

# Two Young Brothers and a Texas Community Show Us the Value of Family Love and Solidarity

*This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before the discussion questions.*

### Lesson Goals

Help students...

- Appreciate the value of family support and dedication, especially during difficult times in our lives
- Acknowledge and appreciate the people in our lives who sacrifice to improve our lives
- Consider how our own chosen duties will sometimes take precedence over our own near term wants
- Develop a commitment to persevere through the challenges of life
- See how being generous towards those in need can make a significant difference in the lives of others
- Consider how when community members come together in solidarity, we can accomplish our goals more effectively than by ourselves
- Be grateful for all that we have in our lives and can often take for granted such as our home, family, school, etc.

### Highlighted Virtues

**Family Dedication and Support:** complete dedication for the well-being of members of our family, physically, emotionally and spiritually, motivated by love

**Duty:** something that one is expected or required to do according to one's own standards; duty can also come from what is expected of us as members of our family, citizens of our local community, nation and other communities.

**Trustworthy:** to be a person worthy of confidence where others can rely on us to do or to provide what is right or needed

**Perseverance:** trying hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties

**Caring:** to help others; a caring person lives with empathy, compassion and generosity

**Empathy:** trying to understand another person's situation; entering into the feeling or spirit of others and imagining yourself in another person's situation

**Compassion:** feeling of sympathy for the distress of others, with the desire to help

**Generosity:** giving freely of our own possessions, time and/or talent.

**Solidarity:** unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group; being present with others

### Leader Introduction:

Today we are going to learn about two brothers, 22 year old Jaylan and 12 year old Julian, who've faced exceptional challenges in their lives, including the death of both of their parents and a natural disaster that nearly destroyed their home. Let's see how their perseverance, commitment to each other, and the support of others in their community have enabled them to overcome their challenges.

### Lesson Article and Video:

(Please read the article at the bottom of this lesson and then play the video)

Washington Post Article: Source:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2022/08/23/home-renovated-for-two-brothers/>

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

### Leader Summary:

Jaylan and Julian's heart wrenching, yet inspiring story, shows us the incredible value of family dedication, perseverance and being trustworthy. It's also encouraging to see how Jaylan's efforts then attracted the attention of the community who worked together to repair the brothers' home. Let's discuss how their story speaks to our own lives.

### Discussion Question Options: *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses)*

Before beginning our discussion, let's read over the virtues and their definitions, found in the online lesson as a separate document.

1. What are the challenges that Jaylan and Julian have had to face in their lives?  
(the death of both of their parents, their home being nearly destroyed, contractors stealing from them, having to move in with their grandma, Jaylan having to drop out of college to support his brother and himself financially)
2. Jaylan had a strong sense of **duty** to look after his brother, commenting, "Julian became my priority. . . I promised my mom that I'd look after him and the house, so I dropped out of college. . . I wanted my brother to feel cared for and loved." He also said that he "had no idea what I was doing with the damaged house, but I wasn't going to give up on it."

In fulfilling his sense of duty to his mother and brother, what virtues did Jaylan live out?  
(As students present their answers write them on the board. **Family dedication and support** for his brother, **trustworthiness** in keeping his promise to his mother to watch out for his brother and taking care of their home, **perseverance** in continuing to be present for his brother, even when it required personal sacrifice)

How do you think Jaylan felt about having to drop out of college?  
Do you think Jaylan can still attend college at another time?

Let's practice some **empathy** and place ourselves in Jaylan's position. How easy or difficult do you think it would be to make the same decisions if we found ourselves in the same situation?

Do you think Jaylan believes his sacrifice is worth it?  
(Jaylan said, "My little brother is my main purpose right now. Just seeing him every morning makes me smile.")

Having a sense of **duty** comes from caring about something deeply, like our friends, family, community, country or a group that we are a part of. Let's share some examples of duty from our own lives, big and small examples, where our sense of duty encouraged us to sacrifice something to help another person or to serve a greater good. (If they don't do it on their own, encourage students to discuss whether the sacrifice was worth it)  
[This is also a journal prompt below.](#)

3. How might Julian's life be different if Jaylan's dedication to him was not as strong?

Let's share some stories of family members, or another person in our life, who has lived out a sense of **duty** towards us in sacrificing to help us through a difficult time or in helping us to strive towards a goal. [\(Also a journal prompt below\)](#)

4. Let's look at the virtue of **trustworthiness** again: "to be a person worthy of confidence where others can rely on us to do or to provide what is right or needed"

In her absence, Jaylan's mother trusted him to look after and guide his brother. Julian also relies on and trusts his brother to provide for him. What are some typical things people trust us to do in our own daily lives?

(Parents trust us to look out for our siblings and follow through with chores to benefit our families; teachers trust us to complete school work and behave well; friends trust us to be loyal and to have their best interests in mind, etc)

5. Volunteers with Katy Repairs said, "From the very first day they said they were going to take on this project, I wanted to help," and "I felt devastated that this young man had to have all of this responsibility after his mom died. This is the house where he grew up with his brother. I wanted to help make it new again." What virtues did the volunteers display when they rallied together to help repair the brothers' home?  
(**Caring** in having **empathy** for the situation the brothers were in, **compassion** in desiring to help them and **generosity** in giving of their own time, money, and resources; **Solidarity** in coming together with the brothers and working together to repair the home for the boys)

6. When their home repairs were revealed, Julian spoke to the power of **solidarity** without stating it directly, saying "It makes me happy to see that there's good people. I just like the way we've been treated. I didn't think anything good would happen."

Do you think Julian is most happy because their home is fixed, or because he came to know that other people actually care about them?

How do you think the volunteers felt in seeing their efforts pay off?

7. In what ways did the volunteers of Katy Responds jump in to help Jaylen and Julian? (fundraising, working long hours to repair many damaged parts of the home, donating furniture)

Without each volunteer's role in repairing the house, could they have accomplished their goal of repairing the home in only three months?

Let's share some examples of **solidarity** when we worked with others and were stronger as a team working toward a shared goal. [\(Also a journal prompt below\)](#)

### Journal Writing Options

1. Write about a time in your life when you experienced a strong sense of **duty** toward a friend, your family, community or a group that you are a part of and sacrificed something / and or worked hard to help another person and / or to serve a higher goal.
2. Write about a family member or someone else in your life who has lived out a sense of **duty** towards you, someone who has sacrificed for you, helped you through a difficult time, or has helped you strive towards a goal?
3. Write about a time you worked in **solidarity** with others on a project? How were you stronger working as a team towards a shared goal rather than on our own? What were the results of your work?

### Extended Activity:

Organize students into groups of 3-4 and ask them: “Do you know of anyone suffering from a disaster in our community or an organization in our community who has needs not being met?” Have students create a plan from start to finish about how they can provide for the unmet needs. (If students have trouble coming up with people, suggest a family who has had a house fire and lost their clothes/furniture, a homeless shelter in need of toiletries, a food pantry that is in need of more supplies)

# Character Action Media

*Connecting Virtues to Our World*

[www.characteractionmedia.com](http://www.characteractionmedia.com)

rent Links in Education

Copyright 2016



This is a Washington Post Article by Cathy Free published on August 23, 2022.

## **A contractor stole their money. The community rallied to fix their flooded home.**

Jaylan Gray's mother died two years ago of a blood disorder, leaving him alone in their Texas house with his little brother, then 10.

"Before she died, she told me not to sell the house," said Gray, 22, whose stepfather had died several years earlier. "My mom and my stepdad had paid it off and she wanted us to live in it." Then, last year, disaster struck at their three-bedroom house near Houston, when the pipes burst in the [massive winter storm](#) that left millions of Texans without power for days. The house was quickly flooded from the attic, soaking and ruining ceilings, walls and floors.

Gray hired a contractor to make repairs, but the contractor punched holes in walls throughout the house, then disappeared with about \$20,000, he said. Gray didn't have the resources to pursue the matter.

He filed a police report, but authorities were unable to find the contractor. Gray eventually decided to move on, he said. He didn't have homeowners insurance to cover the damage because the policy had lapsed, he said.

He wanted to find another way to repair the house so it was livable, but with everything on his plate, he didn't know where to turn. "I couldn't keep up with it — it was just too much," Gray said about the house, which is in [Katy](#). "I couldn't afford to make the repairs."

Overwhelmed, Gray and his brother, Julian Nicholson, moved across town to live with their grandmother. But Julian had to change schools, and both of them wanted to return to the home where they had lived with their parents.

"We were really grateful to her, but I always wanted to move Julian back to the house where we grew up, so he could play football at the same school I did," Gray said.

"I want to make sure he doesn't get in any trouble and that things can be smooth as possible for him in school," he added.

Gray, who had been enrolled in college, stopped taking classes and got a job at a car inspection company to help pay the bills and raise his brother.

"Julian became my priority," Gray said of his brother, who is 12 now and entering seventh grade. "I promised my mom that I'd look after him and the house, so I dropped out of college."

"I wanted my brother to feel cared for and loved," he said, adding that he had no idea what he was going to do with the damaged house, but he decided he was not going to give up on it.

Then in the spring, Kevin and Michelle Duty, who volunteer with the community nonprofit [Katy Responds](#) — which helps rebuild homes after natural disasters — heard from a friend about the brothers' situation.

"It was just heartbreaking to find out what these two had been through," said Kevin Duty, 56. "For Jaylan to have to take on that much at such a young age was unimaginable."

Duty contacted the nonprofit's executive director, Ron Peters, and filled him in.

“We thought Katy Responds would be a good fit to help them,” Duty said, noting that the group relies on community donations and volunteers to renovate homes damaged in natural disasters. Peters said he immediately agreed to help and contacted several dozen volunteers after he’d taken a close look at the house. “When I walked in, my heart sank,” he said. “They’d lost everything to the pipes breaking except for their mother’s dining room table,” said Peters, 59. “There were holes in the walls, the floor was completely ruined, and the air conditioning system was gone. The contractor they’d hired had stolen it.”

Peters told Gray that his group could repair the home free of charge in about three months — just in time for the beginning of the new school year. “We’ve fixed 160 homes and the stories from each renovation are emotional,” he said. “But this one really touched our hearts.”

Volunteers repaired the roof, hauled away ruined furniture and flooring, put up new drywall, and rewired, plumbed and painted the entire house. “From the very first day they said they were going to take on this project, I wanted to help,” said Pauline Mabry, 61, who has volunteered with Katy Responds for two years. “I felt devastated that this young man had to have all of this responsibility after his mom died,” she said. “This is the house where he grew up with his brother. I wanted to help make it new again.” Mabry said she helped haul out the damaged drywall, baseboards and kitchen cupboards, then tackled a lot of the repainting.

She was joined on several weekends by Gray, who helped paint walls until he was asked to bow out during the final phase of the work. “We really wanted him and Julian to be surprised at the end result,” Peters said. When the brothers walked into their renovated home Aug. 12, they could hardly believe what they were seeing. They both cried, Gray said. Volunteers gave them a new kitchen and bathrooms, and Houston’s [Lakewood Church](#) donated new furnishings.

The project cost about \$50,000. It ran overbudget by about \$10,000, said Peters, who is raising funds to cover the rest. “What they did for us is so much more than I ever imagined,” Gray said. “My goodness, I was blown away. Everybody was so kind to us — they went above and beyond.”

“It makes me happy to see that there’s good people,” Julian told [local television crews](#) that were there to capture his reaction. “I just like the way we’ve been treated,” he said through tears. “I didn’t think anything good would happen.”

Gray said their mother, Roslyn Nicholson, would have been thrilled with the home improvements.

Gray said he hopes to return to college someday and pursue his dream to become a park ranger, preferably in Texas. “I love being out in nature — that would be the ideal job for me,” he said. Until then, he said he’s content to help his brother with homework at their mom’s dining room table.

“I want Julian’s future to be better than what I went through,” Gray said. “My little brother is my main purpose right now. Just seeing him every morning makes me smile.”