

Character Action Media

Will Avila – Empowering Returning Citizens

Lesson Goals

- Help students realize how the people we choose to be with significantly influence our thoughts and actions.
- Inspire students to take responsibility and control of their own lives and to determine their own future, regardless of their past and their environment.
- Encourage wisdom in learning from our past experiences and applying these lessons for the good of ourselves and others.
- Appreciate the importance of having mentors in our lives and to inspire students to someday be a mentor to others.
- Appreciate the power of hope, perseverance and solidarity with others in striving to achieve our goals.

Primary Virtues

Hope: confident expectation of the fulfillment of a goal or wish

Perseverance: trying hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties

Solidarity: being present with others, unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group

Secondary Virtues

Generosity: giving freely of our own possessions, time and/or talent

Wisdom: ability to apply knowledge, experience, and understanding in ways that are effective and good; the ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting

Leader Introduction

We're going to listen to the story of Will Avila, a man who for many years allowed his environment to negatively define him, but who then decided to change, and now through perseverance, wisdom and generosity is building a better life both for himself and for others.

Audio Clip

The link is located in the footnote at the bottom of the page. (Footnote 1)

Leader Summary

Will Avila brought us into the tragedy of his childhood, as well as his new life, now filled with meaning and purpose. In this interview he didn't have time to explain some important aspects of his transformation. At the age of 26 and coming out of prison for the third time, Avila dared to hope for a better future and was determined to lead a better life. Even though he was rejected 22 times in applying for a job, he kept going until he got the job in the restaurant. He then connected with a non-profit, Free Minds, that introduces former prisoners to poetry and literature. At a poetry reading he met Graham McLaughlin, a businessman who wanted to dedicate his time, talent and resources to helping others. McLaughlin helped Avila create a business plan for his new company, Clean Decisions, provided the money to get it started and gave Avila and two of his workers a temporary home to live in. Avila's transformation is a powerful example of what we can accomplish when we live with hope and dare to define a better future, live with perseverance in striving for our goals, and have someone else in our life to help.

Discussion Question Options *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses if needed)*

Before beginning our discussion, let's read over the virtues and their definitions (included within the online lesson as a separate document)

1. Describe Will Avila's childhood and the environment he grew up within.

How difficult or easy do you think it would have been for Will Avila to choose a different and better path as a child and teenager?

2. Avila's environment defined him as a child and into his young adulthood. How much do you think our environment defines who we are today? Let's talk about this in terms of our school, our community and

our families.

What are some of the positive aspects of our school, community and family that we can focus on?

3. Do you think our environment has to define who we are, or can we define and strive for goals that go beyond our present environment?

What are some of the virtues that can help us to strive for goals beyond our environment? (hope, perseverance, wisdom, solidarity)

4. Will Avila decided at the age of 26 to strive for a better life. What do you think motivated Avila to change at that point of his life?

What virtue did Avila live out in deciding to change? (hope in daring to see and to be confident in pursuing and achieving a better future)

5. Do you think after being rejected 22 times in applying for a job you would have kept going like Avila did?

What virtue did Avila live out in continuing to search for work? (perseverance) How else did he live out perseverance in his life? (striving for a new life and working through the obstacles of his environment, his addictions and criminal record)

6. How was Avila helped by others in pursuing his new life? (Free Minds introduced Avila to poetry, McLaughlin became his mentor and helped as described in the leader summary)

What virtues did these other groups and people live out in helping Avila? (solidarity, generosity)

7. How is Avila now helping himself and other returning citizens? (starting Clean Decisions and hiring other returning citizens to enable them to work, stay away from crime and to view themselves more positively)

What virtues does Avila live out in starting his new company and helping others? (wisdom in learning from his own experiences and applying these lessons to be effective in helping other returning citizens, generosity, solidarity)

8. *Alternative Question:* Instead of leading the students through the story and the related virtues (questions 4-7), ask students to discuss how each of the virtues outlined in the Highlighted Virtues sheet is / was lived

out by individuals within the story.

Journal Writing Options

1. Write about the negative aspects of your environment that you don't want to follow and why they are damaging. Next write about the good aspects of your environment and why they would be / are good for you to follow.
2. Imagine yourself in the future. Write about how you think you may want to be a mentor for others. How would you want inspire others and what virtues would you want to help others live out?

Extended Activities Options

1. Watch the video for the Free Minds Book Club that Will Avila was involved with and discuss its program:

The link is available in the footnote at the bottom of the page (footnote 2).

2. Organize the students into small teams and ask each team to identify a returning citizen who successfully built a new life, accomplishing something significant for themselves and / or for others. Each team should present to the group as a whole outlining the environment the person came from, the crime the person committed, the time served in prison, the accomplishments of the returning citizen and the virtues they lived out in striving for their new life. Each person in the team should present.
3. Organize the students into small teams and ask each team to identify, research and present on a program that seeks to reduce recidivism (convicted criminals committing additional crimes). Each team should present to the group as a whole outlining the goals and work of the program, the program's history, and any data available on whether the program is successful. Include Free Minds Book Club below.

Other Resources

Will Avila's Story

The link is available in the footnote at the bottom of the page (footnote 3).

Free Minds Book Club

<http://freemindsbookclub.org/>

2. <http://freemindsbookclub.org/our-work/book-club-writing-workshop>

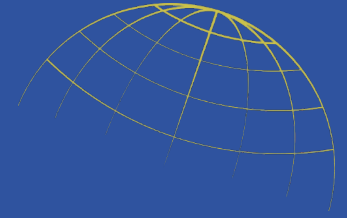
3. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/once-a-violent-offender-his-company-now-keeps-dc-kitchens-spotless/2015/11/27/534acd9d-fdf8-4dad-b07e-eb9dacaf960a_story.html

Character Action Media

Connecting Virtues to Our World

www.characteractionmedia.com Current Links in Education

1126 Dartmouth Road, Flossmoor, IL 60422



Copyright Current links in Education, March 2016

2. <http://freemindsbookclub.org/our-work/book-club-writing-workshop>

3. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/once-a-violent-offender-his-company-now-keeps-dc-kitchens-spotless/2015/11/27/534acd9d-fdf8-4dad-b07e-eb9dacaf960a_story.html