

Character Action Media

Victor Rios – The Value of Second Chances

This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. If you choose 2 sessions you can use the discussion questions, journal writing and extended activities designated by session (A), and session (B). Instructors should feel free to use whichever activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues and an overview of the story before each session.

Lesson Goals

Help students understand:

- The importance of compassion in desiring to help and to empower others.
- How affirming and believing in others can help inspire them to change.
- The value of second chances.
- The importance of acknowledging our own dignity and value in enabling us to change our lives for the better.
- The value of wisdom in assessing our lives honestly and determining how we can change for the better.
- The value of their personal experiences as a foundation to help others, now or in the future, through mentoring.

Primary Virtues

- **Compassion**—feeling of sympathy for the distress of others with the desire to help.
- **Perseverance**—trying hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties.
- **Respect for Ourselves / Others**—showing full appreciation of the worth and dignity of ourselves/others.

Secondary Virtues

- **Caring**—a caring person lives with empathy in trying to understand another person's situation, compassion in desiring to help others, and then with generosity in acting to help.
- **Fortitude**—mental and emotional strength in making the right decisions, in the face of difficulty, adversity, danger, or temptation.
- **Solidarity**—unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group; being present with others.
- **Wisdom**—ability to apply knowledge, experience, understanding in ways that are effective and good.

Leader Introduction

In this lesson, we meet Victor Rios, who feels like he has lived two lifetimes, transforming himself from a gang member and high school dropout into a successful professional and father, while also working to help young people avoid the same mistakes he made. Let's watch for the virtues that Victor and others lived out that enabled him to transform his life.

Film Clip: Gang Member-Turned Ph.D. Mentors Youth on the Fringes

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4G3H5goU_Mo

Leader Summary

Victor Rios's transformation from a gang member to a university professor, mentor, and author is an incredible story made possible by second chances and his own perseverance. At crucial moments in Victor's life, compassionate adults gave Victor a second chance and importantly reminded him of his own dignity and value. Let's discuss how Victor's story applies to our lives.

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. What are some of the reasons that you think Victor dropped out of school early in his life? (wanted to help his mother with the bills so he left school at times to cut grass and earn money, joined a neighborhood gang for protection, bad relationships with teachers and authority figures)

Thinking about our own lives, what are some reasons why we do not want to come to school? Oppositely, what are the reasons we continue to go to school? (to learn and to develop the understanding, wisdom and skills to accomplish our own goals; see friends; participate in sports, clubs and other after-school activities) **(A)**

2. What major event caused Victor to "wake up" and reflect on his life as a gang member? (death of Smiley, his best friend and a fellow gang member)

What did Victor realize as a result of this time of reflection? (he was not okay, he could end up in jail or dead, he needed to turn his life around) **(A)**

3. Who reached out to Victor and in what ways that encouraged him to reflect on his life?

(-His teacher Ms. Russ who told Victor she cared about him and that she would be there for him to support him, but he had to do the work

-Mentors

-Police officer who offered Victor a second chance)

How did Victor respond to these people and what did he say they helped him to realize?

(He said they made him feel that they believed in him, that he has dignity "and I ran with that and am still running with that")

What virtues did Victor's mentors, teacher and police officer live out in helping Victor? (compassion, caring and respect for others – the essence of this is acknowledging the dignity and value of each person) **(A)**

4. Who are people in our school, at home, and in our community who convey to us that we have dignity and value?

Do we have to rely on adults to give us this sense of dignity and value in our lives or can we find this within ourselves, within our spiritual lives, and from each other as friends? **(B)**

5. Even when we make changes in our lives, our past can still follow us and it's hard for us to break out of bad habits, such as when Victor picked a fight with members from a rival gang. What actions specifically can we take, and what attitudes and virtues can we focus on, to keep us on the right path?
(We advise writing student replies on the board for each part of this question. Some answers are spending time with people in our lives who will help keep us focused on positive goals such as a mentor, family members and hopefully the friends we choose; fortitude in making the right decision especially when it's difficult; wisdom in focusing our lives on what is good and lasting) **(B)**
6. Victor uses his life experience as a gang member and troubled youth to reach out to people in similar situations. The young man Victor mentors points out some of the advantages Victor has as a mentor who has "been there". What are these advantages? (he is relatable, he knows where they're coming from and what they're about, he knows how to talk with them) **(B)**
7. How can we live out respect for others, affirming their dignity and value, and the call to give others a second chance among our friends and within our families? (encourage students to become very specific here in discussing scenarios where they can live this out, both with simple and more powerful examples) **(B)**

Journal Writing Options

1. Write about a big moment in your life that encouraged you to stop and think about what is truly important? What did you feel during that time and what were the decisions you made to make changes in your life?

Or

Have you ever helped someone through a similar time of reflection? What advice did you offer and how did it work out? **(A)**

2. Write about a time you gave someone else a second chance. How did you feel? How did the other person feel, and what difference did the second chance make in your lives? Please include some of the virtues covered in this lesson in your writing. **(B)**
3. Recall the last achievement you worked really hard for—a good grade in a difficult subject, achieving a goal in a sport, helping someone else in a meaningful way, saving up for a big purchase, etc. What was your motivation? What action steps did you take? How did it feel to achieve your goal? **(B)**

Extended Activities Option

1. Divide the students into groups of 3-4. Each group is to come up with 1-2 short skits about giving / receiving second chances. Each group should focus on second chances within our families, or among friends. All students must participate in at least one skit.

Name each skit and write its title on the board. Ask students to then vote on which “second chance skit” was best in each of three categories:

- Best family second chance skit
- Best friends second chance skit
- Most likely to actually do it second chance skit

Next ask students to discuss the key messages they took away from each winning skit. **(B)**

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