WHAT MAKES A HUMANE BEING?

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PURPOSE
What are the most desirable and undesirable qualities of humans? Use sample stories and pictures to help students identify our best (and worst) qualities and how we can encourage humane qualities in ourselves and others.

GRADES
3 through 6

TIME
30-60 minutes

MATERIALS
- two prepared poster boards; Velcro
- sample stories showing desirable/undesirable qualities of humans
- individual envelopes with information and photos enclosed
- pencils/pen and paper for each student
- white board and markers

SUBJECT AREAS
Language Arts and Social Studies/History

COMMON CORE STANDARDS
Common Core for grades 3-6: http://bit.ly/1cfXXfz
PREPARATION

1. Find sample stories with accompanying photos (see below) that represent examples of desirable and undesirable human qualities.

Depending on how you wish to lead this activity, you may want all the stories to be about the same general topic (animal cruelty/kindness, human rights/oppression, environmental preservation/destruction, or cover a mixture of topics). You should have enough examples so that small groups can each have at least one “desirable” and one “undesirable” example.

2. Once you have enough examples for your class, laminate them and put a small Velcro strip on the back of each one. Put each one in an envelope. Number the envelopes. (Be sure that example 1 and the last example are examples of “desirable” qualities, so that you begin and end on a positive note.)

3. Prepare two poster boards. One with the heading “Desirable Human Qualities” and one with the heading “Undesirable Human Qualities.” Put long strips or dots of Velcro on the poster boards under the headings, so that the sample stories can be placed on the poster board under the appropriate heading. Place the poster boards on the wall.

PROCEDURE

1. Ask students to respond to the question “What are the most desirable qualities of humans?” Give them a few minutes to write down at least five qualities they think reflect the best qualities a human could have. (You may wish to give a couple of examples if students are unsure of what you
mean (compassion, kindness, generosity, respect, responsibility, etc.).

2. Ask volunteers to share, while you write their responses on the white board under the heading “Desirable Human Qualities.” (The list might include qualities such as compassion, empathy, justice, tolerance, patience, generosity, thoughtfulness, creativity, love, persistence, etc.)

3. “Now let’s look at the other end of the spectrum…” Have students take a few minutes to write down at least five qualities they think reflect the most undesirable qualities a human could have. Ask volunteers to share, while you write their responses on the white board under the heading “Undesirable Human Qualities.” (The list might include qualities such as cruelty, spite, impatience, greed, envy, jealousy, hatred, racism, thoughtlessness, injustice, etc.)

Ask: “Do we all agree that each list represents some of the most desirable and undesirable qualities of humans?”

4. Have students get into groups of four or five. Pass out a couple of envelopes to each group (be sure that each group receives at least one “desirable” and one “undesirable” story). When each group receives their envelopes, have them open them one at a time, read the information on the card inside and look at the accompanying picture. As a group, have them discuss where they think this card should be placed: under the “Desirable Human Qualities” category or under the “Undesirable Human Qualities” category. Groups will also need to decide which of their members will read the information on each card to the rest of the class, and which will place each card under the appropriate heading on the poster board and explain why the group chose to place it there.

5. Once groups have had time to categorize their cards and choose readers and card placers/speakers, ask the group with the envelope marked #1 to take the card out, read what it says, and share the photo with the class. Then have that group place their card under the heading they chose and explain why. Repeat with each group until all examples have been shared and posted.

6. Once each group has had the opportunity to share their cards and hang them under the posters on the front wall, lead a discussion about what they notice about which stories fall under which categories and which qualities are desirable.

7. Ask students (as a class or in small groups) to brainstorm a list of ways
that they can encourage more desirable qualities in themselves and others. Write down their suggestions and post them on the wall, so that everyone can see them each day.

EXTENSIONS

1. Ask students to spend time (a day, week, etc.) observing the people around them, and noticing when they see desirable and undesirable qualities. Have them record those instances to share in a future discussion. (This activity could also be extended to observations of the news and other media.)

2. Have students develop and implement a plan for promoting desirable qualities in their school community (in themselves, fellow students, teachers, staff, etc.)

SAMPLES CARDS (SHOWING ANIMAL CRUELTY/KINDNESS):

“Here are photos of a special dog who had been permanently chained. He was underweight, frightened and had heartworms. I found him when I responded to a complaint of animal cruelty. He decided that I needed to be his new mom. It is just amazing to see the before and after picture of my Brisco. He is now heartworm free, neutered, has all his vaccines and is never chained. You can see the happiness in his eyes now, and he never lowers his tail.
anymore; he carries it high and proud over his back!” ~ Animal Control Officer

TRENTON, Ohio, August 6….China came to the Humane Society as a stray on March 28, 2007, with no license, and with a chain embedded about one inch into her flesh. …According to the Butler County Dog Warden, a Mr. Otis Clark was aware of the injury to his dog but placed China on a harness and left the chain in her neck. He sought no medical treatment for China. The dog soon broke free of the harness and found her way to the Humane Society.