support America's children who have been abused, neglected and abandoned by the very people who should love them most. These children must be rescued from their homes, often entering crisis shelters and foster care with no personal belongings. My Stuff Bags seeks to collect items for these children so they have something with which to start.

For more information on these and other holidays visit: <http://holidayinsights.com/moreholidays/february.htm>
or <http://www.brownielocks.com/february.html>

Robin's Reading List



Grades Pre - 3:

Lady Lollipop by Dick King-Smith
Lollipop is no ordinary pig. According to her young trainer, Johnny Skinner, she's the smartest pig in the entire kingdom. When people stare into Lollipop's bright, intelligent eyes, it somehow changes them for the better. But can the pig win over the spoiled Princess Penelope, and her not so pig friendly parents, the King and Queen?

Say What? By Margaret Peterson Haddix

"No running in the house. This isn't a playground." That's what her parents would say if they saw six-year-old Sukie running through the living room with big plastic tubs of glitter in each hand. However, this time her dad asks, "If all your friends jumped off a bridge, would you jump off a bridge too?" Her parents are acting very strange. They've been reading child psychology books again. Sukie and her older brothers decided to investigate, and what they discover leads to a kids-against-parents WAR!

My Best Friend by Mary Ann Rodman

Lily yearns to be noticed by Tamika at the neighborhood pool on Wednesday playgroup day. Lily is ever hopeful, claiming, "Tamika is my best friend. She just doesn't know it yet." Tamika ignores her in favor of her mean friend, Shanice. Lily continues to

popsicles and floats, but Tamika just takes her kindness for granted. Meanwhile, Keesha is yearning to be noticed by Lily. She always complimenting Lily on her diving skills, and her bathing suit, and sticking by her in spite of snubbing Tamika.

Stink: The Incredible Shrinking Kid by Megan McDonald

Stink is Judy Moody's younger "bother". Every morning Judy Moody measures Stink, and it's always the same: three feet, eight inches tall. He feels that everyone is growing faster than he is. One day the ruler reads, "three feet seven and three quarters inches tall. Could it be that Stink is shrinking? Judy gives him advice from wearing up and down stripes to spiking his hair, all to no avail. He's a kid picturing himself with super powers to deal with the travails of everyday life, even those of an occasional teasing big sister.

Grades 4 - 8:

Loser by Jerry Spinelli

Throughout his earliest years at school, exuberant Donald Zinkoff smiles and laughs like crazy, even when a big kid steals his giant giraffe hat on the first day of first grade, and when his second grade teacher tells him his handwriting is atrocious and kicks him out of class just because he throws up on her best blackboard eraser. Poor Zinkoff. He's sloppy and he's clumsy and, because of an upside down valve in his stomach, he throws up a lot. Zinkoff may view life as a

hilarious adventure, but over the years, his classmates have dubbed him a loser.

Davis is the kid with no best friend, the one who makes his team come in dead last for fifth grade field day, the student even teachers find annoying. On the day of the big snowstorm, when a little girl goes missing, David braves a snowstorm to search for her. Could he end up a hero? Will people look at him differently? Readers will look at the ways they view others who are different from them, re-evaluating the casual cruelties they inflict on each other to single out the ones who don't fit into "the norm".

Firegirl by Tony Abbott

The story begins, "It wasn't much, really, the whole Jessica Feeney thing. If you look at it, nothing much happened. She was a girl who came into my class after the beginning of the year and was only there for a couple of weeks or so. Stuff did get a little crazy for a while, but it didn't last long, and I think it was mostly in my head anyway. Then she wasn't there anymore"

The story is told by Tom, an introverted, pudgy seventh grader at St. Catherine's. Usually, Tom hangs out with his friend, Jeff, who, after his parents' nasty divorce, isn't such a nice person right now. Tom revels in his ongoing, vivid daydreams driving a fat red Cobra and rescuing popular, pretty classmate, Courtney with his imagined superpowers. In real life, she's never noticed him, of course.

Robin Castetter is a Retired Elementary Teacher Loveland City Schools

share
her

Robin's Reading List

Then Mrs. Tracey, his seventh grade teacher, announces that a new girl is joining the class. Jessica Feeney, she tells them, was badly burned in a fire, and she'll be going for treatments at the hospital in New Haven. Jessica's face is scary and disfigured. It looks like a mask. It's horrible. The kids in the class aren't actually mean to her face—they just don't speak with her, really. Except for Tom.

The rumors begin to fly. Maybe the fire is all Jessica's fault. Maybe she even set the fire that killed her sister, which would make her a murderer. Their vicious talk makes Tom feel sick. (You will deduce, before Tom finds out, that there is no sister. The photograph is of Jessica before the fire.) Tom talks with Jessica and treats her like a person when no one else will, even when Jeff and others in class are spreading hateful lies about her. When Tom has the chance to do the right thing, he tries, even if he's not perfect. Still, the three weeks that he gets to know Jessica change his life a little bit. Here's a book that shows how one person can make a difference.

Sahara Special by Esme Raji Codell

Sahara Jones has a True Ambition: she is going to be a writer. In the meantime, she's repeating fifth grade, having kept her abilities a secret from all her teachers since her father moved out two years ago. Her new teacher calls herself Madame Poitier. Her students

call her Miss Pointy, and she is not like any teacher Sahara has ever met. She smiles on the first day of school, asks her students to keep personal journals, and tells them that "boring" is a swear word. For the first time, Sahara confides in a teacher. "I am a writer," she writes in her journal. And Miss Pointy writes back, "I believe you." But a writer writes, and Sahara is doing nothing in class. Madame Poitier gradually helps Sahara get over her fear of participating. Through the Madame's unusual teaching, storytelling, and quiet support, Sahara finds the courage to overcome her fears and prove which file shows her true self.

The Giving Tree by Shel Silverstein

In Shel Silverstein's popular tale, a tree starts out as a leafy playground, shade provider, and apple bearer for a rambunctious little boy. Making the boy happy makes the tree happy, but with time it becomes more challenging for the generous tree to meet his needs. Every day the boy would come to the tree to eat her apples, swing from her branches, or slide down her trunk . . . and the tree was happy. But as the boy grew older he began to want more from the tree, and the tree gave and gave. This parable suggests the gift of giving and the quiet acceptance of another's capacity to love in return.

Okay for Now by Gary Schmidt

As a fourteen-year-old who just moved to a new town, with no friends and a louse for an older

brother, Doug Swieteck has all the stats stacked against him. As Doug struggles to be more than the "skinny thug" that his teachers and the police think him to be, he finds an unlikely ally in Lil Spicer—a fiery young lady who "smelled like daisies would smell if they were growing in a big field under a clearing sky after a rain." In Lil...who notices and respects who he is... Doug finds the strength to endure an abusive father, the suspicions of a whole town, and the return of his oldest brother, forever scarred, from Vietnam. Together, they find a safe haven in the local library, inspiration in learning about the plates of John James Audubon's birds, and a funny adventure on a Broadway stage.

Nerd Camp by: Elissa Brent Weissman

Ten-year-old Gabe has just been accepted to the Summer Center for Gifted Enrichment. That means he'll be spending six weeks at sleep-away camp, writing poetry and perfecting logic proofs. SCGE has been a summer home of some legendary middle-school smarty-pants (and future Jeopardy! contestants), but it also has a reputation for being, well, a nerd camp. Gabe isn't a nerd. Is he? He's never thought about it much, but compared to Zack, his hip, soon-to-be-stepbrother from LA, Gabe's not so sure where he falls on the cool scale. A wild summer at camp—complete with a midnight canoe ride to Dead Man's Island—helps Gabe realize that he and Zack may be different, but that doesn't

Robin's Reading List

mean they can't be brothers...and friends.

Grades 9 - 12:

Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow by Susan Campbell Bartoletti

"I begin with the young. We older ones are used up...But my magnificent youngsters! Look at these men and boys! What material! With them, I can create a new world."—Adolf Hitler, Nuremberg 1933. By the time Hitler became chancellor of Germany in 1933, 3.5 million children belonged to the Hitler Youth. It would become the largest youth group in history. Bartoletti explores how Hitler gained the loyalty, trust, and passion of so many of Germany's young people. Her research includes telling interviews with surviving Hitler Youth members.

Ashfall by Mike Mullin

Many visitors to Yellowstone National Park don't realize that the boiling hot springs and spraying geysers are caused by an underlying super volcano, so large that the caldera can only be seen by plane or satellite. By some scientific measurements, it could be overdue for an eruption. For Alex, being left alone for the weekend means having the freedom to play computer games and hang out with his friends without hassle from his mother. Then the super volcano erupts, plunging his hometown into a nightmare of darkness, ash, and violence. Alex begins a harrowing trek to search for his family and

finds help in Darla, a travel partner he meets along the way. Together they must find the strength and skills to survive and outlast an epic disaster.

The Scorpio Races by Maggie Stiefvater

"It is the first day of November, and so, today, someone will die." This is how it has always been on the island of Thisby. The Annual Scorpio Races bring tourists to the island, and blood to the shore. What makes the island so deadly is also what makes the island so unique—the capaill uisce, the flesh-eating water horses who are captured, trained, and raced by locals every year. For four-time winner, and sixth time survivor, Sean Kendrick, this year's race is especially important because ownership of his beloved capaill uisce, Corr, is on the line. And for Kate "Puck" Connolly, the first woman to ever enter The Scorpio Races, and the only participant riding a regular land horse, a win would help keep her family together on the island she loves. Sean and Puck's story is a love story. There is little romance, but it's also about the love and respect between rider and horse, familial love, and the love for one's home. The romance is subtle, slow-growing, and based in respect and understanding.

To Kill A Mockingbird by Harper Lee

"Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird." A lawyer's advice to his children as he defends the real

mockingbird of Harper Lee's classic novel—a black man charged with the rape of a white girl. Through the young eyes of Scout and Jem Finch, Harper Lee explores with rich humor and unswerving honesty the irrationality of adult attitudes toward race and class in the Deep South of the 1930s. The conscience of a town steeped in prejudice, violence, and hypocrisy is pricked by the stamina and quiet heroism of one man's struggle for justice—but the weight of history will only tolerate so much.



On Talk of the Nation (an NPR show) the other day, I heard an interview with an author named Henry Alford, who has written a book called *Would It Kill You To Stop Doing That?* He spoke about the need for etiquette, or what I prefer to call manners, in 21st Century America. His book gives examples of bad manners: the rider who sneezes in a crowded bus and manages to hit every passenger; people who cut into movie lines; or a person texting in the middle of a movie. He argues that good manners can be harder to define than bad ones. In the radio interview, he stated that it was poor manners to ask a physician how long s/he has been in practice; or to ask an attorney if one is being billed for a phone call; or to ask someone where they are from. (How was your score? I was 0 for 3!) He even has a remedy for what he calls being addressed with a pet name. "I think ... what I would be tempted to do is to launch into what I call retaliatory manners, and that is to say, I would 'hon' a 'hon,' I would 'doll face' a 'doll face.'"

Croskey's Corner

This reminded me of books I've read about grammar. (Yeah, I read grammar books without being threatened with torture!) Someone has decided there are rules; someone (else) has decided to tell you what the rules are; and someone (you) who behaves otherwise is considered in violation of these common sense rules, which may not be commonly sensible at all! Just as there are grammatical rules which are logical, there are manners that makes sense to me, such as holding a door for anyone, as a sign of respect or courtesy – or because that person does not have free hands to do it. Or helping a person with his or her coat. Or sharing a delicious entree at a restaurant. Yet the latter illustrates a point: some people would be thrilled to have a taste of some food you are enjoying. But others would be offended, even grossed out, at the idea of eating from your plate. Where does sharing stop and offense begin? Who is to say? The self-appointed manners expert, that's who!

So, most people would probably agree that there is a need for manners and civil behavior in our culture. I suspect, however, that the specific rules would find about as much common agreement as do political opinions or religious views. Manners may be like rules of thumb; they provide general guidelines but they have to be applied with wisdom in particular cases.

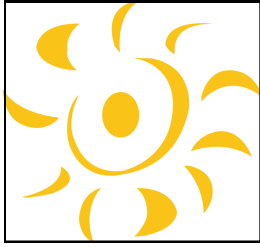
The February Character Quality of the Month, Deference, is very mannerly. The definition is, "Limiting my freedom so I do not offend the tastes of those around me." The "I will" statements include noticing those around me, respecting the feelings of others, not using offensive language, not playing loud music in public, and being careful how I dress. When I looked up "defer" in the dictionary, Random House said it meant "to put off action to a future time." If that means to procrastinate, I could really get into Deference! All I have to do is turn down my music, wear some inconspicuous clothing, and put off 'til tomorrow what I don't want to do today! Uh, No, Bill! That is too-easy-to-be-true Character building.

I think the key to Deference may be empathy, which I think of as having walked a mile in another's shoes, or at least tried hard to imagine that walk, and noticing how the journey felt to him or her, as well as how it looked and sounded. Note: It refers to how an experience feels to another, not how it might feel to you. We were "schooled" in January in Availability, making my wishes a secondary priority to others' wishes. That was in part so that we would be prepared to work on empathizing with others this month. Rather than guess at others' experiences, we will know better how others felt in a certain situation if we bite our tongues and let them tell us how it felt.

Trying not to offend others' tastes get tricky, as we said, because their tastes may be so different from ours. One of the points Henry Alford made in his book was that we can learn about manners by looking at other cultures. I would go further and say that one reason manners are becoming even more important is because we are living in close proximity to so many other cultures. If we all followed the same customs as an isolated culture does, we would have little need for manners. Every day customary behavior would suffice. But in the age of Diversity, with cultures rubbing elbows on the bus, if not sneezing in each others' faces, there is more need than ever to first find out WHAT the tastes of others are and then try not to offend them. I could ask all 300 million Americans what their tastes are. Or I could try to get better at using communication, careful observation, respectful questions, and sensitive assessment to develop empathy for others. Then, if I know better how that person feels, I know better how to respect their tastes.

How do we get kids kids to exhibit better manners? Well, as with ALL Character, it comes back to modeling. We adults say please and thank you; we send thank you notes; we hold doors for others; we drive courteously; we respect the possessions of others, such as not helping ourselves to the lunch food which people store in community refrigerators. We avoid gossiping about others and use the tattle/report rule: We never tell a story about another to get them into trouble. We only tell a story in order to keep them – or us - out of trouble. In short, we are models of good manners for our students Aren't we?

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Character...It Starts With Me!

Character in the Classroom *Continuously*

There are many ways that you can teach the Character Quality of Month. Here are just a few suggestions:

- Ask students to make posters to hang in the classroom or around the school.
- Challenge students to find quotes, news stories, current (or classic) songs or movies that portray the character quality of the month. Be sure to share these with the class and “archive” these to use in future years.
- Add the character trait of the month to the spelling word list. (Even if it is posted in the classroom to copy!)
- Offer for students to make a video or write a rap that demonstrates the Character Quality of the Month.
- If you teach younger students, see if you can “borrow” some older students to lead your students in an activity or switch the roles and have the younger students “teach” a rhyme to the older students.
- If you teach older students, you can be the initiator in the previous activities.
- Invite local business leaders or small business owners to talk about the importance of a character trait. If you teach older students, aim to get a representative from a business that typically hires teens so that they can relate the importance of good character when applying for and *keeping* a job.
- Men and women in uniform usually make impressive guest speakers. Police departments, fire departments and military recruiting offices are usually willing to come into a classroom. Do not be afraid to give them specific requests or guidelines for speaking so that it is pertinent to the lessons of the month.
- Always have a generic character activity planned and ready to go that you can use as filler when you have time to kill or that a substitute teacher can use in your absence.