

Character Action Media

Veronika Scott: Empowering the Homeless and Challenging Stereotypes

Please note the new format for the first discussion question, which explains the parentheses prompts at the end of each virtue definition. If you choose to use the lesson over 2 sessions then we have outlined recommended activities for the first session (A) and second 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 appreciate the value of:

- education in improving our lives and empowering us to help others
- wisdom in learning from our own experiences and the experiences of others, and then applying this knowledge and understanding effectively for our own good and the good of others
- humility in being open to others' views as a means of learning and attaining wisdom
- individual initiative, responsibility and perseverance in defining and working to achieve goals despite whatever difficulties we may encounter
- work in helping us to attain a sense of self-worth and fulfillment
- caring and generosity in empowering others with opportunity
- respect for others and challenging how we view and perceive others, and to consider if we have false pre-conceived perceptions of others
- solidarity in bringing different people and organizations together to achieve a shared goal

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.
(Where do we see concrete examples in Veronika's project of how she cares for people experiencing homelessness?)
- **Humility**—realizing that we don't have all of the answers and being open to learning from others; an honest self-appraisal of our strengths and weaknesses
(What did the homeless woman shouting at Veronika say and how did Veronika's response indicate that she is humble?)
- **Respect for Others**—showing full appreciation of the worth and dignity of others and of ourselves, and not judging others by their circumstances
(This virtue is covered in the 2nd and 3rd questions.)

Secondary Virtues

- **Perseverance**—trying hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties. *(In what ways did Veronika show perseverance in her journey to start The Empowerment Plan and in her personal life?)*
- **Solidarity**—unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group; being present with others. *(Solidarity is about a number of people or different groups uniting around a shared purpose. How is solidarity being lived out in helping the workers at the Empowerment Plan?)*
- **Wisdom**—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. *(What were the steps that Veronika took in building her project and how does it connect to the virtue of wisdom? Think also about the difference between a short-term fix and long-term solution.)*

Leader Introduction

In this story, we learn about Veronika Scott the founder and CEO of The Empowerment Plan. As someone who experienced homelessness growing up, Veronika took advantage of a college class assignment to help the homeless by empowering them with jobs. Let's see how Veronika is living in solidarity with the homeless of Detroit, and how her story may challenge our perceptions of the homeless.

Film Clips:

One Stitch Closer: Veronika Scott empowers other women

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mo-kvh1w60w>

Now that we've seen how the project came about and what its goals are, let's listen to the story of Ashley, one of the women who works with Veronika and The Empowerment Project.

The Empowerment Plan

<https://vimeo.com/180763373> (we recommend starting this video at 30 seconds)

Leader Summary

Veronika and the women working at The Empowerment Plan are creating both short-term fixes and long-term solutions to homelessness. Their work is possible because of Veronika receiving a scholarship and taking full advantage of her educational opportunities, and then being creative in becoming an entrepreneur and starting her own business. It's important to mention something not in the videos, that Veronika could only accomplish her goals with the help of many other organizations: foundations and individuals who donate money, and groups that help the women working there with affordable housing, furnishings, childcare, and education to complete high school, learn how to budget and to develop new skills. Veronika's story is an inspiring example of how we can take opportunities given to us and in turn help create opportunities for and with others. Let's talk about how Veronika's work and story apply to our lives.

Discussion Question Options *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses below for questions 2-5)*

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

1. What did you find to be inspiring, surprising or most meaningful about the story we just watched? As you offer your comment, connect it to one or a couple of the virtues, defined on the sheet we just passed out and listed on the board. We'll keep discussing new points about the story until we have discussed each of these virtues. (A)

Discussion Leaders – above in the list of the virtues are in parentheses discussion tips / reminders if students don't bring up a discussion point related to that virtue. Note that we will discuss respect for others in questions 2-3.

2. What did Veronika say about how some people touring their factory spoke about the women working there? ("I can't believe you were homeless," they were shocked that they do this good of work, etc.)

What did Veronika say about these responses? ("Do you not realize how offensive you're being?")

It's interesting how Veronika now views this as a constructive challenge saying the "best part of the Empowerment Plan, the best part of my job is changing how people value others." Veronika also stated, "Homelessness is not a defining characteristic, it is a temporary state of being, it does not define who you are, it does not make you worthless by default."

Do think we are at times guilty of the same thing in judging others by their circumstances or appearance, instead of at a deeper level?

When we judge people by their appearances or circumstances what virtue are we not living out? (respect for others)

Let's share some stories from our own lives where we initially came to a conclusion about a person because of their outward appearances and then later realized we were completely wrong? (B)

3. The virtue of respect includes respect for ourselves. How does The Empowerment Plan promote their workers respect for themselves? (Ashley and other workers discuss how working gives them a sense of pride, and they feel good about providing for themselves and serving others) (B)
4. How did Veronika's education help her launch The Empowerment Plan? (the idea for the project came from a class assignment, her education gave her the knowledge to write a business plan and to carry it out)
Do you think education will help you to better serve others? (B)
5. Empowerment is about opportunity. Do you think our nation and local community give all individuals the opportunities to succeed? Let's discuss both the areas we are doing well in, and areas where you think we need to improve. (B)

Journal Writing Options

1. Veronika stated: "People can tackle far more than they think they can." Write about a time in your own life where you found this to be true. (A)
2. Write about a way/s that you want to empower others now, or in the future. It can be though a charity, your full time work in a job that you can see yourself doing,

or even the way you relate to other people in your everyday life. (B)

Extended Activities Options

1. Let's discuss the causes of homelessness. There are many, but let's list at least 5 causes and I'll write them on the board.

Now for each cause, let's discuss both the individual issues that may have led to this cause, as well as whether each cause occurs because of larger issues within our society. Do some of these causes relate or feed off of each other?

1. #TakeASEQondLook Campaign. Watch the video "Do you judge a book by its cover? #TakeASEQondLook!" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Alt4r56IOLw>).

What do you think are some takeaways from the interactions you see? Were the ideas that people had about what the other person looked like true? What kind of lessons can we learn from this type of blind interaction?

Create your own "take a second look" activity within your school or group. Figure out who would participate. What kinds of questions would suggest that the participants to ask each other? How would you record people's reactions to who they saw when they remove their blindfolds?

2. Learn more. Check out The Empowerment Plan online at www.empowermentplan.org.

Character Action Media

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