WALK A MILE IN MY SHOES

What fun I had helping to plan my little grandson’s 2nd birthday party. The theme was “Under the Big Top”. It was easy for me to get excited and involved because I had always LOVED going to the circus. There is just something about the smell of sawdust floors, twinkling lights, eating cotton candy, and watching all the thrilling acts. Since the circus was still fresh on my mind, it was easy to come up with this year’s theme for our Character Coordinators’ meetings, BIG TOP IDEAS.

I think the clown is my favorite circus character. Everyone seems to love the clown. He is happy and wears a big smile, his clown suit, and BIG bright shoes. But you know, we do not know what is really behind the mask of the clown—is he really that happy and care free? As spectators, we do not know where he and his clown shoes have been on that particular day. He and his shoes might have been to his doctor’s office earlier where he learned the news of his serious medical diagnosis. The clown’s shoes might have taken him to a lawyer’s office where he ended a 28 year marriage. Or maybe, he and his shoes have been to his daytime job where he learned he had been terminated. Yes, the clown enters the ring with a BIG smile and appears to have no cares in the world…BUT there is no way to really know how Mr. Clown feels until we have taken a walk in his shoes.

There’s an old Indian proverb dating back to the Cherokee tribe that says, “Don’t judge a man until you have walked a mile in his shoes.” Our Big Top Idea for November was “EMPATHY”. Empathy is about making connections. It’s having the ability to put yourself in someone else’s shoes, to feel how they are feeling, and to understand what they are experiencing.

Empathy can make a difference in our world. It can make our world a kinder place. Learning how to develop the skill of empathizing is not only for children, it is a trait that we must all strive to obtain.

How can we develop and increase our empathy?

- **Walk a mile in someone’s shoes**—understand others from their point of view, where they have been and how they feel
- **Replace anger with compassion**—respond with understanding instead of anger
- **Discover similarities, not the differences**—try to acknowledge what you have in common with the other person
- **Don’t judge too hastily**—ask yourself if you really know the person inside and out and what made them the person they are today

Empathy can move our world to compassion and create a world of kindness. We should all be striving to create an empathetic world. Empathy is a learned skill that can develop and grow through consistent practice. So, if you are willing to increase your understanding of the behavior of others, it is never too late to learn!
“Step Right Up!”

Step Right Up to the Greatest Show on Earth! Character@HEART invites Character Coordinators to explore “Big Top Ideas” during the 2014-2015 school year. C@H workshops will feature circus decorations and circus themed presentations centering around three topics of importance in enhancing character education in Montgomery County and Covington Electric Cooperative sponsored schools. Workshops will focus on Intrinsic Learning, Empathy, and Responsibility, with the final workshop showcasing all three in a “Three Ring Circus”, giving teachers inspiration in using these ideas in the classroom. So Come One! Come All! Share in the excitement “Under the Big Top”!

Character Coordinators’ Workshop

September’s Character Coordinators’ workshop focused on the “Big Top Idea” of Intrinsic Motivation. This topic’s relevance to character education is noted in character.org’s Principle 7 that states, “Character Education should strive to develop students’ intrinsic motivation.” Teachers participated in group activities, discussions, and a presentation encouraging them to think about the use of extrinsic and intrinsic rewards in the classroom:

“How often should I give rewards?”
“What are the most effective kinds of rewards?”
“What rewards might I give other than stickers and candy?”
“How might I use certain privileges as rewards?”
“How can I encourage my students to be motivated from within?”

Teachers were given ideas, and challenged to use them in the classroom, to create learning environments that motivate students to do their best because it is the right thing to do, expecting nothing in return.

“Character is doing the right thing when no one is looking.”

J.C. Watts

“The highest reward for a person’s toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it.”

John Ruskin
November’s Character Coordinators’ workshop spotlighted the “Big Top Idea” of Empathy. Empathy is the ability to put oneself in someone else’s shoes, and to understand the perspective and emotions of others. The presentation started with a moving YouTube clip of students sharing the importance of empathy in school, and how one simple act of understanding can help to ease the circumstances in the life of a hurting classmate. Additional information was presented including quotes, songs, children’s books and activities that could be used to teach the meaning of empathy, and to encourage students to practice being empathetic toward one another. The workshop included an opportunity for teachers to work in groups to explore ways to help students more fully understand the practical application of empathy. A motivational poem was read at the conclusion of the workshop reminding teachers that they can never fully understand their students until they try to “walk a mile in their shoes.”

“No one cares how much you know until they know how much you care.”

Theodore Roosevelt

Workshop Activities on Empathy

“Walk a Mile in My Shoes”
Character Connects

Character@HEART believes in the strong partnership between school and home in nurturing character in the hearts of students. “Character Connects”, designed by C@H, are weekly activity pages highlighting each of the 25 character traits. Teachers are encouraged to send home with each student these helpful teaching tools to spark conversation, perhaps around the dinner table, enhancing and supplementing what teachers are doing with “Character Words of the Week” in the classroom. Character@HEART is pleased to offer this “link” to parents who desire to partner with the school in promoting good character in their children.

Character Education and Children’s Literature

Did you know that children’s books could be used to teach character education? An emphasis on children’s literature at each Character@HEART workshop inspires teachers to “bring literature alive” in the classroom as they use picture books to help instill good character traits into the hearts of boys and girls. Nothing reaches children quite like the colorful pages of a picture book. Discussions about important life issues are often sparked as the classroom teacher turns the pages of an interesting, creative, and sometimes humorous book! Quality literature most often features and develops themes of good character, and can be enjoyed by teachers, parents, and grandparents to creatively discuss positive character traits. Pictured are several of the books featured at the November workshop on Empathy entitled “Walk a Mile in My Shoes”.

Character Traits

Since April 2000, Character@HEART has worked with schools to provide materials and training to implement the finest character education to students in Alabama. The foundation for formal “character education” began in Alabama in 1995, when Act 95-313 was enacted by the Alabama Legislature. This act mandated that Alabama school students in grades K-12, both public and private, receive character education at least 10 minutes a day throughout the school year. In addition, the legislature selected 25 character traits to be emphasized through character education programs. Character@HEART is pleased to help teachers in implementing the following 25 mandated traits.

25 Character Traits

- Cheerfulness
- Citizenship
- Cleanliness
- Compassion
- Cooperation
- Courage
- Courtesy
- Creativity
- Diligence
- Fairness
- Generosity
- Gratitude
- Honesty
- Humanity
- Kindness
- Loyalty
- Patience
- Patriotism
- Perseverance
- Respect for Others
- Respect for the Environment
- Self-Control
- Self-Respect
- Sportsmanship
- Tolerance
Mini Grants

Character@HEART’s school recognition has a new look! In an effort to recognize more schools for their outstanding emphasis on character education, our “School of the Month” recognition has now been replaced with the Character@HEART Character Education Mini Grant Program. This mini grant will be awarded to schools that implement projects, programs, or activities that meet character.org’s criteria for becoming a “Promising Practice”. Submitted applications are judged on how well the activity or program emphasizes at least two of the 11 Principles of Effective Character Education, and at least three of the character.org Promising Practice Topics. Schools are then awarded the monetary grant to be used for funding the activity or program. Character@HEART looks forward to recognizing schools this year that seek creative ways to teach character education!

Students at Morningview Elementary School enjoy a Mustang Character Café Luncheon, for practicing respectful behavior at school. The students, selected by their teacher, are recognized during morning announcements, in the monthly school paper, and with a certificate during the quarterly honor roll assembly.

Students at Flowers Elementary School experienced creativity in action when a local artist, Barbara Davis, conducted an assembly for the students. Mrs. Davis spoke to the students about different gifts/talents, creativity, setting goals, diligence, perseverance, and following dreams. She instructed the students through various drawing techniques, as she discussed character traits in order to nurture and inspire creativity. The goal of this assembly was to use good character traits as a foundation to inspire children to be brave enough to “make their mark” in the world.

We’ve moved!

Character@HEART has a new home!
Our new address is:
4154 Carmichael Court
Montgomery, AL  36106

Our mailing address remains
P.O. Box 240413
Montgomery, Alabama  36124

Character@HEART has a FaceBook Page!

Please “like” us at Character@HEART, Inc. to keep up with the exciting things going on with character education in our schools!
In 2000, Character@HEART was founded as a non-profit organization to train and equip teachers and parents to teach good character and manners to their children. Since then, we have built the community, school, and home partnerships in Montgomery and 18 other counties and 135 schools needed to move those 25 character traits off a piece of paper or the school marquee and into the heart of each child.

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