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## Hands-On Learning

By Tracy Ajello

**W**e want to teach students to be good leaders and help them understand the value of service to their community. They can spend hours reading about leadership and volunteer opportunities, but competence in leadership and service requires hands-on experience.

To help my fifth-grade students practice leadership skills and service, we implement service-learning projects throughout the year. For the last two years we have received year-long training and support for our service projects by participating in SEE's *Youth: Ethics in Service* program (formerly *Building Ethical Communities Through Service-Learning*).

Our service projects are diverse. Some of these projects take a month (e.g., giving holiday cards to firemen); other projects are year-long. A major focus of our service-learning efforts has been organizing and hosting assemblies we call Town Meetings. These meetings are school-wide assemblies that celebrate students' voices, talents, and successes.

Another project integrated our economics unit with service-learning. With their new understanding of supply, demand, expenses, and profit, my students started a greeting card-making business. The students designed, created, and sold greeting cards and donated the profits to charity.

My students actively evaluate their projects and reflect on their participation and accomplishments. We reflect through discussion and journal writing. As the year progresses, student reflections become more insightful. Students are able to learn through their reflection sessions and make connections to their lives.

Hands-on experience has helped my students create a climate at our school that celebrates individual differences and encourages a variety of ways for students to express themselves. It is a pleasure to be able to foster my students' development as competent leaders during the real-life experiences of service to others. ♦

Tracy Ajello teaches 5th grade at Doolittle Elementary School in Cheshire, Connecticut.

## Upcoming Events and Programs

**Hold the date!** Assets-Based Character Conference April 29 & 30, 2003. Workshop presenters may request presenter proposals from SEE at [ethics@ethicsed.org](mailto:ethics@ethicsed.org).

**Laws of Life:** Registration is currently being accepted from schools for the Laws of Life program. Help your students reflect on their values through an essay contest.

*"It is awesome to see students excited about what they write!"*

## Connecticut Students Write from the Heart

By Sandi Michaelson, *Laws of Life* Program Director

**M**y students really enjoyed participating in the contest. I received some of the best writing from my students I have seen all year." This is just one of the many positive comments we received following the 2001-2002 *Laws of Life* essay contest.

*Laws of Life* is a character-education initiative that gives students in grades 5-12 the unique opportunity to reflect on and write about the core values and ideals that they believe will help them live successful and productive lives. *Laws of Life* allows students to discover what they stand for, promotes writing skills and enthusiasm, and develops a sense of community within the classroom.



Statewide winners of the 2001-2002 *Laws of Life* essay program are honored at a May 1 awards ceremony at the Ramada Plaza Hotel in Meriden.

A *Laws of Life* essay can readily be used as a writing prompt to prepare students for standardized tests (in Connecticut, the CMT and CAPT). The essay writing can also be integrated into your curriculum in content areas such as language arts, health, and social studies. In recognition of the program's value, the National Association of Secondary School Principals has placed *Laws of Life* on its list of approved activities.

The *Laws of Life* essay contest was begun in 1987 by Sir John Templeton and has spread throughout the world. SEE has administered *Laws of Life* in Connecticut since 2000, supported by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation. In 2001-2002 nearly 5,300 students across Connecticut wrote about such "laws of life" as love, service, honesty, respect, and courage.

How does *Laws of Life* work? SEE provides contest materials and technical assistance to help each school or district run its own contest. Our motto is, "Do what fits!" You can run your contest anytime between October and March in a way that best suits your school community. The top essays from each contest are sent to SEE to be entered into a regional competition. Winners are honored in the spring at an awards ceremony held in conjunction with Connecticut's Asset-Based Character-Education Conference.

We invite your school to join *Laws of Life* this fall. For more information, visit [www.ethicsed.org](http://www.ethicsed.org), call (203) 783-4436, or e-mail us at [lawsoflife@ethicsed.org](mailto:lawsoflife@ethicsed.org). Together we can help young people write from their hearts! ♦

## Director's Dialogue

### Proactive Leadership for Character Education

David B. Wangaard, Ed.D.

Is your school or organization proactive when it comes to character education? Character education expert Thomas Lickona highlights the need for leaders to be “deliberate and proactive” in order to integrate comprehensive character education into an organization’s culture. An important strategy for proactive character education is to establish a team or committee.

A character committee, as described by the Character Education Partnership’s Eleven Principles ([www.character.org/principles](http://www.character.org/principles)), should include teachers, students, parents, administrators, and community members. In schools it is typically the principal who can personally recruit a diverse and committed group of members for the committee.

Take a look at your school, district, or organization. Can you identify a committee that is taking the lead in character education? If not, who demonstrates the necessary leadership to begin the formation of a character committee? That may be the person who catalyzes the start of a character-education team.

Once a character team is formed, its first responsibility should be to identify a core knowledge base for comprehensive character education. This is the best time to consult with local universities or other experts in character education to confirm that your committee’s goals are anchored in research.

With a clear understanding of character development and related program strategies, a committee can then draft a meaningful strategic plan. The strategic plan will be strengthened by the team’s diversity of ideas.

Every team need not “reinvent the wheel” of character education. Networking can help identify good ideas and strategies used at other schools. SEE’s Northeast Character Education Network ([www.ethics.org/programs/necen](http://www.ethics.org/programs/necen)) provides excellent opportunities for networking. We welcome you to join the network and help put *ethics in action*. ♦



If you have a question about character education for SEE, send an e-mail to [ethics@ethicsed.org](mailto:ethics@ethicsed.org). We will try to answer your questions in this column or through an e-mail response.

***I've been hearing a lot about class meetings as a way to create positive classrooms and student character. What exactly is a class meeting?***

A class meeting can take many forms. Teachers can facilitate the meetings. However, an age-appropriate goal is to teach students to lead selected meetings. Meetings should be held regularly to practice a meeting routine. Time can vary but effective meetings run from 10 to 40 minutes. Students should practice a democratic process (e.g., voting to choose topics) and demonstrate honest and open dialog without putdowns or use of disrespect. There are other guidelines and 20 ideas for classroom meetings on SEE's Web Site at [www.ethicsed.org/consulting/Class.htm](http://www.ethicsed.org/consulting/Class.htm).

***How can I get parents more involved in character education?***

Begin by recruiting parent-leaders who are currently in your school. Integrate character themes into programs and communication you already have in place, such as newsletters, parent nights, and career day. You might want to consider including a student character report with your midterm report cards. Make sure you make it convenient for parents to get involved. Providing child care and refreshments always helps. Be sure to regularly acknowledge parents for their involvement.

### Check Out...

**SEE Online: [www.ethicsed.org](http://www.ethicsed.org).** From our Web site you can subscribe to this newsletter, download activities, and find out more about SEE programs.

**Character Education Partnership 9th National Forum:** A character-education conference focusing on the theme of *Cultivating Citizens for a Changing World*. Oct. 17-19 in Atlanta, GA. Visit [www.character.org](http://www.character.org) to learn more.

**Center for Advancement of Character and Ethics:** [www.bu.edu/education/caec/index.html](http://www.bu.edu/education/caec/index.html). A resource for administrators, teachers, and parents as they seek to fulfill their responsibilities as moral educators.



# Student Activity Page

## A Single Act of Kindness

There is an old Japanese saying that translates to "One kind word can warm three winter months."

Mark Twain had a similar idea and was quoted as saying, "I can live three months on a good compliment."

1. What is the shared meaning of these two sayings?
2. Do you agree with the idea behind the two sayings? Explain.
3. How could you put this idea into action?
4. Create your own saying to promote kindness at school.



## ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

Read the following story and find a solution to the dilemma. A dilemma happens when you have to make a difficult decision between two or more choices. The four questions after the story are steps to help make wise decisions. Practice these steps whenever you are faced with a dilemma.

### New and Different

You are sitting in class on the first day of school. You are with two friends you haven't seen since June. One of the first assignments is to work in a team with two to three other students on a research project. You and your two friends have decided to work together. As you start talking, a new student approaches your group. She asks if she can be part of your team. She dresses and speaks very differently from everyone else in school. You were really hoping to work with just your friends.

1. Is there a dilemma? What are your choices?
2. How does the Golden Rule (treat other people as you would like to be treated) apply?
3. What character traits, such as honesty and caring, do you want to display?
4. What would you decide to do?

## Shared Character Goals

Practicing the positive character traits below will help your team, class, or family work together successfully.

Caring Cheerfulness Citizenship Confidence  
 Cooperation Courage Courtesy Dependability  
 Fairness Generosity Honesty Initiative Love  
 Loyalty Optimism Patience Perseverance  
 Respect Responsibility Tolerance

1. By yourself, circle three character traits you believe are most important for a class to work together successfully. Use a dictionary to look up any character traits that you do not know. Write down any character traits not listed here that would help your class or group work well together.

2. For each trait you circled, write down how you can show this trait. For example, courtesy is shown when someone holds a door for someone.

Character trait: \_\_\_\_\_ is shown when \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Character trait: \_\_\_\_\_ is shown when \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Character trait: \_\_\_\_\_ is shown when \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. With students in your class or group, share the top three character traits. Then, try to agree on the top three traits for the group or class.

4. On a poster board write down the three character traits for your group or class and how they can be shown. Keep this poster in a place where you can review it often. Try to demonstrate these character traits as you work together.

For more activities visit our Web site at [www.ethicsed.org](http://www.ethicsed.org)



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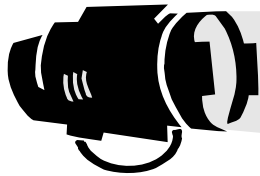
Character Ed. Comm.

Health Teacher

Counselor/Social Worker

PTA/PTO

Post in Teachers Lounge



## Character Spotlight

### Patricia Meskill and ROPE



Patricia Meskill and Steven Browne, a Wethersfield High School senior who has been in the ROPE program for six years.

The transition from childhood to adulthood is a time of great change — a time when young people benefit from programs that focus on the issues they face. Such programs offer youth positive opportunities to practice newly acquired skills and to celebrate life transitions besides graduation celebrations and religious confirmations.

Patricia Meskill, clinical coordinator of Wethersfield's Department of Social & Youth Services, runs such a program. ROPE (Rite of Passage Experience) was founded 20 years ago and continues to evolve. ROPE is a youth and community development process that helps young people come of age. The ROPE process uses cognitive and physical challenges to teach life skills. Each year 290 eleven-and twelve-year-olds, 600 thirteen-and fourteen-year-olds, and several hundred high school students from the Wethersfield area take part in this youth-development process.

Ms. Meskill and her staff are working tirelessly to ensure that youth successfully make the transition from childhood to adulthood. Thank you, Ms. Meskill, for keeping your ethics in action to promote healthy youth development!

For a FREE subscription to *see news* or further information on how you can assist students in these changing times, please complete the following information, tear off and mail to:  
**SEE, 440 Wheelers Farms Rd., Milford, CT 06460 or fax to (203) 783-4461**

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Please check the SEE programs you would like to receive information on:

- Laws of Life       Youth: Ethics in Service
- Consulting       Character education conference
- Northeast Character Education Partnership

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