

Character Action Media

Eddie Bocanegra – a Search for Forgiveness and Peace

Lesson Goals:

- Appreciate the importance of forgiveness - from others, for others and for ourselves – as a means of healing and moving forward in life
- Understand that honesty is an important pillar of seeking forgiveness and can require courage
- Increase awareness that life brings many opportunities for choices. Practicing prudence can help prevent us from making poor choices and enable us to make wise ones.
- Understand that solidarity can be positive or negative and that being part of a unified group with a positive purpose can help us to lead a life of true joy and fulfillment
- Appreciate the value of hope in being confident that we can achieve a better future for ourselves and for others, especially if we define positive goals and make plans to achieve them

Primary Virtues:

- Forgiveness - to stop being angry, resentful and desiring vengeance toward a person or group who has harmed you; to free yourself from anger and another from guilt. Forgiveness involves four steps: admitting our mistake, realizing how we have harmed others and ourselves, taking action to right the wrong we have committed and asking for forgiveness
- Hope - confident expectation of achieving a goal or wish, having a strategy to achieve the goal and the motivation to implement the strategy
- Solidarity - unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group; being present with others

Secondary Virtues:

- Honesty - truthfulness; free from deceit or fraud; being honest often requires courage to overcome fear such as admitting how we have failed, or the fear of failure such as not doing well on a test
- Prudence – exercising good judgement in thinking through the implications of our actions and decisions
- Respect for Others - showing full appreciation of the worth and dignity of others; living by “the golden rule”: do unto others as you would want done unto you

Lesson Structure

This lesson contains both a radio interview for students to listen to, and then a video for students to watch.

Leader Introduction

We're going to learn about the life of Eddie Bocanegra who as a young man joined a gang and chose to live out their values of vengeance and violence, and in doing so inflicted great pain and suffering on others and on himself. Eddie's story is one of regret, but also a search for forgiveness and healing, in part by helping others reject violence. We're first going to listen to an interview of Eddie that focuses primarily on his early life and mistakes, and then watch a film clip that focuses on his present work.

Radio Interview

<https://www.wbez.org/shows/storycorps/after-committing-murder-as-a-teen-a-chicago-man-dedicates-his-lifes-work-to-his-victim/8b74459e-b1f6-4227-8ac6-056fa88e7ea6>

Film Clip

[http://www.ymcachicago.org/programs/youth-safety-and-violence-prevention-urban-warriors'](http://www.ymcachicago.org/programs/youth-safety-and-violence-prevention-urban-warriors/)

Leader Summary

Eddie's life is an inspiring story of a person who has the courage and honesty to admit his mistakes, and to seek forgiveness and healing by helping others and working for peace. We can all learn from Eddie's life both in avoiding the mistakes he made, and from his example of determination and hope in working to positively change his life and the lives of many others.

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. How did the values of Eddie's family differ from the values of his gang? (Eddie said in the radio interview that his family is a Christian family and that faith teaches forgiveness and peace, whereas the gang promotes revenge and violence)
2. Eddie grew up in a positive family environment, yet as a teenager, he ultimately chose to become a gang member. The interview and film clip don't cover it but what reasons do you think Eddie may have had to make this choice? (In another interview he discussed being in a gang may offer protection for his siblings and it would give him an identity and importance)

What virtues did he ignore in making this choice? (prudence in not thinking though what joining a gang would likely encourage him to do that could harm his family, himself and others; respect for others in not appreciating the dignity and value of others worth and instead viewing others through the lens of the gang's values)

3. How do you think Eddie's crime affected the family of his victim? How do you think it affected his own family?
4. Why do you think Eddie went to the police and confessed that he was the one who committed the crime? What virtues did he live out in this decision? (honesty, courage)
5. What do you think motivated Eddie to earn a college degree?
6. Eddie states, "*I think there is no better way to ask forgiveness than by doing the work that I do.*" What do you think he means by this?
7. Urban Warriors develops solidarity among the men involved. Explain how this solidarity compares to the solidarity of members in a gang.
8. Has Eddie received forgiveness for his crime from society? Do you think he will someday receive it from his victim's family?
9. Eddie's actions in seeking forgiveness can serve as a model for us with four main steps. The first three steps Eddie has already done are:

1st admitted that he was wrong and the mistakes he made

2nd realizes how his actions negatively impacted others and himself

3rd is taking action in working to make up for how he has harmed others

What is the 4th step that Eddie hasn't yet done? (asking the family of his victim for forgiveness). Do you think it's time for Eddie to do this?

Journal Writing Options

1. How difficult is it to forgive another person? Write about a time where you were able to forgive someone who harmed you. What made it difficult to forgive the other person, what motivated you to forgive them, and how did you feel afterward?
2. When one of the Urban Warrior graduates was asked how he had changed from before he joined the program, he replied, "*I don't see myself taking a life no more; I see myself changing somebody's life. I don't see myself going to prison; I see myself going to college.*" Write about how you see yourself today and in the future.

Extended Activity

Divide students into pairs. Review the virtue of prudence, which means exercising good judgement in thinking through the implications of our actions and decisions before we act. While the lack of prudence can lead to poor decisions, living out this virtue helps us to make wise decisions that will improve our lives. Taking turns, share with your partner an example of a time in your life where you neglected to apply prudence and the consequences it caused. Then share a time where you were prudent, and explain how this resulted in a more positive outcome.

Other Resources

Eddie discusses how he began to transform his approach to life in prison and his work with Ceasefire to help others reject violence.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHr8OAgEE68>

Profile of Eddie by the University of Chicago school of Social Service Administration

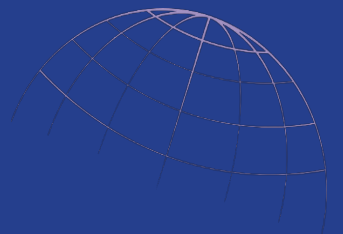
<http://ssa.uchicago.edu/eddie-bocanegra-am-15>

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