



FOUNDATION  
AGAINST  
INTOLERANCE  
& RACISM

**Lesson Title:** Introduction to Character Strengths

**Recommended Grade Level:** K-8

**Recommended Pacing:** 60-90 minutes

**Fair Learning Standards:** HM.K-2.1, HM.3-5.1, HM.6-8.1

**Theme:** Character Strengths

**Era:** Current

**Areas of Focus:** Character Strengths, Ethics, Thriving

**Objectives:**

1. Students will learn what character strengths are.
2. Students will learn briefly what positive psychology is.
3. Students will learn that character strengths are human strengths from every culture.
4. Students will learn why character strengths are important.
5. Students will learn that there are dozens of character strengths.
6. Students will learn briefly about two character strengths as examples: honesty and self-regulation.
7. Students will learn how character strengths are formed by repeated actions.
8. Students will reflect on a way they would like to improve their self-regulation and how it would help them.
9. Students will reflect on a time when they exhibited self-regulation.

**Teacher Instructions:**

1. Define and discuss briefly the key terms.
2. Read together the short preparatory essay on character strengths.
3. Discuss together the short preparatory essay questions; have students take notes.
4. Watch the video.
5. Discuss together the video discussion questions; have students take notes.
6. Assign the writing prompts for homework, giving remaining class time to the task.

**1. Foregrounding Key Terms:**

*Character*: the habits with which a person responds to challenges and opportunities in their lives  
*Character strengths*: habits of living common to cultures around the world that help us to thrive  
*Habits*: the repeated ways with which people tend to respond to situations in their lives  
*Positive Psychology*: the study of human thriving and which habits and actions most help people thrive.

## 2. Short Preparatory Essay

Character strengths are qualities people develop in order to succeed and thrive in their lives. Character strengths are habits that are formed by repeatedly doing the right thing at the right time in the right way for the right reasons. By forming good habits from repeatedly responding in positive, effective ways, people prepare themselves to respond from strength the next time a challenge or opportunity in life demands it.

There are dozens of character strengths, including curiosity, humor, forgiveness, gratitude among many others. The science that studies character strengths, positive psychology, has studied cultures from around the world for decades to find those personal qualities that people from all cultures share that make them particularly successful and happy people.

Character strengths are important qualities for people to have because they help us to get through tough times and take advantage of opportunities. Also, such strengths can help us work well in groups by helping us treat others well. And, in addition to helping people achieve good outcomes, character strengths can be very enjoyable in themselves.

It may help to consider honesty and how it can help people. People are all sometimes tempted to lie in order to get more than their share or to manipulate others. Such dishonesty often poisons relationships and leads to poor outcomes. Honesty is a character strength because it tends to strengthen relationships and keep people united in their pursuit of real goals.

Another example of an important character strength is self-regulation. Self-regulation is the ability to manage our impulses, emotions, and habits to ensure that people can take care of their responsibilities. Self-regulation is being aware that we tend to forget our math homework and to make sure it is in our backpack. Self-regulation also keeps us from blurting out in class whatever crosses our mind and helps us avoid getting a team-harming technical foul in a basketball game when an opponent trash talks.

Every time we overcome our impulses to act harmfully, and we instead act well, we build the habits that are character strengths that will help us respond the best we can to the world we face each day, putting us in position to best succeed and enjoy our lives.

## 3. Discussion questions for essay:

- A. What are character strengths?
- B. Name three character strengths.
- C. How do we form character strengths?
- D. How do character strengths help us to succeed and enjoy our lives?

## 4. Video: <https://youtu.be/Hh1PLuAJXnc>

**5. Discussion questions on short video:**

- A. Define honesty.
- B. Explain how you use honesty as a character strength to live well in your life.
- C. Define self-regulation.
- E. Explain how you use self-regulation to live well in your life.
- F. Why do you think character strengths such as honesty and self-regulation are valued in every culture? Could a culture survive without them?

**6. Written Assignments:**

- A. Write about a specific way that you wish you were better at self-regulation and how getting better at it would help your life.
- B. Write about a time when you were tempted to lose your temper but decided to stay cool, and how your decision affected events afterward.

**Extension Activities:**

Have students keep a self-regulation journal for a week on how they are trying to improve in one specific way.

**Additional Resources:**

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification. New York: Oxford University Press and Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

<https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths>