

Discretion

Vs. Simplemindedness

I WILL:

- Consider Reactions
- Choose Words Carefully
- Check My Attitude
- Mind My Manners
- Learn From My Critics

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Recognizing and avoiding words, actions, and attitudes that could bring undesirable consequences

At first glance, discretion may seem like a difficult topic to teach but if you spend some time with the "I Wills" you will wish you had more than a month to teach it. The following topics are natural extensions of discretion: Forethought - think before you act; gossip; critical thinking, decision-making, manners, courtesy and etiquette; importance of



attitude; criticism - how to give and receive; looking at the bigger picture; reap what you sow...

One only has to read the newspaper to see many examples of indiscretions by the rich and famous or those in positions of power or leadership. How many

times has a single careless comment in public ended a career?

This month, let's practice the art of slowing our response so that there is time to consider the consequences of our words, actions and attitudes.

Go to the Root

Discretion comes from the Latin word, "discretionem" which means the power to distinguish, to separate. The phrase "at [one's] discretion" came about in the 1570's, and means that each person has the power to be discreet.

eDiscretion



You've heard stories of young professionals ruining careers by indiscriminate posting on the social networking sites or high schoolers blogging weekend adventures for their friends' benefit only to get arrested for the activity. Now more than ever discretion on the internet including emails and texting needs attention. Posts or texts can be forwarded and shared quickly. One must look ahead to the consequences of spreading a rumor or sharing an inappropriate comment or photo even if it is with just one person. Lead the class in a discussion on electronic communication discretion and what to do if they receive something that is inappropriate.

The Age of Discretion is used in both civil and religious law to designate when an individual is capable of making sound decisions. For some states it is a given age and other states it can be determined by a judge's discretion.



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Discretionary Spending

is items you purchase with money left over after the required purchases (food, rent, utilities, etc) have been covered. One look at the state of our economy tells you that this is a lesson that many need to learn. Create an age appropriate exercise that gives the students the ability to set a budget based on a limited number of funds. For older students, you may want them to research actual costs.

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Character Quotables

“The better part of valor is discretion, in the which better part I have saved my life.”

William Shakespeare

“Whoever gossips to you will gossip about you.”

Spanish Proverb

“Do not repeat anything you will not sign your name to.”

Unknown

“Nothing is more dangerous than a friend without discretion; even a prudent enemy is preferable.”

Jean de La Fontaine

“Never wrestle with a strong man nor bring a rich man to court.”

Latvian Proverb

“Definition of Mentor: Someone whose hindsight can become your foresight”

Unknown

“Look before you leap.”

Idiom

“Remember the divine saying, He that keepeth his mouth, keepeth his life.”

Sir Walter Raleigh.

“A sound discretion is not so much indicated by never making a mistake as by never repeating it.”

Christian Nestell Bovee

“In today's complex and fast-moving world, what we need even more than foresight or hindsight is insight”

Unknown

“A closed mouth catches no flies.”

French Proverb

“Never say "oops" in the operating room.”

Dr. Leo Troy

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

Emily Post

“None I find it's as hard to live down an early triumph as an early indiscretion.”

Edna St. Vincent Millay

“Vengeance has no foresight”

Napoleon Bonaparte

“Trying to squash a rumor is like trying to unring a bell.”

Shana Alexander

“What you don't see with your eyes, don't witness with your mouth.”

Jewish Proverb

“I have never been hurt by anything I didn't say.”

President Calvin Coolidge

“Hindsight explains the injury that foresight would have prevented”

Unknown

“Attitudes are contagious. Are yours worth catching?”

*Dennis and Wendy
Mannering*

“Great is our admiration of the orator who speaks with fluency and discretion”

Marcus Tullius Cicero

“Judgment is not upon all occasions required, but discretion always is.”

Philip Stanhope

“What is told in the ear of a man is often heard 100 miles away.”

Chinese Proverb

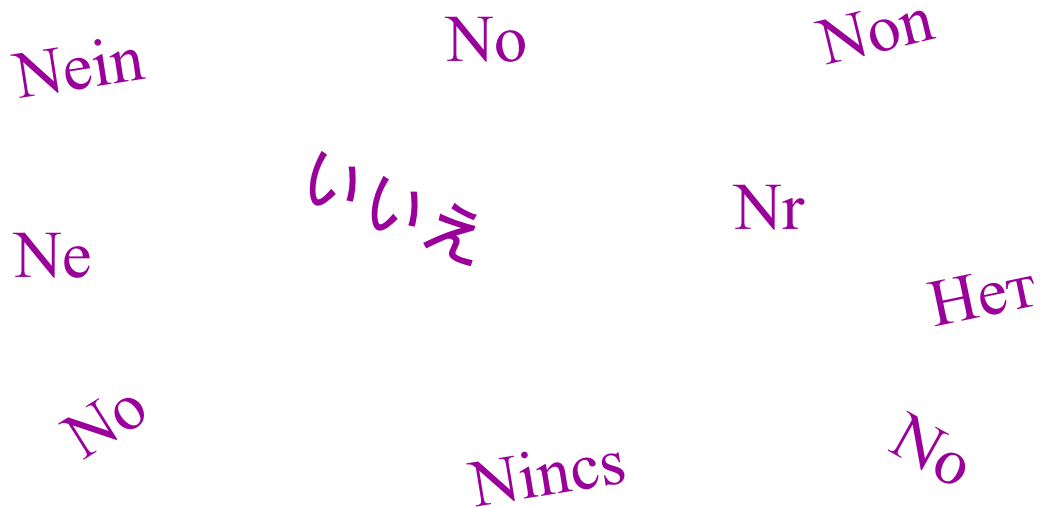
Curriculum Connection Science

What better scientist to teach predicting the consequences of actions than Sir Isaac Newton and his conclusion: “For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction”. When applying this theory to our actions, discretion requires us to consider the full force of our actions, not just the initial reaction.



JUST SAY NO!

Anticipating sticky situations and practicing how to say no gives children confidence that they can exercise discretion. Start out by identifying all of the situations that students in their age group must make decisions. From choosing their clothes in the morning, lunch choices in the cafeteria line, or who to play with, children make decisions all day long. Have them role play to practice refusing bad choices. You can also turn it into a contest : Divide the class into groups and pose situations. See which group can come up with the most ways to say No. Be sure to include age appropriate situations of participating in bully behavior, using foul language, cheating, vandalism, smoking, drugs, alcohol or sex.



For some more examples of how to teach refusal skills visit:

- <http://www.cdconsults.com/refusalSkills.html>
- <http://family.samhsa.gov/teach/refusal.aspx>
- <http://www.kellybear.com/TeacherArticles/TeacherTip21.html>
- http://at-risk-youth-support.suite101.com/article.cfm/top_ten_refusal_skills_for_teens
- <http://studentservices.brevard.k12.fl.us/Refusal%20Skills%20for%20Students.htm>

The Doughnut of Discretion

Philosophers view discretion as the hole in the middle of the doughnut. The doughnut itself is a ring that represents the black and white rules for any given situation. The doughnut hole represents the gaps not specifically covered by these rules. Discretion is where we exercise judgment within the ring of the rules and choose the best words or actions.

Discretion

"Don't get sucked in!"

and Peer Pressure

Use this activity to illustrate the consequences of "getting sucked into doing wrong." Choose a large glass bottle with a mouth just slightly smaller than a smoothly peeled hard boiled egg. Wad up some newspaper. Light the paper at a corner and drop it into the bottle. Quickly place the egg on the neck of the bottle. The egg may bounce as the air rushes out of the bottle. Once the fire goes out the egg will be sucked into the bottle with a "pop".

In this demonstration we are the egg. The fire represents the invitation to do wrong. Placing the egg in the neck of the bottle represents accepting an invitation to do wrong. And, becoming trapped in the bottle illustrates the consequences of doing wrong.



For an explanation of the chemistry principle behind this lesson (and instructions on how to get the egg back out...) visit the following website:

<http://chemistry.about.com/od/chemistrydemonstrations/a/egginabottle.htm>

George Washington's "Rules of Civility and Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation"

When George Washington was just 15 years old he wrote a list of 110 rules. The manuscript has been damaged so not all of the rules are complete. Here are a few that are noteworthy:

- 1 Every action done in company ought to be with some sign of respect to those that are present.
- 56 Associate yourself with men of good quality if you esteem your own reputation; for 'tis better to be alone than in bad company.
- 83 When you deliver a matter do it without passion and with discretion, however mean the person be you do it to.

The full list can be found at:
<http://www.history.org/Almanack/life/manners/rules2.cfm>

Select several from the list have the students rewrite them in today's vernacular.

Robin's Reading List



A LITTLE WALK AROUND YOURSELF

When you're criticizing others And are finding here and there
A fault or two to speak of Or a weakness you can't bear.
When you're blaming someone's weakness Or accusing some of self...
It's time that you went out To walk around yourself.
There are lots of human failures In the average of us all.
And lots of grave shortcomings In the short ones and the tall.
But when we think of evils Men should lay upon the shelves,
It's time we all went out To take a walk around ourselves.
We need so often in this life This balancing of scales.
This seeing how much in us wins And how much in us fails.
But before you judge another Just to lay him on the shelf
It would be a splendid plan To take a walk around yourself.
~~ Author Unknown ~~ (sometimes attributed to Helen Welshimer)

Wouldn't it be nice to use the phrase "take a walk around yourself" when you want to correct some one for unnecessarily criticizing

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth.

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same.

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost

Not only does Frost's poem teach about forethought in choosing a path. It can also be interpreted using Croskey's view of discretion as discreet (no it's not misspelled - read Croskey's article on the next page...)

Visit
<http://allpoetry.com/poem/3332980>
for the poem

**"Sometimes in life we
don't get second
chances"**

*Robin Castetter is a
Retired Elementary Teacher
Loveland City Schools*

Croskey's Corner

My Xavier class and I were having a discussion recently about some research which indicates that the moral reasoning level of college athletes is lower than for other people of their age group - and dropping. Some of my students felt that this result might be due to the fact that these people ARE athletes. The thought was that athletes are easy targets for criticism of their morality because they are in the media spotlight. Students even said that it went further; athletes and celebrities were not only targets, but were actually TARGETED by groupies and wannabes who saw them as a way to make a quick buck or as a path to fame. There was sympathy among my students for athletes and other celebrities who are caught on cell phones in public places. The discreetly recorded quotes and actions can end up on YouTube videos and on the covers of tabloids. Target? Targeted? It's hard to judge.

What can't be argued is that there is more of what I would call indiscreet behavior showing up in the news lately. Oh sure, Babe Ruth was known for his wild ways. A later generation Yankee star, Mickey Mantle, had a similar reputation. In times when euphemisms were substituted for frank descriptions, an indiscretion was code for immoral behavior. A family lawyer might be employed by those with wealth and be assigned the task of handling the consequences of such behavior discreetly and "keeping the events out of the paper." Well, in 2010, neither public behavior nor the media's handling of it could be considered discreet. The tabloid shows and publications, websites, and other social media allow indiscreet behavior to become, as they say, viral. But discretion is a word with far-reaching meanings.

This brought to mind the May Character Quality of the Month - Discretion. It is defined as "Recognizing and avoiding words, actions and attitudes that could bring undesirable consequences." The "I will" statements are:

"Choose my words carefully;

Practice good manners;

Listen to criticism;

Not make fun of others;

Turn down any invitation to do wrong."

Discretion means to behave in a discreet manner. Discreet means showing good judgment in actions and speech, but it also can mean knowing when to remain silent. There is also a similar word, discrete. It means separate from others, distinct. The 2 words share a common Latin root. It might be worthwhile to consider how we can show our good character by being, at times, silent, and at other times, separate.

I am of a mind which says that human nature has not changed much over the centuries. The strengths and weakness of people in Shakespeare's plays, or even in Greek tragedies, resonate with us today because we see ourselves in them. The human appetites and passions which could get people into trouble 2500 years ago are still plaguing us today.

Up until very recently, then, people got themselves into and out of trouble, but they did it discreetly - more or less in private. That led to a fair amount of lying and hypocrisy. When celebrities did it, they hid their actions from their fans because it was felt that their success depended upon a clean image. Today, celebrities probably get into about the same amount of trouble as those who went before them. But, if anything has changed, maybe it's the public's Tolerance (The Character Quality for March) of Indiscretion. Is the public more accepting, less judgmental? Or, are fans so hungry for fame and the famous that we can put up with lower character, as long as we get our "fix?"

All this suggests that what teachers are doing to promote manners in school is essential. TV or the Internet in no way encourage people to be polite. Some families teach manners; others seem not to do so. But manners have their important place: so much of being polite is being patient. "Sure, I will let you go ahead of me." "Of course, you may serve yourself before me." "Thank you, but I will wait my turn." "No, I do not believe I am entitled to a larger portion. I want there to be enough for everyone." Robert Heinlein, the science fiction author, believed that there could be no civilization without politeness.

We worship fame and the famous. It appears that we will continue to do so, no matter how indiscreet their behavior is. But do we value manners, as a way to becoming more civilized? Perhaps, if we double our efforts to encourage our children to separate themselves by their good manners, their respect for others, and their civilized approach, we will encourage them to be discrete, distinct. That behavior will be admired, and they will not have to be discreet.

"For me, politeness is a sine qua non of civilization."

Robert A. Heinlein

Bill Croskey is a retired
school
psychologist from the
Loveland
City Schools



**The Character Council of Greater
Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky**

P.O. Box 33144
Cincinnati, Ohio 45233

Mary Andres Russell, Executive Director

Phone: 513.467.0170

Fax 513.941.2755

E-mail: mrussell@charactercincinnati.org

www.charactercincinnati.org

Written by Jacqueline Tomey and Jill Tomey,
Education Committee Co-Chairs

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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.