

Heartfelt – March 2013 Family Book Club

DEVELOPING CHILDREN'S MORAL CHARACTER

Sow a thought and you reap an action;
sow an action and you reap a habit;
sow a habit and you reap a character;
sow a character and you reap a destiny.
- Ralph Waldo Emerson -

As we define moral character, we think of words like kindness, honesty, hard-working, giving, forgiving, unselfish, respectful, loving, gentle, faithful, pure, courageous, responsible, resilient --- there are might be more traits you would add to this list. Raising morally responsible and thoughtful children is an awesome task. It requires parents to model the behavior they want to see in their children. Reading good books together can help create teachable moments. We've chosen a few for you to get started.

Susan and John Yates are right on track when they talk about building character. It is not a one time lesson, but rather a life-long journey for all of us. Read **Raising Kids with Character That Lasts**. The Yates are raising five children and share their experiences as they attempt to reflect God's perspective on character development. **Good Families Don't Just Happen** is another good resource for your personal library, as is **10-Minute Life Lessons for Kids** by Jamie Miller. There are several more parent resources listed in our Book List.

Reading to young children can be a joy you share together. Pick books that convey a message such as **Mine!** by Shutta Crum. The whole story is told by the delightful illustrations by Patrice Barton, with the word mine interspersed along the way. If you have a toddler, you know that mine! ranks right up there with some of the first words your child learns. Teaching a child to be unselfish or to share is one of your first tasks. As the toddler in this story learns, keeping the toys all for himself doesn't work too well. This is a good teachable story because you get to add whatever words you think will help your child learn to share.

The Boy Who Wouldn't Share, another book with the same theme, is suitable for Pre-K and Kindergarten children. Perhaps your child has experienced some of the same selfish feelings and situations as Edward. When his little sister offers his dog some fudge, but not him, he realizes perhaps he needs to change his ways. Discussion questions might include:

1. Do you sometimes feel a bit like Edward?
2. Why do you think it is hard to share?
3. Do you know someone who has difficulty sharing?
4. How do you feel when someone won't share with you?

Nico & Lola: Kindness Shared Between a Boy and a Dog by Meggan Hill is a sweet story as Nico learns what it means to be so kind. This book is suitable for Pre-K and Kindergarten children. The photographs used to illustrate the story are charming and draw the reader into the story. Each action that Nico does is highlighted with words such as being kind is sticking together until the job is done. After reading this book a few times, encourage your child to finish the sentence "being kind is...." which is found after each situation Nico experiences.

Discussion might include the following:

1. Do you think being kind is important?
2. What are some of the ways you think Nico showed kindness?
3. Would you rather be Nico or Lola in this story?

There are also several books in an early childhood series called Learning to Get Along that describe many good character traits such as **Share and Take Turns** or **Respect and Take Care of Things** by Cheri J. Meiners. These books include valuable tips to parents, with fun and creative ways to help your child develop the traits you want to encourage.

Sometimes children can be a little too helpful. **Pigs to the Rescue** by John Himmelman is a silly story about what happens when the pigs get over zealous in helping. Discussion: Share with your child that sometimes our hearts are in the right place because we want to help, but we do not have the skills to do what is needed. In those situations, perhaps it is best to just offer our hugs to let someone know we care. Or, we could ask how we might be helpful.

Zip, Zip...HOMEWORK? By Nancy Poydar is a good read for early elementary students. In her over-enthusiasm for her new backpack, Violet learns valuable lessons about truthfulness and responsibility. Invite a discussion by asking:

1. How do you think Violet felt when she got caught in her lie?
2. How would you define truth?
3. We might say Violet told little white lies. What does this mean? How do little white lies get Violet in trouble?
4. Whose fault do you think it was that the homework got lost? Violet's or the backpack's?
5. Do you think the parent had any responsibility to help Violet figure out how to use the backpack to stay organized?

Upper elementary and middle school kids enjoy reading chapter books. One such book is **The Book of One Hundred Truths** by Julie Schumacher. Thea is a twelve year-old girl who has a secret. In order to protect her secret, she begins to tell little lies. In fact, Thea believes there are all sorts of categories for lies. In addition to white lies, there are others such as blue lies (completely obvious), pink lies (exaggerations), and green lies (inventive). As Thea leaves to visit her grandparents' beach house on the Jersey shore, her mother gives her a journal to record 100 truths while she is there. The assignment is easy at first but becomes complicated, which is similar to what she learns about lying. In the end she learns how much lying can weigh a person down. Even though telling the truth is difficult, it helps to bring her family together. This book should lend itself to a good discussion about truthfulness:

1. Why do you think it is hard for Thea to be truthful? When is it hard for you?
2. Do you or others you know sometimes find themselves hiding a secret?
3. What do you think of the way Thea describes lies?
4. Would you find it helpful to keep a journal similar to Thea's?

Motivational speaker Mawl Asgedom has put the lessons he has learned into book form in **The Code: The Five Secrets of Teen Success**. Even though the author did not include a strong faith as one of his secrets, your teen will still find it well worth reading. While sharing the life secrets that helped him achieve his goals, Asgedom tells of his journey from his homeland in war torn East Africa, to a refugee camp, to an affluent suburb in America, culminating in being accepted into Harvard University.

As you read the above stories or share books from the resource list, remember character building and developing a strong moral code are not going to happen by just reading a book. It takes perseverance, courage, good judgment, continually striving to do what is best in a situation, encouragement, and most of all lots of prayers for help along the way.