

# Contentment

Character... It starts with me!

MONTHLY EDUCATOR BULLETIN

NOVEMBER 2011

## Vs. Covetousness

### I WILL:

- be thankful for what I do have
- not complain about what I don't have
- not always ask for "one more"
- value people above things
- want less and give more

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## Realizing that true happiness does not depend on material conditions

I believe that Grandma Moses said it best –

"Life is what we make it. Always has been, always will be."

Looking for contentment in the wrong places causes us to be dissatisfied with our family, our abilities and our possessions. Several months ago we focused on a similar quality - Joy:

Maintaining a good attitude, even when faced with unpleasant conditions. Contentment goes beyond just a cheerful reaction by requiring us to cultivate those relationships that bring contentment rather than acquiring more 'stuff'. This month, look to your relationships to make your life content and find true happiness.



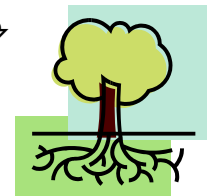
### Contentamiento vs. Codicia

*Reconocer que la verdadera felicidad no depende de las condiciones materiales*



### Go to the Root

From the Latin verb *continere* meaning "to hold together; bind; limit; enclose; surround. Can you picture contentment as being happy with present "contents"?"



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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

“No one, I am convinced, can be happy who lives only for himself. The joy of living comes from immersion in something that we know to be bigger, better, more enduring and worthier than we are.”

~John Mason Brown

“Joy is not in things! It is in us!”

~Benjamin Franklin

“Men can only be happy when they do not assume that the object of life is happiness.”

~George Orwell

“Contentment is natural wealth, luxury is artificial poverty”

~Socrates

“It is better to want what you have than to have what you want.”

~Proverb

“Until you are happy with who you are, you will never be happy with what you have.”

~Zig Ziglar

“When somebody does something well, applaud! It will make two people happy.”

~Samuel Goldwyn

“Content makes poor men rich; discontentment makes rich men poor.”

~Benjamin Franklin

“When we cannot find contentment in ourselves, it is useless to seek it elsewhere.”

~François de La Rochefoucauld

“I don't want to own anything that won't fit into my coffin.”

~Fred A. Allen

“It is right to be contented with what we have, but never with what we are.”

~James Mackintosh

“It is not our circumstances that create our discontent or contentment. It is us.”

~Vivian Greene

“What makes us discontented with our condition is the absurdly exaggerated idea we have of the happiness of others.”

~French Proverb

“The grand essentials of happiness are: something to do, something to love, and something to hope for.”

~Allan K. Chalmers

“Sociologists find that those who volunteer enjoy better health than those that don't.”

~Eugene C. Dorsey

## Curriculum Connection



## Science

Psychologist Abraham Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs describes human motivation in terms of a pyramid of needs. At the bottom of the pyramid are the most basic of needs for survival. Progressing up the needs become more social in context. The last level is known as Self-actualization. In this level, humans can act unselfishly seeking those things which lead to personal growth or fulfilling potential. This is the level where true contentment is reached.

For more information visit:

<http://downloads.cas.psu.edu/leadership/pdf/motivation.pdf>

<http://www.businessballs.com/maslow5quicktest.pdf>

<http://www.teach-nology.com/tutorials/teaching/whatareneeds.html>

[http://www.squidoo.com/basic\\_needs\\_lesson\\_plans](http://www.squidoo.com/basic_needs_lesson_plans)



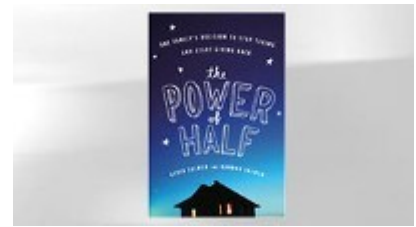
# Hannah Salwen , Hero of Contentment

Hannah Salwen, at 14, surprised her family with her request that they sell their 2 million dollar home and give half of it to the poor. What's more surprising is that her family did just that. Hannah's request was prompted by seeing a homeless man begging at a traffic light near their home. She felt compelled to correct the situation. She thought that if her family had a smaller house, that man could eat. So she suggested it to her parents. After careful consideration, they realized she was right. Once her family decided to downsize

their home, they embarked on a family journey to decide who should get the money. The family had been active in charitable works and contributions but none on scale with half of their home. Their research led to the Hunger Project in Africa and the funding two five-year programs designed to move 20,000 villagers from poverty to self-reliance, at which point external funding would no longer be required. Hannah and her father, Kevin, wrote a book about their family's experiences called *The Power of Half*. According to her father "This isn't a book about

giving. It's a book about relationships. If our family hadn't changed and we hadn't come out happier and more trusting, there would be no book.'

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/family/7527861/The-Power-of-Half-how-Hannah-Salwen-and-her-family-gave-half-their-home-away.html>



## Team~Building Activity

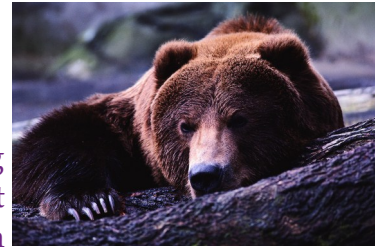
Building a culture of good character requires building the class into a community. Here is this month's teambuilding activity:

### Commercial Time!

Have the students count-off and remember their number. Now each person must write (or draw for the younger ones) a commercial for the person who has the number ahead of them. The first one to count-off will write about the last person to count-off. You can have them imitate a current commercial or write completely from scratch. You can also pass out magazines and let them cut a jingle out that describes their person and glue it to a paper which they will decorate with their person's name. Please make sure to emphasize positive qualities. When they are done, have each person share what they wrote. (You may opt to collect them and review them before sharing them at another time.) Let the person who is advertised keep the final copy.



# Bear Necessities



Disney's movie, *The Jungle Book*, popularized the song "The Bear Necessities". You can use a recording of that song or that scene from the movie to introduce this lesson or just call the song to mind. Give each student a sheet of paper on which you have photocopied an outline of a bear with writing lines drawn on it. As a class list several items that you can't live without besides the basics of food, water and shelter. Encourage intangibles such as love. You can have them create this list as a class or in small groups. Once the list is made you may also give the students some time to add a few of their own. It is important that each list contain the same number of items. The next part of this exercise can be done in small groups or each student individually. Ask the students to cross off the item they can most live without. Now have them pick another. Continue to do this until you are down to the last 3. These are the "Bare Necessities". Compare the lists and see what is common.

**Sign Language:** Visit the ASLPro Website to learn the signs for Contentment and Covetousness. Notice how the sign for contentment is focused on the heart while the sign for Covetousness looks greedy.

[www.aslpro.com/cgi-bin/aslpro/aslpro.cgi](http://www.aslpro.com/cgi-bin/aslpro/aslpro.cgi)



# Life's Sweets

For this exercise you will need to be a little sneaky. Before you begin the exercise, hand out some sort of long-lasting treat such as a Lollipop, Tootsie pop or Jolly Rancher. (Of course, choose something age appropriate.) Then introduce the lesson as an experiment. You will give them an assignment to do, one from your normal curriculum but during the exercise you will have them do something additional that makes it uncomfortable such as wear a clothespin or paper clip on their finger, sit sideways in the chair, use the less dominant hand, etc. After a few minutes ask for comments about what they are feeling and how different it is. It is likely that their idea of having a treat at the same time will not be noticed since it was not included as part of the lesson. Be sure to choose a long lasting treat that will still be present during the assignment. Even if someone brings it up, it will be mentioned far less than the uncomfortable one. Ask them to think about much easier it is to complain than it is to appreciate. Challenge them to be more aware of how many times in next several days they do one or the other.

## The Times of Your Life

(You may recall the title of this exercise as a song used in a Kodak commercial long ago.) If Christmas is more than 6 months ago when you use this exercise, ask the students if they remember everything they got for Christmas. If last Christmas is closer than 6 months start with the previous Christmas. Go back 2 or 3 Christmas depending on the age of the student. For older children you can go back to their 5th birthday. Have them write down their answers so as not to embarrass other children who may not have received as much or to give ideas of a gift that was very popular (Tickle Me, Elmo...). Now ask them to recall gifts they have given that other people enjoyed or an event where they gave time at which to help. Usually, doing acts of kindness, stand out in memory more so than gifts received. Discuss why they think this is so.



## Gratitude Race

Divide the class into groups of about 5 students per group. Appoint one student to record the responses of the group. Choose a 5 - 8 letter word that is related to Thanksgiving (turkey, pilgrim) or to the school (the mascot, sports team, etc). Call out the first letter of the word and the students in each group should write down the things that start with that word for which they are thankful. Groups need to be careful in telling the scribe their ideas so that the other groups do not hear them. Give them a minute or two for each letter. After all of the word is spelled, have each group read their lists going letter by letter. You can award points for the longest list or you can eliminate any item that is on all lists or any item that is on at least one other group's list and give points only for unique answers. For non-writing students, you can give them each a sheet of drawing paper, and have them fold the paper into fourths. Have them draw a picture of something or someone for which they are thankful in each of the 4 blocks. You can give each block a category or just let them choose 4 random things. When finished, have them share what they have drawn. When the activity is complete, you can comment on the difference in the responses or the similarities.



Benjamin Franklin, while working to build forts, observed, "...When Men are employ'd they are best contented. For on the Days they work'd they were good-natur'd and cheerful; and with the consciousness of having done a good Day's work they spent the Evenings jollily; but on the idle Days they were mutinous and quarrelsome, finding fault with their Pork, the Bread, etc., and in continual ill-humor...." (*Autobiography*, p. 165)



## Spot Test

Hang a large sheet of paper in the front of the room. Place an “inkspot” in the center of the paper. Ask the students what they see. Most will give an answer concerning the inkspot ignoring the mostly white sheet of paper. When several have answered point out how much they missed by having such a narrow focus. Contentment is all about what you focus on. If you focus on what you don’t have you will be discontent. If you focus on what you do have, you will find true contentment.

## The Grinch

The Grinch is one of Dr. Suess’ more notable characters. There’s a clip on YouTube from the movie where the Grinch’s heart grows 3 sizes when he realizes that Christmas still goes on in Whoville even if he did steal all the presents. The residents of Whoville knew about contentment!

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8J-YmVs1j0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8J-YmVs1j0)



## Scrooge

The story of Ebenezer Scrooge demonstrates the I will...value people above things. His greedy lifestyle left him miserable and lonely. When he followed the advice of the spirits who showed him that being generous and giving away his wealth would make him happy, the townspeople could see the visible change in him. The link below is song from the Muppet version of Dicken’s classic tale describing Scrooge.

## Newly-Friend Game

For this game, you will need to have an assistant. To start, have everyone pick a partner or pair up the class. Decide who is A and who is B within each pair. Time 2 minutes for A to interview B. Suggest questions about family, pets, hobbies, or school. Then time 2 minutes for B to interview A. Bring all of the pairs back together and now give each person a notepad and marker. Send the A's to another room and keep the B's with you. Tell them you will ask them questions and they will write down their answers (big letters on the notepad in Game Show fashion). When the questions are finished, have them put them together with several sheets of loose-leaf between each answer so they cannot be seen. Place several sheets on the top as well. Bring the A's back in when both are done.

Have all of the A's sit on one side of the room and the B's sit on the other side of the room. If you have room for all of the A's to have a place at the board, then line them up. If not, give A's the notepads and markers. Now ask A the B questions asking them to answer them the way the B would have answered. After each question, go to each pair and have A reveal their answer. Then see if B matches. When all of the B questions have been asked, give the notepads and markers to B and ask them the A questions, etc.

### Questions for A:

What is your favorite sport?

SOCCER

How many people live in your house?

What would you like to be when you grow up?

TEACHER

What was the best present you ever received?

### Questions for B:

What is your least favorite subject in school?

SPELING

What restaurant serves your favorite food?

How many pets do you have?

If you could go anywhere in the world for free what one place would you like to visit?

When the game is over, see how well they did. Ask them if they thought it was hard to think like someone else? Ask them what new things they learned about people either in the interview or when the answers were revealed. The purpose of this game was to learn about each other so that we can value each other more.



# Robin's Reading List



## Grades Pre. – 3

### Blackout by John Rocco

All of a sudden, on a hot summer night, the lights go out in the city. The air conditioning goes off, as does the TV and the computer...the phone doesn't work, and Dad can't finish cooking dinner!!!! The family goes up on the roof to escape the heat and finds the lights there, in the stars. Many of the neighbors are out on the streets, talking, roller balding, eating ice cream, having so much fun, and enjoying not being so busy for once. Even the board games came out. When the lights came back on, the family enjoyed their own personal "blackout" by turning out the lights, and leaving off the electronics. They discovered contentment in not being so busy.

### Dewey: The Small-town Library Cat Who Touched the World by Vicki Myron

Dewey was only a few weeks old when he was stuffed into the book drop slot at the Public Library one frigid night in Spencer, Iowa. He was discovered the next morning by Mrs. Myron, the library director. Myron had survived the loss of her family farm, health issues, and many family problems, and Dewey immediately won her heart. He pulled himself up, hobbling on frostbitten feet, to nudge a gesture of thanks and love to Myron and her staff. They had rescued him, and he never stopped charming the people of Spencer with his enthusiasm, warmth, and an understanding of who needed

him  
the  
most.  
He

was properly named Dewey Readmore Books.

### The Short and Incredibly Happy Life of Riley by Colin Thompson

This is a humorous book about the human need for more and more, bigger and better... everything!! It's a great book for kids and adults. Humans live long lives, and most of that time we spend unhappy, always wanting something that we don't have. If we are short, we want to be tall. If we have straight hair, we want curly hair. We want to be somewhere else, with someone else. We hate our parents, teachers, and siblings. On the other hand, rats live for a very short time, and they spend most of that time being happy!! Good discussion book!!

### The Retired Kid by Jon Agee

"It's been a wonderful eight years...but I need a break," says Brian, exhausted from school, soccer and broccoli-eating. He wants to escape school, homework, and chores. So, he boards a plane to the Happy Sunset Retirement Community in Florida, where he's 60 years younger than everyone else. While there, he does what retired people do...nap, play golf, play cards, do yoga, drinks prune juice. One of the retiree's suggests that he remember the good old days. After giving that some thought, he decided to come out of retirement. "I love my job!"

## Grades 4 – 8:

### The Way a Door Closes by Hope Anita Smith

Through the voice of a 13-year-old boy, a series of clear, sweet poems tells a modern family story. The first 12 poems describe the contentment C. J. feels about being a part of a

close-knit family. With the 13th poem, "The Way a Door Closes," his father abruptly leaves home day he leaves and doesn't come back. The plain words and beautifully individualized pictures express the family anguish. In the poem "Prodigal Son," his dad finally returns, and he can't find enough words to say how sorry he is. The first part is just too idyllic, with everything absolutely perfect; but after the shocking grief of abandonment, the father's return seems both hopeful and realistic. Readers will be deeply moved by the portrait of a rooted, extended family that makes it through hard times

Ruby Holler by Sharon Creech  
Having suffered through a string of appalling foster homes, 13-year-old orphans Dallas and his twin sister, Florida, have pretty much given up on ever finding a happy home. So when an eccentric older couple, content with their life in the holler enters their lives, providing such adventures as a river expedition, a treasure hunt and a whole lot of remarkable meals: "beat-the-blues broccoli," "anti-cranky crumpets," and "getting-used-to-kids- again stew," the twins take a while to warm up. They discover that family and happiness does not depend on possessions, but love and each other.

### Bud, Not Buddy by Christopher Paul Curtis

Bud, not Buddy, is an unforgettable character. It is the story of ten-year-old Bud Caldwell, an orphan, living in Flint, Michigan in 1936 during the Great Depression. Since the death of his mother, four years earlier, Bud has been living in

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# Robin's Reading List

an orphanage, as well as short stints in several foster homes. All he has of his mother are a bag of rocks and a photograph of his mother as a child. He sets off to find his father only to find the man he believes to be his father is really another family member. Pay close attention to Bud's "Rules and Things! The story's message is if you have a dream & are willing to work to make it happen, you can rise above even the most humble beginnings and be content.

**Sixth Grade Glommers, Norks and Me** by Lisa Papademetriou

Allie Kimball is excited to be starting sixth grade. Her best friend is going to be in the same school and she is going to try out for the soccer team. However, she soon learns that middle school is a very different world, full of strange new peers, like "glommers girls" who never go anywhere alone and "norks" a combination of a nerd and a dork. Allie realizes it's time to define herself before she gets lost in the sixth-grade jungle. **Sixth Grade Glommers, Norks, and Me** is a funny and poignant look at middle school friendships, crushes, and trying to define you.

**Grades 9 – 12:**

**The Outsiders** by S.E. Hinton

According to Ponyboy, there are two kinds of people in the world: greasers and socs. A soc (short for "social") has money, can get away with just about anything, and has an attitude a mile long. A greaser, however, always lives on the outside and needs to watch his back. Ponyboy is a greaser, and he's always been proud of it, even willing to rumble

against a gang of socs for the sake of his fellow greasers--until one terrible night when his friend Johnny kills a soc. The murder gets under Ponyboy's skin, causing his world to crumble and teaching him that pain feels the same whether a soc or a greaser.

**Esperanza Rising** by Pam Munoz Ryan

This powerful and realistic novel is set in 1930's. The main character Esperanza, is a wealthy young Mexican girl that has grown up on a ranch called El Rancho de Las Rosas near Aguascalientes, Mexico. She is used to the care-free life of riches and privileges, surrounded by her loving parents. Everything changes when one night, a day before Esperanza's 13<sup>th</sup> birthday; her father is killed by the bandits.

Esperanza, her mother, and Abuelita (grandmother) find themselves in a very precarious position - they cannot own the ranch without Papa, a man, a head of the family. A fire and an evil uncle leave them with nothing. Esperanza and her mother make the difficult choice to leave to a migrate camp in California, leaving behind their privileged life. Once her mother becomes ill, Esperanza has to find a way to rise from the ashes and make a new life for herself.

**THE SECRET TO LYING** by Todd Mitchell

In his old high school James was totally unremarkable; the guy no one noticed. When he's offered a scholarship to a public boarding school for gifted students, he accepts. He's tired of being dull and boring and sees the American Science and Math Academy as a chance to reinvent himself. He has scars

that help fuel a tough guy image, but these scars are real and self-inflicted. James builds friendships, pulls off outrageous pranks, deals with his first love and fights off demons in his dreams, and self-destructive tendencies in his real life. Some of the story is told through IMs between James and the enigmatic persona of Ghost44 who communicates best online and tells him, "I can't be myself in person." This is a sensitive and funny novel that offers a thoughtful take on the importance of learning to live in your own skin.

**Talk** by Kathe Koja

Kit Webster is hiding a secret, and his best friend, Carma, is encouraging him to audition for the high school play, "Talk." He is cast as the male lead, and expects to escape his own life and become a different person. Instead, he gets the role of a lifetime: Kit Webster. He is thrown together with Lindsay Walsh, the female lead and teen queen of the school. She's tired of the selfish and shallow boys from her circle of friends and sees something real in Kit. However, Kit's attention is focused on Pablo, another boy in school. Parents put pressure on the school to shut it down as the play is controversial. Kit and Lindsay rally to save the play, and they find themselves deep into a battle for the truth... onstage and inside themselves.



“Crusin' and playin' the radio  
With no particular place to go.” - Chuck Berry

# Croskey's Corner

When I was in high school, I was 6 foot, 3 inches tall, weighed 180 pounds, and could eat twice what a normal person could eat at any one sitting. I ate 2 lunches at school. I ate seconds at every meal, even in restaurants. There was a little cafeteria in my home town which decided to offer an “All You Can Eat” buffet for \$1. No, I am not kidding. Even in those ancient times (1960's), All You Can Eat for a Dollar was CHEAP! One time, 6 of us guys descended on the place before a high school dance. While we were eating, I kept hearing the owner, a very religious man, gnashing his teeth, quoting the Bible's Book of Exodus, saying the Pharaoh never had it this bad, and praying that this plague would be the last to strike his establishment. (Notice that these days, the wording is more likely “All you care to eat,” as though reminding us that just because we are capable of eating more, that doesn't mean gorging ourselves is a good idea. Tell that to teenage boys.)

How much food (or anything else) is enough? I thought about this, about going for rides, and overpriced comic books when I heard the definition of The Character Quality of the Month, Contentment. As mentioned elsewhere, Contentment is defined as “realizing that true happiness does not depend on material conditions.” I guess that mastery of Contentment means that we know when we have reached “enough.” We feel Satisfied, not Satiated. Passed the point of Contentment, it's more likely that we are seeking something besides Satisfaction; perhaps our quest is for status or power or to avoid loneliness. My life is filled with examples.

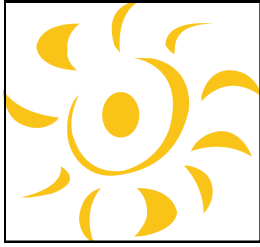
I am a lover of comic books, Superman in particular. I don't just like the character; I like the actual books. If you haven't seen a comic book in a while (i.e., if you have actually grown up), their cost and slick paper and art may surprise you. But I like the old ones. Up to a point. What used to cost 10 or 12 cents when I was a kid have actually grown in value, due to the influence of that dreaded word: the collectors! Maybe you heard that a copy of Action Comics #1, dated June 1938, the first appearance of Superman, was sold recently for over \$1 million. (Earlier a record \$317,000 had been paid for a different copy of the same comic.) Now, like I said, I like old comics. But in no world that I could ever inhabit, including one where I was rich, would I ever pay hundreds of dollars for an old comic, let alone \$1 million. I have several copies of Action Comics #1. Together, they probably cost me under \$50. THAT might sound like a LOT to you. But, it's a hobby! My point is that, if I want to read Action Comics #1, I can. If I want to enjoy young Joe Shuster's art or Jerry Siegel's pasted together (literally) story, I can. I am Content with having access to those reproductions and do not need the status of actually owning an original copy. If I did, what would be the point? I could not actually read it because turning the pages would devalue it. No, the point would be to show people I had a copy. That might impress other collectors. I could leave it to my kids, who would, of course, immediately sell it. But when did the Market decide that Action Comics #1 was worth that much? Matter of fact, right after that sale, a copy of Detective Comics #27 (first appearance of Batman) sold for more than a million. So, Batman CAN beat Superman after all.

Market value can, obviously, be a tricky concept. One man's beat up old comic can be another's beat up old heirloom. But, Contentment doesn't look at this scenario from the point of view of the market. Rather, it looks at the individual who is seeking satisfaction. As my old friend used to say, “Ask yourself what you want and then ask yourself what you really want.” That second question, which requires introspection, leads to personal insight into what will make me Content.

Adults need help finding Contentment, but so do kids. Sometimes, we need to explain that there can be more satisfaction in going through a process than there can be in acquiring a product. Einstein felt that people, including Americans, were preoccupied with measuring everything. He said, “Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.” I think that sentence can remind us that we know value in other ways besides measuring how big, how costly, how full of calories, how smart, or how rare something is. I enjoyed reading my first Superman story much more than I ever did reading Action #1. Putting process over product can be said in another way: Getting there is half the fun. I always say, if there is a cliché to describe a psychological point there must have been some truth to it or people wouldn't repeat it so often. When we were little, we begged my dad to take us for a ride. Just a ride; no particular place to go. Often, in those days of 29 cent gallons of gas, he said yes. The journey was the point, not the destination.

So, perhaps, if we enjoy getting there more, and teach kids to enjoy it, too, we won't be so obsessed with Satiation, which I think of as eating ‘til I am stuffed. In fact, a reminder for kids might also be about kids: if I enjoy their growing more, and help them appreciate how much they have grown, I won't be as obsessed with trying to hurry up their growth. The Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget, when he toured the US, was often asked how parents and educators could speed up the development of their children. He asked why you would want to do that? Good question. Why do we want to get there so fast? Well, maybe to get some of that food before the high school boys devour the whole buffet. But trust me: the last bite is not as satisfying as the first.

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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.