

Character Action Media

Teacher and Student Share the Gift of Serenity

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 to:

- develop their own strategies for living with serenity in being able to remain calm and peaceful, even when dealing with challenges beyond their control
- recognize how their worries can negatively affect their focus, and realize how managing their worries can help them to perform better in the classroom and in all aspects of their lives
- realize the importance of fortitude and perseverance in becoming more resilient in their ability to recover from negative events beyond their control and to achieve their goals
- appreciate their teachers and all people who share their experiences and wisdom to help others live fulfilling lives
- consider what they have learned from others that has been of value to them and how they can “pay it forward” by sharing this wisdom with others

Primary Virtues

Serenity — the state of being calm, peaceful

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

Courage - the capacity to meet danger and difficult situations without giving way to fear; to have the courage of one's convictions; to be willing to put one's opinions into practice.

Secondary Virtues

Fortitude - mental and emotional strength in making the right decisions in the face of difficulty, adversity, danger, or temptation.

Perseverance—trying hard and continuously despite obstacles and difficulties

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

Leader Introduction

Serenity is a topic that we sometimes hear about but rarely take the time to consider. Today we have the opportunity to explore the importance of serenity, and how to calmly deal with negative developments in our lives through the story of a teacher and a student whose lives intersected not just in the classroom, but years later in a surprising way. By the way, the story we are about to see was created by high school students.

Film Clip: Teacher's lesson comes full circle after life-changing accident

<https://studentreportinglabs.org/video/teachers-lesson-comes-full-circle-life-changing-accident/>

Leader Summary

Dr. White taught Aaron in the 4th grade a way to keep his anxiety at bay and to achieve a greater sense of calm and serenity, and for Aaron this strategy was so important that it stuck with him for the rest of his life. This is just one example of how teachers and all of us can have a powerful and positive impact on others, and especially if we imitate Aaron and share with others the goodness we have learned and experienced in our own 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 things that we as students worry about? Let's make sure we include things related to school, friends, family, and our community. (please write student responses on the board)

Now let's share some of the ways that we handle and deal with these worries that work well for us? (a more comprehensive activity for this topic is presented below in Extended Activities option 2)

What approach does Dr. White and Aaron live out in dealing with their worries? (they identify an issue that they are worried or concerned about, identify whether it is within or outside of their control, and then write it down and place it in a "worry jar")

Do you think this is a good strategy for dealing with issues that worry us, and what is the advantage of actually writing down the worry and placing it in a jar?

What may be missing from the worry jar approach that we should also consider doing to deal with our worries in a good way? (For those issues that we can control or influence, to come up with a specific approach and strategy for dealing with them) (A)

2. Dr. White spoke of how Aaron had difficulty focusing and doing well in class because of his worries and anxieties. Do you think that in our lives being overly worried about issues hurts our performance in school, and even affects how we interact with our friends and family?

Does worrying ever actually help the situation we are worried about? (A)

3. Dr. White is a powerful example of resiliency in recovering from and adjusting to a serious physical injury and continuing disability. What virtues did she live out in her recovery and life as a whole as she earned her doctorate and became an author? (fortitude, perseverance) (B)
4. What is the difference between fortitude and perseverance? Let's talk about this difference using the story of Dr. White? (Fortitude is the attitude of mental and emotional strength that enables us to then live with perseverance in striving to overcome obstacles.) (B)
5. How can we support our classmates who might be experiencing significant issues that worry them? (being a good listener; if welcomed by our friend to offer suggestions for how to deal with their issue; to simply spend time and have fun with our friend) (B)
6. Serenity Prayer. The leader writes the Serenity Prayer on the board:

*Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.*

How is each virtue mentioned in the prayer (serenity, courage, wisdom) lived out by Dr. White and / or Aaron?

Do you think saying the Serenity Prayer and thinking about how it applies to our lives can help us to better deal with challenging situations? (B)

Journal Writing

Write about an issue in your life that you worry about and that causes you to feel stress. After describing the issue, write about whether you are able to address the issue in a positive way and if yes exactly how you can address the issue. If you can't change the issue, write out how you will try to achieve a greater level of serenity in dealing with the issue. (B)

Extended Activities Options

1. Fold a piece of paper into 2 or 4 sections and tear out each section. Next write on each section something that you worry about. After writing each one:
 - read it to yourself, ask yourself whether you can change the issue
 - for issues you can change, come up with a plan for addressing the issue
 - for issues you can't change, decide how you will achieve a greater level of serenity in dealing with it
 - next crumple up each worry and throw it away in a recycling bin or trash can

Discuss as a class how it felt to throw our worries away. Is this an exercise you imagine might be helpful in the future? Do we want to share this exercise with others? (A)

2. Serenity Exercises. Leader will prompt students to share and come up with activities they can do to be serene when troubles, obstacles and pressures come into their lives. Read the definition of the serenity out loud.

What activities, strategies, exercises, etc. have you used, heard of, or can now think of to reach a state of serenity when we face difficult challenges and obstacles?

Here are some examples to prompt if students don't offer many suggestions:

Empowering meditations: develop your own motto to deal with challenges by repeating a phrase such as, "I can handle whatever comes my way, and I will control my own response to any situation."

Prayer: for those who believe in God to ask for God to be with us during difficult times - to illuminate our minds with God's wisdom, to inspire our hearts with God's love, and to strengthen us to see through our challenges.

Exercising: releases hormones that help us to feel good and release stress

Listening to music: our favorite songs can motivate us to take on a challenge or help us feel that someone understands how we feel

Memories: thinking back on happy memories to remember that things have gone right in the past

Physical contact: holding someone's hand or giving them a hug

Breathing Exercises: "box" breathing method: breathe in for 3 seconds, hold for 3 seconds, breathe out for 3 seconds, hold for 3 seconds

Progressive Muscle Relaxation: slowly and repeatedly tightening and releasing various muscle areas (such as shoulders, thighs, calves, etc.)

Meditation: sitting quietly, or listening to soft, calm music, and quieting your mind

Creative Visualization: imagining yourself in a situation that is especially relaxing and / or enjoyable for you

Friendship and Community: spending time with people who support you and who you trust

Personal Care: keeping up with good hygiene and eating healthy foods

Journaling/Gratitude Notebook: keeping track of things you are grateful for, writing down your thoughts to help organize them

Favorite hobby: doing something you enjoy

(B)

3. Role Play. Organize students into teams of 3-4. Each team will create a 1- 3 minute skit. Each team will act out a situation to demonstrate how to handle a pressured situation with serenity. The instructor can assign each team a general subject matter so students have the benefit of considering how to achieve serenity in the different areas of our lives that can generate pressure—school, family, peers, community developments. (B)

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