

"Go Baby Go!" Puts Children with Special Needs in the Driver's Seat

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...

- better understand the experiences of children with special needs. Feel motivated to be a good friend and offer support to those with special needs.
- appreciate the value of teamwork in striving to solve problems.
- be inspired by the creativity of others in solving problems.
- appreciate how helping others is mutually beneficial. Not only do the recipients benefit, but also the people helping others can be impacted in positive ways.
- realize that the endeavor to include others can have a meaningful impact on the lives of those who are often left out.
- develop a personal sense of duty to help others.

Highlighted Virtues and Character Traits

Wisdom: the ability to apply knowledge, experience, and understanding in ways that are effective and good. The ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting

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

Creativity: the ability to think of new ideas; to come up with new approaches for accomplishing a goal or solving a problem

Inclusivity: the practice and mindset of including people who might otherwise be excluded; making sure that everyone is valued and respected, no matter who they are or where they come from.

Duty: something that one is expected or required to do according to one's own standards, moral or legal obligation, especially as it relates to one's status as a citizen and / or member of various communities.

Leader Introduction:

Children's Wisconsin, a pediatric hospital, and Marquette University have launched an incredible initiative known as "Go Baby Go." In this program, college students studying engineering volunteer their time to modify motorized toy cars, tailoring them to the specific challenges of children with special needs. Under Molly Erikson, a research engineer at Marquette, over 300 cars have already been gifted through the program. These adapted vehicles make it easier for kids facing mobility challenges to explore and have fun. Not only does this initiative bring happiness to the children, but it also provides the college students valuable learning experiences and the opportunity to create a meaningful connection between education and community service. Let's watch the video to witness firsthand how these college students are making a significant impact on the life of one special boy, Garnet Davis, and his parents.

Lesson Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUI58D7e67Q>

Leader Summary:

Molly Erickson and “Go Baby Go” Volunteers show us how creativity, using the skills we have from our education and teamwork can help us to effectively address the needs of others. Their work is bringing genuine joy into the lives of children who face significant challenges, empowering children like Garnet to take control and “be in the driver’s seat” of their own adventures. But it’s not just about mobility—it also fosters independence and making sure these children feel included in the world of fun. Let’s further unravel “Go Baby Go”’s initiative and see how their innovative mission and positive impact resonate with our 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 specific health issues did Garnet experience at birth?
(Garnet went without oxygen for 27 minutes, had a skull fracture, and even with therapy and improvements cannot move around without someone helping him.) He can’t play with his older sisters and his parents worry about him being happy in life long term because of his disabilities. Most of the babies they service do not have independent mobility)

What are the concerns of Garnet’s parents for his future and likely all of the parents “Go Baby Go” serves?

(They worry that with limited mobility they won’t have many opportunities to interact with other kids, and to experience a sense of independence)

How does “Go Baby Go” engage and provide solutions for these children and their families?

(They tailor toy cars to the individual needs of immobile children, allowing them to explore despite their limitations through push buttons, special seating, straps, etc.)

2. Cody Donahue, the student leader of “Go Baby Go” said, “The [child’s] therapist presents us with a problem. We get to figure out how to [solve it] and put it into the car.” Which virtue best helps Cody and the other volunteers solve the challenges of making accessible cars for the kids?
(**creativity** in coming up with new ideas and approaches for accomplishing a goal or solving a problem)

Do you think that **creativity** is an essential element in addressing challenges in our own lives? Why or why not?

3. What role does teamwork play in the volunteers’ mission to solve the challenges for each child and to build a toy car that is effective for them?
(The Go Baby Go team has to work with and listen closely to the therapists and parents of each child to define each child’s abilities and limitations. Each member of the student team needs to be able to work effectively with each other in sharing potential solutions, experimenting and building each car)
4. **Solidarity** is defined in part as unity from a shared common purpose. Do you think the mission of Go Baby Go helps the student team to have a greater sense of unity within their team?
(The mission of Go Baby Go is so compelling that it likely helps the students to put aside

smaller personality and other smaller issues that happen within any team, and to instead simply focus on accomplishing the mission).

Go Baby Go also helps to form **solidarity** among the college students, the children they are helping and their families. Let's place ourselves in the position of an engineering student using your skills to help a child with a special need. What insights about life as a whole do you think you might gain in having a relationship with a child with special needs and what emotions do you think you would experience?

(A greater sense of appreciation for the abilities we have that other children may not have; a greater sense of empathy for children and their families with special needs; a greater desire to help others in needs; a greater sense of respect and admiration for children and their families who engage their disabilities and do their best with the abilities they do have)

5. The partnership between the university students and the Children Wisconsin is smart. The hospital has a need to provide mobility for children and to bring more joy to their lives. The engineering students have skills they are learning, but not many ways to practice them before entering a career. Being students, they also have time to help others. Go Baby Go is a win-win for everyone. What virtue does this partnership reflect?
(Wisdom in applying knowledge, experience, and understanding in ways that are effective and good)
6. In what ways do the "Go Baby Go" student volunteers benefit from their collaborative efforts to build these toy cars?
(They are learning to apply engineering and electrical skills that will help them through college and into real life situations as engineers. They also say that it makes them happy to help the children.)
7. Molly Erickson says the "Go Baby Go" program "can't do anything but bring a smile to your face." Why do you think that acts of generosity can bring joy to not only the recipient of a good deed, but to the giver as well?

When thinking about **generosity**, money is often what comes to mind. However the student volunteers are not giving money. So what are they giving?

(As engineering students, they are learning how to create solutions for problems and how to accomplish goals and this is what the students are giving to the children in building their cars)

8. Do you think the engineering students have a sense of personal **duty** to help special needs children?
(Given the excitement and sense of satisfaction among the students in discussing their work with children who have special needs, they likely do have a sense of personal duty to help others in need.)

Why do you think we should all have a sense of **duty** to help others?

9. Children with special needs are often left out because of their limitations. They may not be able to keep up with other children or play in the same way. Garnet's mother said with regards to the toy car, "My hopes for our future is that he's happy, and this car made him pretty happy. It's hopefully going to allow him to have fun with his big sisters." This statement reflects which virtue?
(inclusivity)

How do you think feeling just a little more included and empowered at a young age will impact Garnet's feelings and thoughts about himself and the world around him going forward?

(Garnet will likely experience a greater sense of joy and willingness to push his own boundaries in trying new activities)

In what ways can we be **generous** and foster **inclusiveness** with children who have special needs in our own schools and communities?

(Sitting with them at lunch; spending time with them; joining clubs that have organized activities with children who have special needs)

Journal Writing Option:

Imagine you are a child with special needs receiving a customized toy car from the "Go Baby Go" program. Write out how you think receiving the car would make you feel. Write about the simple fun of driving on your own for the first time, being a part of the team that made the car and any other thoughts you think you would have.

Extended Activity:

- Brainstorm ways as a larger group that students can support children with special needs within your school. Think of ways that we can educate all students on the unique abilities and challenges of special needs students. Then break students off into groups of 3-4 and have them choose one of the ways to promote inclusiveness in their school and have them design a plan of action for how they can actually implement it.
- Organize students into groups of 2-3 and have them illustrate/design what an inclusive playground that accommodates the diverse needs of all children would look like. They can use writing, drawing, or any other creative media to present their ideas.

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