

Character Action Media

Jeison Aristizábal: Physically Disabled And Truly Unstoppable

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 student to:

- Appreciate that every person, including those with disabilities, has something of value to contribute to our community
- Develop an appreciation that our value comes not from exterior traits and how others view us, but rather from us defining our true self and being true to our self
- See how important it is to affirm the value of others and to inspire others
- Realize that each of us has a purpose in life, unique to our own talents and interests
- Feel inspired to assess our own talents and interests and to begin assessing our own purpose in life
- Develop an appreciation for the reality that achieving large goals requires defining and achieving many small incremental steps
- Generate greater awareness of those with disabilities and how our community and culture supports or doesn't support them
- Become inspired to now, and in the future, advocate and work for others with disabilities

Primary Virtues

Caring: to help others; 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.

Perseverance: trying hard and continuously despite obstacles and difficulties.

Respect for Ourselves and Others: showing full appreciation of the worth and dignity of ourselves and others; living by "the golden rule"; do unto others as you would want done unto you.

Secondary Virtues

Hope: confident expectation of achieving a goal or wish.

Wisdom: having a strategy to achieve one's goal; ability to apply knowledge, experience, understanding in ways that are effective and good; the ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting.

Integrity: being true to oneself; steadfast adherence to a moral or ethical code.

Leader Introduction

From birth, Jeison Aristizábal faced difficult challenges. He was born in a poor neighborhood in Cali, Colombia, and he was also born with cerebral palsy, a condition caused by brain damage that affects Jeison's nervous system and his ability to move. Despite the challenges of growing up in a country that has few resources or expectations of success for people with disabilities, Jeison felt called to help other people with disabilities achieve their dreams. Jeison recently received the CNN Hero of the Year award for 2016 in honor of his incredible work. Let's watch Jeison's story and see how he transformed an idea and a calling into a powerful reality.

Film Clip: CNN Heroes Tribute: Jeison Aristizábal

<http://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2016/12/12/cnn-heroes-jeison-aristizabal-tribute-pkg.cnn>

Leader Summary

Jeison's work is helping to change the way the people of Colombia view the potential and value of people with disabilities. Possibly Jeison has also influenced the way we view those with disabilities, and challenged our ideas on how we value ourselves and others. Jeison's success also shows us the power of perseverance in not giving in to the obstacles we encounter in life, the importance of the support and affirmation that we receive and can give to others, and the importance of taking small steps to achieve larger goals.

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. Jeison's mother has been an important part of his success. What are the different ways his mother supported and encouraged him?
(encouraged Jeison to face his challenges; encouraged him to define and to achieve his dreams; helped him gain access to services he needed from therapy to school; simply loved and encouraged him) (A)
2. In the video, Jeison shows us his own wisdom in his statement, "Sometimes when we see a big problem, we feel like we can't do something, but starting with the little things, helping fix the little things, we can transform many lives."

What little things did Jeison do to address the big problem of children with disabilities and their families not receiving enough support? (started by providing therapy to children with disabilities in his parents' garage, affirming the value of children with disabilities by offering them education and joyful activities)

Let's share some stories of experiences we have had, or seen, where little things added up to make a big difference in our life, or the lives of others. These stories can come from sports, our family life, school, the news and from historical examples. (A)

3. What do you think is the main takeaway message from Jeison's experience and story?
(After each main message offered by a student ask them to then state the virtue/s associated with that message. Options are: "Never give up, always fight for your dreams" - perseverance; we can accomplish big things from small steps - wisdom; see the value of ourselves and affirm the value of others – respect for ourselves and others)
(A)

4. People who are born with or develop disabilities can sometimes become sad or angry about their situation. Jeison said that sometimes people with disabilities become angry with God. What did Jeison say is the reason he thinks he has his disability? (“God chose me to help children with disabilities, and their families, and to build a chain of dreams”)

What are the virtues that Jeison is living out in his chosen life and work? (caring and the associated virtues of empathy, compassion and generosity)

Do you think we each have a special calling or purpose in our lives, whether that comes from God as Jeison believes, or from within ourselves?

Even though we are young, what can we do now to begin finding our calling, our purpose in life? (think about what interests us, what we enjoy, what are our unique talents and abilities) (B)

5. What does Jeison’s story tell us about how we value ourselves and others? (our value doesn’t come from our exterior traits, or even from our abilities, but rather in part in striving to do the best with what we have as Jeison is doing) (B)
6. Generally speaking, how do you think people within America view and approach people with disabilities?

Do you think we offer enough care and affirmation for and with those with disabilities? (B)

7. For those of us who know someone with a disability, do we interact with them differently than with someone who does not have a disability? Let’s share some examples from our own lives and discuss whether we think we are on the right track or can improve. (B)
8. Think about someone you know who has a disability. Let’s discuss how they bring joy to the lives of people they know and interact with?

Let’s also share stories of how people with disabilities have set out what we may initially think are surprising goals and then accomplished them. (B) (this is also a discussion question below)

9. What organization(s) do we know of within our community that serve people with disabilities? Are there ways we can get involved with them? (B)

Journal Writing Options

1. Jeison’s mom encouraged him, loved and supported him and helped him develop the strength to strive to achieve his goals. Write about someone in your life who has done this for you, or about how you have been / are this person for someone else. (A)
2. Jeison achieves his goal of helping children every day because he focused on many small steps that built up his nonprofit into what it is today. Think about a situation in your life where you were proud of what you have achieved. Write about your own wisdom and the small and big steps that led to your achievement. Also write about how it felt to achieve your accomplishment? (A)

3. Think of someone you know who has a disability. Write about how they bring joy to the lives of people they know. Have they surprised you in what they can achieve? Should it surprise us? Be sure to include some of the virtues they live out in striving to achieve their goals. (B)

Extended Activities Options

1. Break out into teams of 3. Each group creates a map that goes through their typical school day, reimagined as though they had a disability such as blindness, deafness, dyslexia, using a wheelchair (choose one). Each team should outline the obstacles at various points on the map, as well as various aides put in place to help a student with that disability. Each team should then write out any recommended changes to better assist a student with that disability. (A)
2. Break out into teams of 3. Ask each team to discuss whether our school and other public places such as stores, restaurants, parks, etc. do enough to enable access for people with disabilities. Each team should then present to the group on their views and any recommended changes. (B)
3. See more photos of Jeison and the children he serves at his nonprofit ASODISVALLE at <http://www.cnn.com/2016/06/23/health/cnn-heroes-jeison-aristizabal/index.html>. Check out Jeison's nonprofit website at <http://www.asodisvalle.com/> (translation needed through internet browser) (B)

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