

# Thoroughness

Character... It starts with me!

MONTHLY EDUCATOR BULLETIN

## Vs. Incompleteness

### I WILL:

- plan my work
- pay attention to details
- make a list so I don't forget
- finish what I start
- clean up along the way

### FEATURES

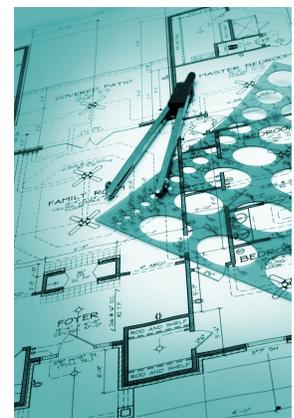
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## Taking care of necessary details

Success is in the details. Thoroughness is the awareness of even the smallest details and their relationship to the big picture. This doesn't come automatically. It is learned by attention to how details have affected our past successes and failures and learning from the

successes of others. Thoroughness is getting the job done, but it doesn't stop there. The job includes cleaning up after the work is over. This month, challenge yourself not only to plan your work with thoroughness, but to work your plan as thoroughly as you

created it.



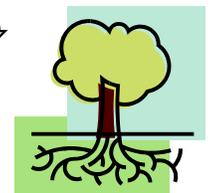
### Minutieux vs. Incomplet

*Adresser chaque détail qui influence la qualité de mon travail.*



### Go to the Root

From the late 15c. OE *thuruh* "from end to end, from side to side". Can you picture how thoroughness is all encompassing.



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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

“Thoroughness characterizes all successful men. Genius is the art of taking infinite pains. All great achievement has been characterized by extreme care, infinite painstaking, even to the minutest detail.”

~Elbert Hubbard

“Every job is a portrait of the person who does it. Autograph your work with excellence.”

~Abraham Lincoln

“See your road through.”

~J. R. R. Tolkien

“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”

~Aristotle

“For most diagnoses all that is needed is an ounce of knowledge, an ounce of intelligence, and a pound of thoroughness.”

~ Anonymous

“It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things.”

~Leonardo da Vinci

“We rate ability in men by what they finish, not by what they attempt.”

~Anonymous

“A project is complete when it starts working for you, rather than you working for it.”

~Scott Allen

“There is nothing so fatal to character as half finished tasks.”

~David Lloyd George

“Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishment.”

~Jim Rohn

“Nothing builds self-esteem and self-confidence like accomplishment.”

~Thomas Carlyle

“When you have a great and difficult task, something perhaps almost impossible, if you only work a little at a time, every day a little, suddenly the work will finish itself.”

~Isak Dinesen (pseudonym of Baroness Karen Blixen. Danish)

“My therapist told me the way to achieve true inner peace is to finish what I start. So far today, I have finished 2 bags of M&M's and a chocolate cake. I feel better already.”

~Dave Barry

## Curriculum Connection



## Language Arts

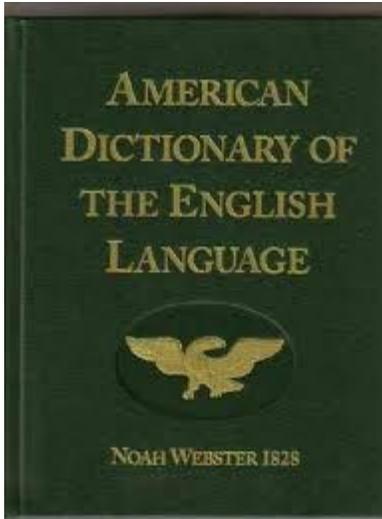
**The Importance of Proofreading:** In his State of the Union address on December 5th of 1870, President Ulysses S Grant mentioned a tariff adjustment that would put a duty on certain imports and bring more luxurious items-such as tropical fruits-to the United States, and that the revenue from these taxes would help increase the country's wealth. Unfortunately, this tariff was miswritten: a phrase in the tariff excluding items from the tariff was supposed to read “Tropical fruit-plants for the purposes of propagation,” but which, due to a punctuation error instead read “Tropical fruit, plants for propagation”, causing the United States to lose an estimated \$1 million in tax revenue on tropical fruit. It was rewritten a few years later and the error was corrected.

There are many stories out there about how one small punctuation mark has made a lot of difference in a message, and how disastrous things have happened, much like the story above.

Proofreading is not just important when it comes to English, though. Thoroughness in proofreading math problems, a paper written for science or social studies class can make a difference. Even thoroughness in reading an assignment can improve understanding and make completing an assignment easier.

capitalize	underline
Decapitalize	strike out
insert text	center
delete a letter	insert paragraph
transpose	circle spell out

# Noah Webster, Hero of Thoroughness



Noah Webster, the author of the dictionary, is the hero this month who exemplifies

thoroughness. Webster started writing the dictionary when he was 43, and began by breaking down the work into steps. Once he actually got to working on the project, he realized that in order to properly define a word, he had to research its origin and how it came to be in the English language.

Webster set aside the actual writing of the dictionary to do the necessary research into the origin of the words in the English language. This task took him years as he delved into the German, Latin, French, Italian, and other

language roots of these words. He wrote another book in the process, *"A Synopsis of Words in Twenty Languages"*.

Once the research for the word origins was finished, Webster began again writing the dictionary. The project in all took him almost 30 years to complete.

Webster understood the importance of being thorough enough to put aside his work to complete the word origin research and not avoid the issue.

## Team-Building Activity

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



### Human Tic Tac Toe

Set up 3 rows of three chairs each for the tic tac toe board. Divide the class into boys against the girls. Line up the boys on one side of the chairs and line up the girls on the other side of the chairs. Each side takes turns placing a student in one of the chairs until there are 3 girls or 3 boys in a row for a tic tac toe win or the game is a draw. When the game is over, the students in the chairs will go to the back of the line and play continues until all students have had a chance to be in the chairs. During this first round, the students can openly discuss where the next student should sit but it is up to the person doing the sitting to use the input of the group to make the final decision of where to sit. Once all students have had a chance to play the rules change. This second time around there is to be no talking or sign language. Each student must decide individually where to sit. You may impose a time limit for choosing a seat to make the second round go faster and discourage discussion. When all have had a chance to play both ways, ask them to compare and see which they liked better. In most cases, the students will prefer the group input. Emphasize the importance of operating as a team in making better decisions.



# Simon Says

For this activity, ask your students to perform each of the following tasks:

- Snap their fingers. Notice which finger, second or third, they snapped with. Now ask them to switch fingers.
- Fold their hands together, interlocking their fingers: Notice which thumb, right or left, is on top. Now ask them to switch thumbs.
- Cross your arms under your chest: Notice which arm is on top right or left. Now ask them to switch arms.
- Cross your legs above the knee: Notice which leg is on top, right or left. Now ask them to switch legs.

In each of these situations, you should find that it is uncomfortable to switch. Point out that there is no right or wrong way to perform any of these tasks and the positioning of right or left has no relationship to being right-handed or left-handed. The reason that one way feels normal and the other doesn't is a result of habit. The activity that is controlled by habit seems to come naturally. Developing habits that assist being thorough will make finishing tasks completely feel normal. Ask your students to list habits that can help in being thorough.



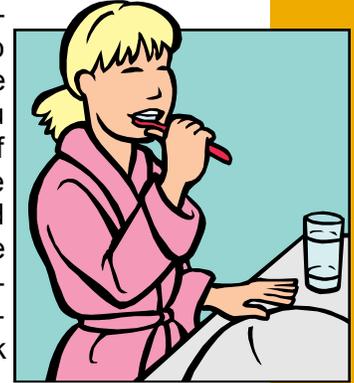
# Dot-to-dot

Choose a dot to dot picture that is age appropriate for your students. Give them time to complete the dot to dot picture. When your students are done, point out the importance of every step in connecting the dots. For older students, you can have them create a dot to dot picture by using tracing paper and coloring books. They could also trace a map or a picture from a text book or printed from the internet. What would the picture look like if one of the dots was missing or you didn't place enough dots on the picture? Alternately, you can make a copy of a dot to dot with one of the dots missing and have them guess where the missing dot should be placed before they finish the picture. End with a discussion about the importance of details in any project.



# Instructions

Divide the class into groups of 4 -6 per group. Each group will need to write step by step instructions on how to do a simple task such as brushing your teeth or making a sandwich. After each group writes their instructions you can then demonstrate each set of instructions being careful to do only what is instructed so as to point out anything they may have missed. You may want to preface your testing as if you have been raised by apes living in the jungle and you have never brushed your teeth before. Be very literal so that you can spot if they say to rinse without saying to turn on the water and pour some in the cup. An alternate ending would be to have the groups exchange lists and act them out to look for missing details. If you have all of the groups do the same activity you can then do a group activity that compares each list of instructions and see if there are instructions that are in one but not the other. Are there any instructions that were left out of all of them? Then work as a group to combine all of the sets into one single thorough set of instructions. When completed, discuss when details like this need to be extremely thorough. Discuss using judgment to discern when to be detailed and when to summarize. For example, would you need to explain all the details about brushing your teeth when you tell your parent you brushed them and are ready for bed?



## CAYG

Anyone who has worked at McDonald's knows what this acronym stands for: Clean As You Go. McDonald's strict policy on keeping your work area and utensils clean and tidy at all times is drilled into employees. The policy enforces cleaning and straightening at the soonest possible moment. Cleaning isn't an afterthought. It is an important step in the work instructions for food preparation. Once you master the concept, habit makes cleaning as you go feel natural. Many McDonald's employees report using the concept successfully in their own homes or dorm rooms. CAYG is a good habit to cultivate to increase thoroughness



## Directions Test

Directions tests are great for measuring how thorough a classroom is. The way to 'pass' such a test is to read through all of the directions on the paper first (which is normally the first task listed on the paper), and then the last instruction will normally say something like only do # 1 and #2 (which is usually just writing your name at the top of the paper). A thorough person will read all of the instructions first and then do as the last instructions dictates; a person who is not thorough will normally do the instructions as they read them, resulting in them completing random tasks like counting out loud or drawing different shapes on the paper in specified places. There are a lot of different versions available on the internet, and are made for all levels of education. Have the students take the test, and note how many 'follow the directions' and how many actually follow the directions.

# Thoroughness in Chores



Start this activity by telling the students to pretend that they are going to hire a maid to do their chores for them. Each maid will be paid for how thorough of a job they do. Have them come up with specifics of what constitutes a very good, average, and poor job of doing typical chores at home. (Typically, when critiquing someone else's behavior their expectations are much higher!) Discuss the consequences of leaving out parts of a chore out such as not putting in a new can liner when you take out the trash and why that makes it a poor job.

Ask them to think about the type of job they do on their household chores. If they were being paid or evaluated on this same scale, where would they be? Would they keep their job or be fired? Why should their parents expect less than they expect of the imaginary maid they have hired?



Relate the exercise to grading homework papers and the rubrics you use to gauge for thoroughness. How can they be more thorough when they do their homework? When you assign the next homework assignment, relate it back to this exercise by giving them examples of good vs. poor work.

Discuss what factors make doing the job less thorough? Did you put it off until you didn't have enough time to do it thoroughly? Were you too tired? Were you distracted by the TV? These can apply to chores or homework.



Since the exercise started out by pretending they were hiring someone, relate this to job performance. Most teen jobs are a step up from household chores. The same rubrics that the class comes up with for gauging the performance of their maid are the same types of things that bosses use to evaluate employees for raises, promotions or even keeping the job. Pose this question: If you are a slacker in doing homework and household chores and then get a job, how easy will it be for you to do a good job if you haven't been practicing being thorough and conscientious?



## Smart Goals

SMART is the acronym used as a method of creating goals that are meaningful and practical. Each letter stands for a quality of a goal that will help make it more effective.

**S = 'Specific'** General goals are harder to measure. The more specific the better.

Specific – I'm going to get at least a B on all of my spelling tests.

Non-specific – I'm going to improve my spelling grade.

**M = 'Measurable'** If a goal is not measurable it is difficult to tell if you have accomplished it or not.

Measurable – I'm going to stop skipping breakfast.

Non-measurable - I'm going to try and eat more healthily.

**A = 'Achievable'**

**R = 'Realistic'** Goals need to be within reach from where you are today. If a goal is not reachable right now, choose one that is reachable that is a stepping stone toward the more lofty goal. Breaking it down into smaller chunks may make success more likely.

Achievable and Realistic - I'm going to exercise for 30 minutes 3 times a week.

Not achievable or realistic - I'm going to weight train an hour a day.

**T = 'Timely'** Timely requires choosing goals that are needed now and personalized to your needs. While improving grades is worthwhile, an overweight B student may benefit more from goals that improve health.

Timely - I will track what I eat to better understand the mistakes I need to fix.

Not timely – I will raise my science grade from a B to an A.



## Plan Your Work and Work Your Plan

This phrase summarizes almost all of the I wills for Thoroughness. Have the students work on goal setting. Have them pick one goal to work on for the month. Have them test their goal for effectiveness and appropriateness by using the SMART tips. They should have their goal written down somewhere that they will see it daily. You can have them tape it to their desk, or on their planner. At the end of every week, ask them to assess where they are in relation to making their goal. Recognize that struggling is not a bad sign. Encourage them to stick to it. If half way through the month it is obvious that the goal was not appropriate, work with them to alter the goal to one that is more realistic. Reference Noah Webster's goal change while he was writing the dictionary. He had to take a "detour" and do the word origins first and then tackle his original goal.

There are a number of sites that offer help in goal setting in the classroom:

[http://www.teachingmoments.com/goal\\_setting\\_for\\_teenagers.html](http://www.teachingmoments.com/goal_setting_for_teenagers.html)

<http://www.achieve-goal-setting-success.com/goal-setting.html>

# Robin's Reading List

## Books on Thoroughness

### Grades K – 3:

#### The Wednesday Surprise by Eve Bunting

Children naturally assume, from looking at the front cover of the book, that the grandmother is teaching the young girl how to read. This will make a wonderful birthday surprise for the father. However, everything changes when it's the grandmother who stands up, takes center stage, and reads aloud to her son for the very first time!

#### Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel by Virginia Burton

After working together for many years, Mike Mulligan and his steam shovel, Mary Anne, are told that they are no longer needed. Mike Mulligan is not one to give up easily, so he proposes that he and Mary Anne will excavate the basement for the new town hall in only one day. The entire town appears at the work site to see how this team will fair in the race against time.

#### America's White Table by Margot Raven

As a symbol for and remembrance to service members fallen, missing, or held captive in the line of duty, the White Table is set in many mess halls. It is solemn and solitary...a table where no one will ever sit. As a special gift to

Katie and her sisters are asked to help set the white table for dinner. Katie's mother explains the significance of each item that is placed on the table. Eventually, Katie comes to understand and appreciate the depth of sacrifice that her uncle, and each member of the Armed Forces and their families, may be called to give.

Ruby Holler by Sharon Creech  
13-year old twins, Dallas and Florida, have suffered through several abusive foster homes. They have pretty much given up on ever finding a happy home. They become suspicious when Mr. Trepid, the owner of the orphanage where they grew up, announces to them that they are going to a place called Ruby Holler to keep Mr. and Mrs. Morey company on separate vacations. Dallas accompanies Mrs. Morey hunting down an elusive bird, while Florida accompanies Mr. Morey on a canoe trip. It takes the twins a while to warm up to these strangers. They discover much about themselves and each other, too! This novel celebrates the healing effects of love and compassion.

### Grades 3 – 6:

#### Stargazer by Chris Platt

Thirteen-year-old Jordan McKenzie loves draft horses gentle giants, as they're known in the horse industry. Her favorite is the sweet, dependable Black Percheron,

and she hopes that her mom will let her have one someday. But considering they don't own even one animal on the small farm they rent in their new southern Michigan town, which seems very unlikely. Jordan's fortunes change at a local livestock auction. With the help of a Mennonite boy, Jacob Yoder, she and her mom bid on a draft mare who is in danger of being sold to a slaughterhouse. She's thrilled to become the proud owner of a large, two-thousand-pound draft horse named Star Gazer. But Jordan's joy is short-lived when she learns that her new horse, once the winner of many log pulling contests, is lame and depressed due to years of neglect. Furious, Jordan vows to beat Star Gazer's former owner in the state pulling contest at the end of the summer, but can she get Star Gazer ready to compete?

#### Junkyard Wonders by Patricia Polacco

This inspiring story is based on true events and celebrates the extraordinary influence a teacher can have on her students. As Trisha enters her new school in Michigan she hopes she's not relegated to a special class. At her old school she had trouble learning to read. Much to her disappointment, Trisha learns that Room 206 is known as the



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# Robin's Reading List

junkyard. Their teacher, Mrs. Peterson doesn't allow her students to feel like misfits. She divides her Junkyard Wonders up into tribes, creating a sense of unity among them. One day the children visit a junkyard, which Mrs. Peterson describes as a place full of wondrous possibilities...full of amazing things waiting to be made into something new. It's obvious she sees her class the same way. Urging their creativity, they reclaim and rebuild an old model airplane that they intend to send to the moon. Trisha's tribe manages a triumphant launch.

**Quarterback Season** by Fred Bowen

Everyone believes that Matt Monroe is a shoo-in for the Parkside Middle School football team this year. However, a new student, Devro, is consistent, has speed, and can run the bases. As the fall football season begins, the team has more than its share of challenges and unexpected surprises, as well as victories and upsets on and off of the field. Matt records and analyses these incidents in a journal that he keeps for English class. By the end of the season, Matt realizes that a team is only as good as the sum of its parts, and that playing together is the only way to win!

**T.J.'s Secret Pitch** by Fred

Bowen

More than anything T.J. wants to be a pitcher, but he's smaller than the rest of the team, and his pitches just don't pack the power needed to strike out batters. T.J. has new confidence when he learns about the Pittsburgh Pirates hero Rip Sewell's secret weapon. But will his teammates give him the chance to be a pitcher again? Will he be good enough to lead his team to victory?

**Grades 7 – 12:**

**Touching Spirit Bear** by Ben Mikaelson

Cole Matthews is a violent teen offender convicted of viciously beating a classmate, Peter, causing neurological and psychological problems. Cole elects to participate in Circle Justice, an alternative sentencing program based on traditional Native American practices that results in his being banished to a remote Alaskan Island where he is left to survive for a year. Cynical and street smart, he expects to fake his way through the preliminaries, escape by swimming off the island, and beat the system, again. But his encounter with the Spirit Bear leaves him desperately wounded and gives him six months of hospitalization to reconsider his options. He realizes he must accept responsibility for what he has done, but his pain, pride and

conditioning interfere continually. He learns that he can control his anger, although it may never be gone.

**The Freedom Writers Diary: How a Teacher and 150 Teens Used Writing to Change Themselves and the World Around Them** by The Freedom Writers

When Ms. Gruwell was a first-year high school teacher in Long Beach, CA, teaching the "unteachables" (kids with learning disabilities that no other teacher wanted to deal with), she discovered that most of her students had never heard of the Holocaust. Shocked, she introduced them to books about tolerance...first-person accounts by the likes of Anne Frank and Zlata Filipovic, who chronicled her life in war-torn Sarajevo. The students were so inspired that they began keeping journals of their own lives that showed the violence, illness, homelessness, racism, and abuse that surrounded them. These student diaries form the basis of this book, a lot like *Dangerous Minds*: the outsider teacher who isn't supposed to last a month, comes in and rebuilds a class with hard work and tough love. Readers will be proud to see how these students succeeded at the end of their four-year experience.



# Croskey's Corner

I have spent the last four days installing a dishwasher at my house. Yes, I said four days. At \$10 an hour (the wage rate I have most recently been paid) I have “earned” about \$150.00, which, coincidentally, is how much Sears charges to install. As usual with Home Improvement jobs done by me, a simple procedure became more complicated because of some hidden plumbing problems at my house, and my lack of experience and know-how. I think I am done, but we shall see.

I care about our dishwasher primarily because I am the one who loads and unloads it. I have developed a reputation around here for being obsessive and compulsive about how the dishes are prepared for the washer and how to load them. This has worked against me. My family members are either afraid to load dishes themselves – don't want to displease me – or they see no point because I will just rearrange them after they leave. So, I have stuck myself with the whole job.

This project is instructive for me because it shows my over-doing of a job. If the instructions say to tighten a bolt with half a turn, I give it three quarters turn (and STILL have a tiny leak!). If something should be secured with 2 screws, I put in an extra one. Why? I learned this from my Dad. He is an engineer, and he taught his kids to do a job right the first time, to double check to make sure everything was “tight,” in short, to be Thorough.

The Character Quality of the Month from *Character First!* Is Thoroughness. It is defined as “Knowing what factors will diminish the effectiveness of my work or words, if neglected.”

The dishwasher loading is my own brand of Thoroughness. I got in the obsessive habit of basically washing the dishes before I put them in the dishwasher because I had noticed that, when I didn't do this prep, at the end of the cycle I ended up having to rewash many of the dishes. So, I learned to pay attention to details. If I didn't mind them, my work would be diminished. I think my family might say, with multiple meaning, that “the devil is in the details.”

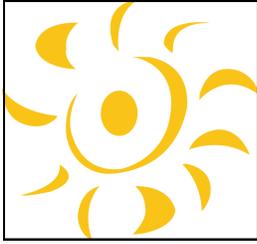
What do we know about Details? Well, late in life I learned that the term relates to cleaning cars. I remember that a friend went out with a new acquaintance. On the way home, my friend became violently ill and vomited. A day later, as a way of cleaning up what was started (another aspect of Thoroughness!), my friend had the car detailed. I came to understand that this meant a meticulous, Thorough, comprehensive cleaning of the car, inside and out. The term threw me because I at first thought it involved some kind of additional painting (of flames? Pinstripes?) on the exterior finish. Nope, just clean every surface of the car. Well, that fascinated me! I knew how to do that. I had done it. I just didn't know it had a name.

I thought of this whole story recently because a window in my car was broken and I had to clean up every shard and piece of glass. Talk about the detailing being devilish! But maybe this is a metaphor for us. When we make a mess of something, there is value in trying to make amends. That might involve re-establishing communication with a friend. It might mean trying to un-gossip, to go out and retrieve half truths spread without care. It might mean cleaning up what we have perpetrated. A thorough cleaning will be the equivalent of detailing a car. No stone left unpecked up. No thread unthreaded. No dirt allowed to settle. No stain to remain.

Checking details Thoroughly also reflects our commitment to Discipline and Integrity. At the Character Council we define Discipline as “adhering to a set of standards.” Integrity is checking for consistency of our values. So, we can show our Thoroughness by not straying from our rightful path and by monitoring our actions to be sure they are consistent with each other and with our beliefs. This can look obsessive and rigid to others. Yet those close to me who embody Discipline choose it when the outcome matters most. The stakes are very high, such as the welfare of a child or the preservation of a friendship. In fact, the most Disciplined, well Integrated people I know are also free-thinking and comfort-loving. Heck, they might have been described as wanting to “Do their own thing” in the hippie era. My wife calls it being a “lush.” But when they are involved in a high-stakes situation, the Discipline and Integrity kick in. They do not settle for an incomplete approach. They consistently structure their solution to such problems. They wish they did not have to be patient. They wish they could avoid the hard, dirty work. They wish they could let things slide. But they care so much about being Thorough that they force themselves to be Patient, Courageous, and Hard-Working. Others think it is easy... or rigid of them. It is likely neither.

Bill Croskey is a school psychologist from the Loveland City Schools

We could teach our students this. Sometimes, apologizing is not enough. Sometimes you have to fix what you have messed up. You have to un-do what you have done. You have to detail your mess. Sometimes, you have to choose Discipline over the easy way. Sometimes you have to carefully check to see that you are not contradicting yourself in word or deed. The best was for us to teach this to kids is to model such thought and action in real-life situations. That would be Thoroughly appreciated.



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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.