

# Ilm o Amal

A bi-annual education resource brought to you by TRC

January-June 2006

Vol 2, Issue 1



## ISSUE FOCUS

### CHARACTER COUNTS!

A look at the importance of supporting the moral and ethical values of future generations



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CHARACTER COUNTS! is a service mark of the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics. [www.charactercounts.org](http://www.charactercounts.org)

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Dear Readers,

In this issue of *Ilm o Amal*, we have focussed on the importance of supporting the moral development of the youth of our schools and communities.

Unfortunately, our society does not always provide the best example for our children: corruption is rampant and ethical standpoints are often allowed to slide in favour of convenience and profit. For these reasons, it is even more important that our children are provided supportive environments in which they can develop strong moral and ethical foundations. As teachers and parents, we must take the initiative to provide examples for our children to follow in the classroom and in the home. Because, after all, Character Counts!

In our TRC Student Character Survey we have compiled questionnaires from over a thousand students, from both public and private sector schools, to find out what they felt about moral issues and how they would act in certain scenarios. Their answers may just surprise you. We have also provided sample, character-building activities in the hope that you will be able to help strengthen the foundations of character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.

We would also like to bring to your attention that, once again, we are offering unique content in the English and Urdu sections rather than translations. We hope to benefit our bilingual readers, while maintaining the same quality content you've come to expect in either language.

As always, we want to emphasise that we love hearing from you, and that any comments or suggestions are warmly welcomed. In particular, we are currently planning the next edition of *Ilm o Amal*, so if there are certain issues you would like to see us focus upon, please email us at: [info@trconline.org](mailto:info@trconline.org)

TRC Editorial Team

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# Permissions

*Considering the nature of this edition of Ilm O Amal, we thought it was important to show you the source of many of the activities and ideas expressed in this issue. As we emphasise in the Character Counts Survey, plagiarism is the unauthorised theft of ideas, and must be discouraged at all levels. When quoting information, it is enough to document your source and where others can access it. In this case however, where we are using the title and format of another organisation's work, we have asked for direct permission, as can be seen in the following email correspondence:*

From: Mahenaz Mahmud  
To: CharacterCounts  
Subject: Permission to use Character Counts

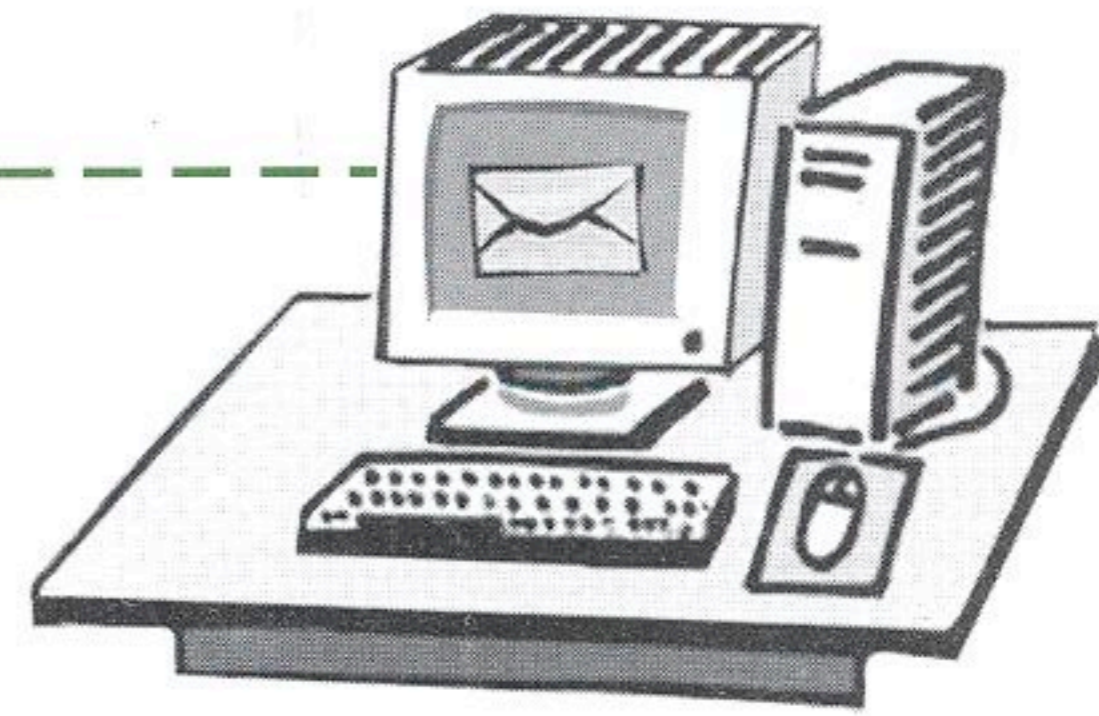
I'm writing to seek your permission to use the words "Character Counts!" as the theme for a future (January to June 2006) issue of *Ilm O Amal* a bi-annual resource published by the Teachers' Resource Centre (TRC) which is in Karachi, Pakistan.

I came across your organisation/website in the Bernard Van Leer Foundation Publication, Early Childhood Matters. With acknowledgement of the source, I would also like to use some of the lesson plans from your website for use by our readers/teachers. Please let me know if this is OK with you. Some of the lesson plans may be adapted slightly to contextualise them, and others may be translated into Urdu, our national language. If you agree ... and I sincerely hope you will, and you have an acknowledgement policy/standard sentence we could use, could you please let me have it.

TRC is a not-for-profit organisation, which through its publications, reaches out to teachers in public and private sector schools across Pakistan. *Ilm O Amal* is distributed free of cost. We also conduct inservice teacher education workshops, develop curricula and learning resources and work with the Ministry of Education. To learn more about us, you can visit our website; the URL is given below.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Mahenaz Mahmud  
Director Programme Development  
Teachers' Resource Centre  
Karachi



Subject: RE: Permission to use Character Counts  
From: "James Jankowski"  
To: "Mahenaz Mahmud"

Hello Mahenaz,

You have our permission to use CHARACTER COUNTS! as your theme for your teachers' resource. When using CHARACTER COUNTS!, please be sure to use the following attribution language:

CHARACTER COUNTS! is a service mark of the CHARACTER COUNTS! Coalition, a project of the Josephson Institute of Ethics. [www.charactercounts.org](http://www.charactercounts.org)

Also, please use all capital letters and exclamation point when writing CHARACTER COUNTS!

It is fine if you use some of the lesson plans and modify them as necessary to meet your needs. You can use the following as a citation:

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If you have any questions about this, please feel free to let me know.

Keep up the good work!

Kind regards,

James Jankowski  
Program Coordinator  
CHARACTER COUNTS!

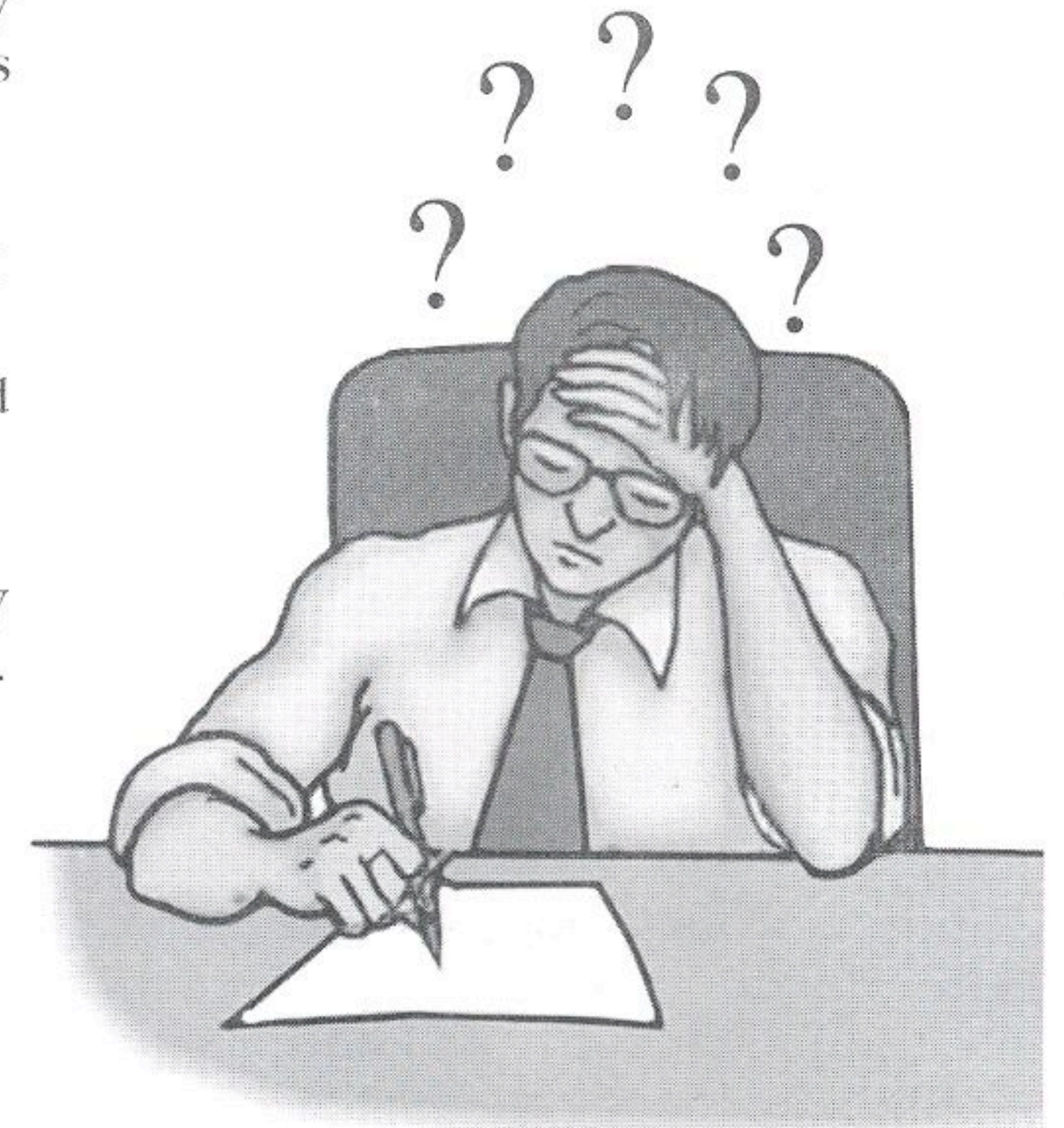
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# Shades of Grey

Mahenaz Mahmud

Did someone say making an ethical decision is easy? That there are clear guidelines between right and wrong? Unfortunately our children are constantly exposed to lying and cheating, so how should they learn to trust? There is a lack of responsibility amongst their elders and people in high places, so what should they make of rules and ethical guidelines? Let's consider these common everyday scenarios:

- It is June in Karachi. Mrs. Abid wants to run two air conditioners, but it costs too much. She can't afford the bill. She thinks to herself: everyone pays off a KESC lineman to tamper with the meter. What's wrong with that? The children need to be comfortable and sleep well, so just for a couple of months, only May and June.
- Mr. Saleem suddenly remembers: oh no, my passport needs to be renewed; I've missed the date. I need to send it to Islamabad for a visa. These guys at the passport office are going to give me a run around. I'll just pay off one of these touts, it'll cost less than paying the late fee, and it'll get the job done.
- Mr. Khan just has to get his child into the 'best' school in town. He thinks: the boss sends his children there and what will everyone think if my child doesn't attend the same school. Should I have my child sit the entrance test and wait for the result, or just offer to 'help' the school with a hefty sum of money and ensure a place. After all, my child's future depends on going to this school.
- I hear my neighbour shouting at his wife and children. Occasionally, I hear screams and know that she is being severely beaten. She hasn't been out for a couple of days. Should I mind my own business? Should I try talking to him or should I report this to someone?
- I need to raise funds for a very good cause. I am told that the only way I can raise a substantial amount is to have a ball and serve alcohol etc. I don't think this is right, but what do I do? Many underprivileged children will benefit. Should I do it just this once?



We often find ourselves thinking: will my decision, my ethical choice or behaviour harm anyone? Will it infringe on the rights of others? Is it ok to do something just once when it's not really harming anyone and it will ease my life considerably? What does it matter in the larger scheme of things if I bribe an official? The system is corrupt anyway, so what's the issue?

The do's and don'ts of life are somewhat simpler when we are children, but all too soon the shades of grey on the ethics continuum begin to confuse us. These are difficult questions, and perceptions of right and wrong, of our sense of personal responsibility for other people's decisions, for society's code, for further corrupting the prevalent system, differ. The complex structure of society and its values, makes it so easy to extend the ethical parameters within which we function.

## Choosing Right from Wrong

Most of us agree that stealing, lying, and cheating are wrong. These three actions are the taboos of a common-sense morality. For instance, if we take the hotel towels, we know we are stealing and that the act is wrong. If we use someone else's answers on an exam, we know we are cheating and that the act is wrong. You can probably describe half a dozen such situations in as many minutes.

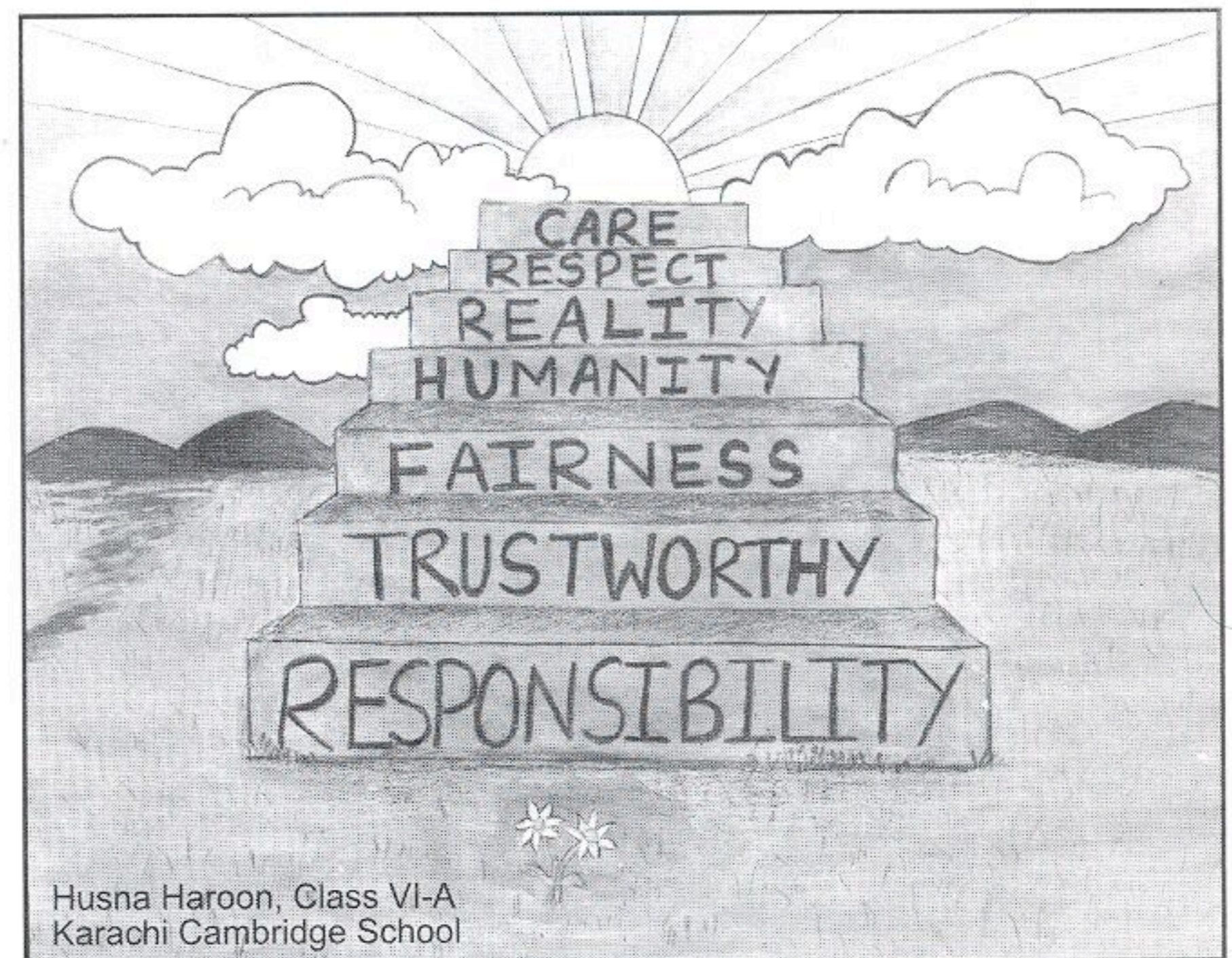
Ethical choices become more difficult when the situation is not as clear, is not black or white, but contains some shades of grey. Is it wrong to steal food if you are starving? Is it wrong if your child is starving? Is it wrong to keep any coins you find in a pay telephone? Does the money belong to the previous caller? To the phone company? To you? Does the amount make a difference? (Keep a small amount, return a large amount?) How would you return the coins? Do you call the operator and offer to feed the coins back into the machine? What if the operator will not take them? Are you off the hook so to speak? Should you give all the money to charity? (Grillo & Kallman, 1996, Pg.6)

## Ethical Principles

Value Judgements are at the heart of personal and business decisions in which ethics have a bearing on the choices we have to make. The objective is to make a judgement, based on a combination of our own values and those of others, to arrive at a defensible principled choice (Grillo & Kallman, 1996, Pg.6). For a responsible person, ethical principles are an essential part of solving the problem. Ethical principles are ideas of behaviour that are commonly acceptable to society. Using ethical principles as a basis for decision making prevents us from relying only on intuition or personal preference (Grillo & Kallman, 1996, Pg.6).

## What Schools Can Do

Even though the situation appears bleak, all is not lost. Our Student Character Survey (see list of contributing member schools on page 10) revealed that our youngsters have a strong sense of ethical principles. As a start, you could examine with your staff how you presently nurture values or qualities in your formal and hidden curriculum, and also in your everyday instruction. Can you point to specific learning activities on ethical education, in which students actually participate? Or is ethical education restricted to the moral and sometimes "preachy" messages we often convey to students during assembly and Islamiyat? We must remember that it is in specific and repeated activities that students will develop values and qualities, rather than by listening to sermons by teachers (Grillo & Kallman, 1996, Pg.6). Turn to the activities section on page 12 and website resources on page 17 for ideas on how to involve and engage students in discussions and deliberations, to help them arrive at their own ethical decisions.



### References:

- Grillo, John P. & Kallman, Earnest A. (1996) *Ethical Decision Making and Information Technology*. New York: McGraw Hill College  
Starratt, Robert J. (1994) *Building an Ethical School*. London: The Falmer Press

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Pervez Hoodbhoy is Professor of Physics at Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad and holds a Ph.D in Nuclear Physics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He is Visiting Professor at MIT, Carnegie Mellon University, the University of Maryland and often lectures at US and European universities and research laboratories.

# The TRC

## CHARACTER COUNTS! Survey

The TRC Team

We've all heard the old maxim, "Don't judge a book by its cover," but when it comes to students and children, it's easy to presume the worst. Who hasn't seen someone shake his head in confusion and say, "Kids these days... What are they thinking?" Well, at TRC, we were determined to find out ... at least to a certain extent. When it came time to plan for this Character Counts! edition of *Ilm o Amal*, we decided to survey students from our member schools about their positions on issues such as Stealing, Plagiarism, Lying, Cheating, Littering, Punctuality and Respect.

We realized that asking outright whether a student would steal or cheat would lead to predictable results. So we set out to design a survey that would give students many options to choose from on a sliding scale, so that they would have to consider their choices and, hopefully, answer honestly. The format we developed involved a three-part structure. For example, here is the section that deals with cheating:

**Q.1 You're about to sit an exam and you're not sure you're prepared. A friend offers you a sheet with the answers. Would you cheat?**

Never  Sometimes  Most of the Time  Always

**Q.2 Do you think it's important not to cheat?**

Very Important  Important  Somewhat Important  Not Important

**Q.3 Which of the following statements best describes the reason for your answer above?**

- If I cheat, it isn't fair to the students who have studied and are not cheating.
- If I always cheat, I will never really learn the material.
- If I cheat, I'll make sure I get good marks.
- It doesn't matter because it's just a school test.
- If I got caught, I would be in trouble.
- Cheating is also a skill that I might need in the future.

As you can see, the first question contextualizes the issue at hand by presenting a scenario and asking how students would act in that situation. The four choices given, bridging the extremes of "Never" and "Always," gave the students more options to consider. A simple "Yes" or "No" would not acknowledge the grey areas that are always a part of moral issues. The second question asked directly about the importance of the category being discussed. By questioning the importance, we felt we might touch on the value systems that have been

nurtured in the students. In other words, if a student admitted to shoplifting, we wanted to know whether she believed it was wrong to do so. Finally, the third question presented the students with six statements and asked them to choose one which reflected the rationale behind their answers. The statements reflected positive and negative standpoints, as well as moderate positions, and allowed us a hint of the reasons for the surveyed students' views.

The survey was conducted anonymously and school-heads and teachers were assured in a covering letter that results would not be examined or grouped by school. The sample of surveys was taken from secondary level, male and female students, ranging from Class 7 through Class 10, from both the public and private sectors. Interestingly, we expected students' answers to vary depending on age and gender, but found that on the whole the differences between these groups were not significant. For the purposes of this article, we will present our analysis of the general trends, since there is far too much data to discuss all the details.

In a survey of this magnitude, we must also acknowledge possible sources of error. Despite all our efforts, the "honesty factor" must still be taken into account. We, of course, have no way to be certain that students have answered honestly, although the range of answers we received seems to indicate that many did. For the purposes of this survey, we must presume that they have chosen truthfully. There were also several cases where it seemed students had misread the question and answered in total opposition to their other responses. Where these incongruities occurred, they are mentioned.

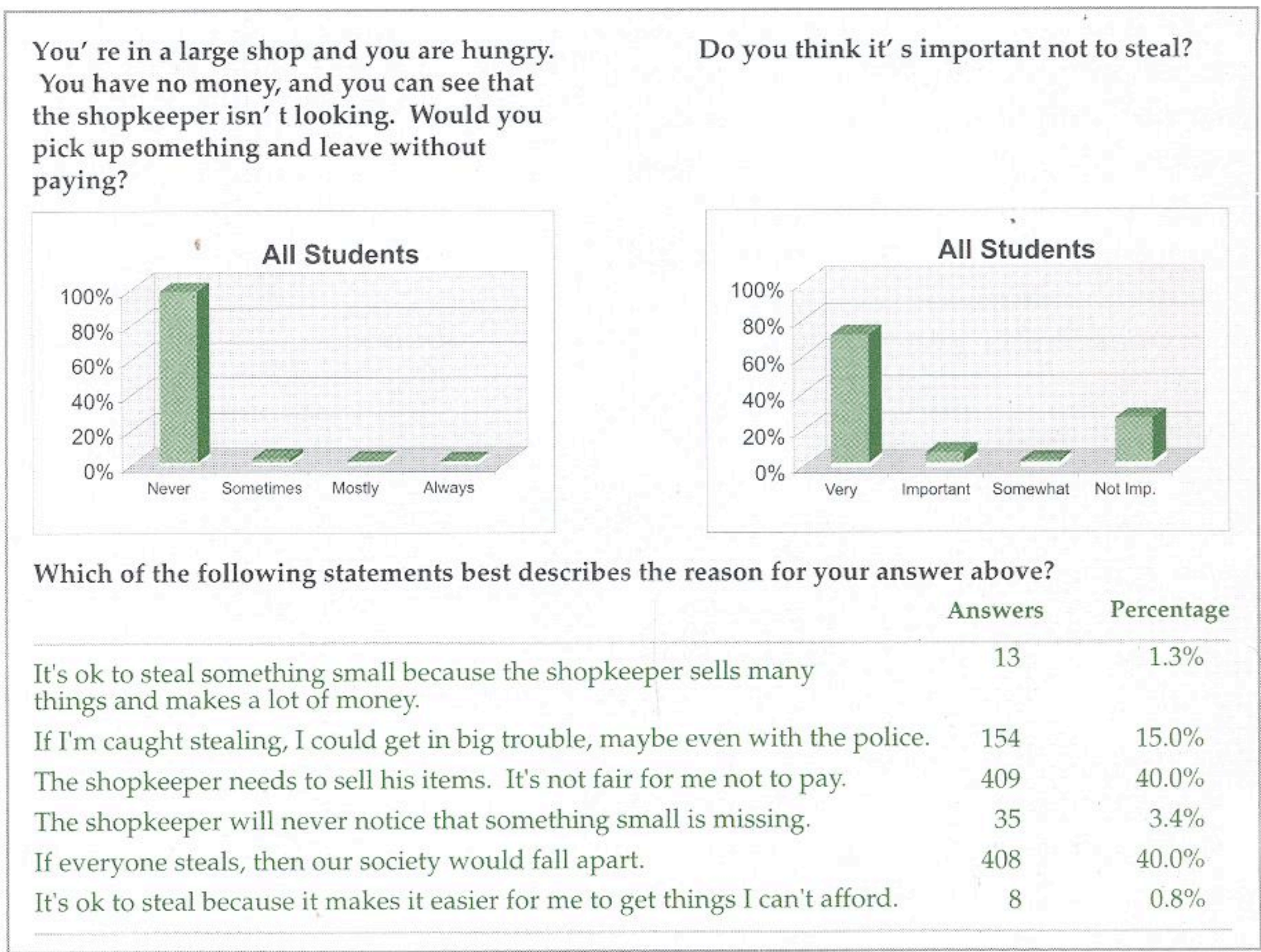
### Survey Sample Size

	Female	Male	Total
Class 7	163	134	297
Class 8	148	116	264
Class 9	148	94	242
Class 10	128	74	202
Total Female			587
Total Male			418
Total Students			1005

# Stealing

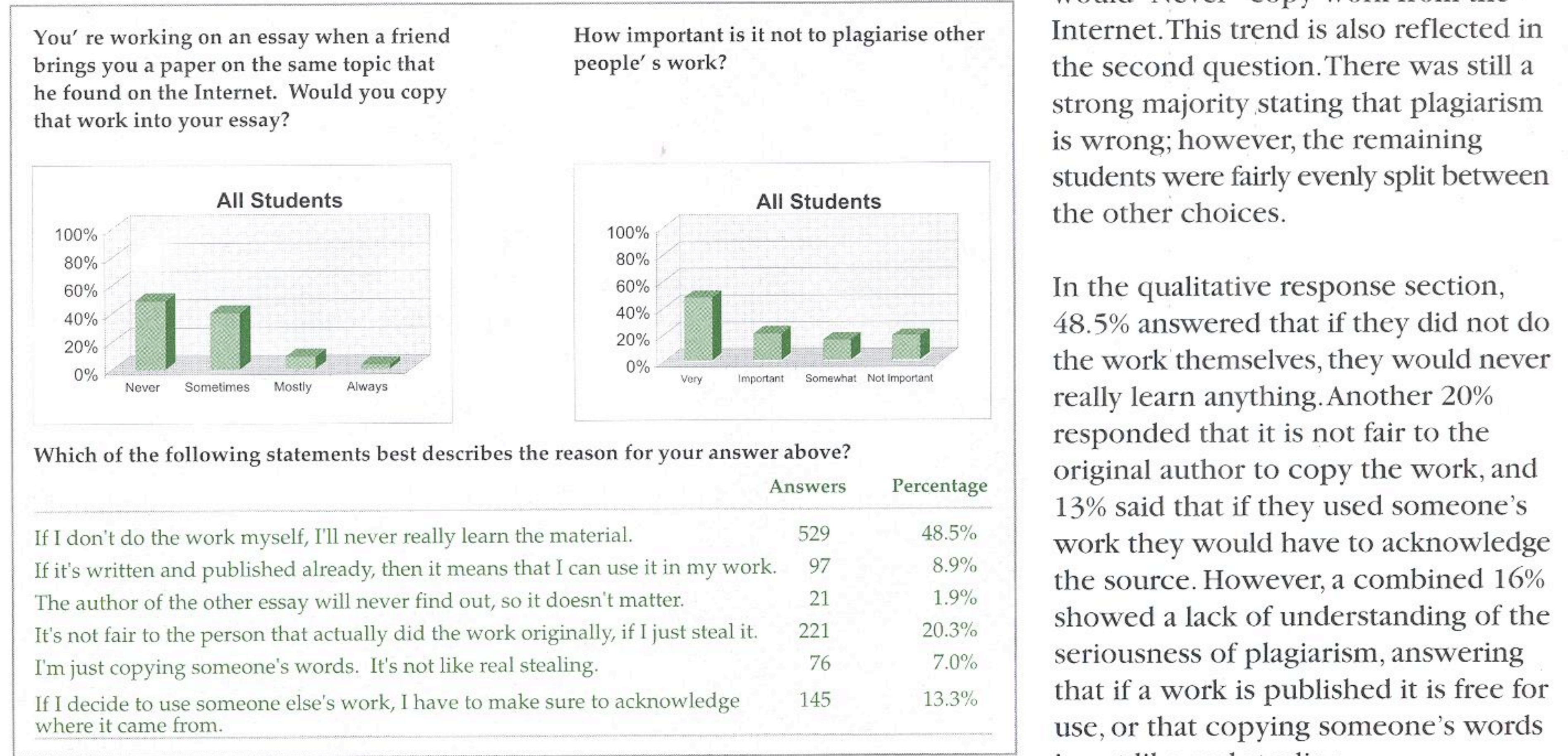
As might be expected, stealing in the form of shop-lifting was almost universally decried by students at every level. When presented with the scenario, 97% answered that they would never steal. In the second, more direct, question, 70% answered that it was "Very Important" not to steal; however, 22% answered that it was not important at all, which seems to suggest that, given the nearly unanimous answer to question one, that many students misread the question and marked the wrong extreme.

When asked in the third section to qualify their responses by choosing a statement, 40% answered that shop-lifting was not fair to the shopkeeper, and another 40% answered that if everyone were to steal, society would fall apart. The next highest response (15%) was "If I'm caught stealing, I could be in big trouble with the police." These choices seem to reflect that students are evenly divided between a local and more global response, but are also influenced in their decision by the figure of a punishing authority.



# Plagiarism

Although it is a form of theft, when it came to plagiarism, the results were far less decisive than those for stealing. As can be seen, there were nearly as many students who said they would "Sometimes" plagiarize as those who said they would "Never" copy work from the Internet. This trend is also reflected in the second question. There was still a strong majority stating that plagiarism is wrong; however, the remaining students were fairly evenly split between the other choices.



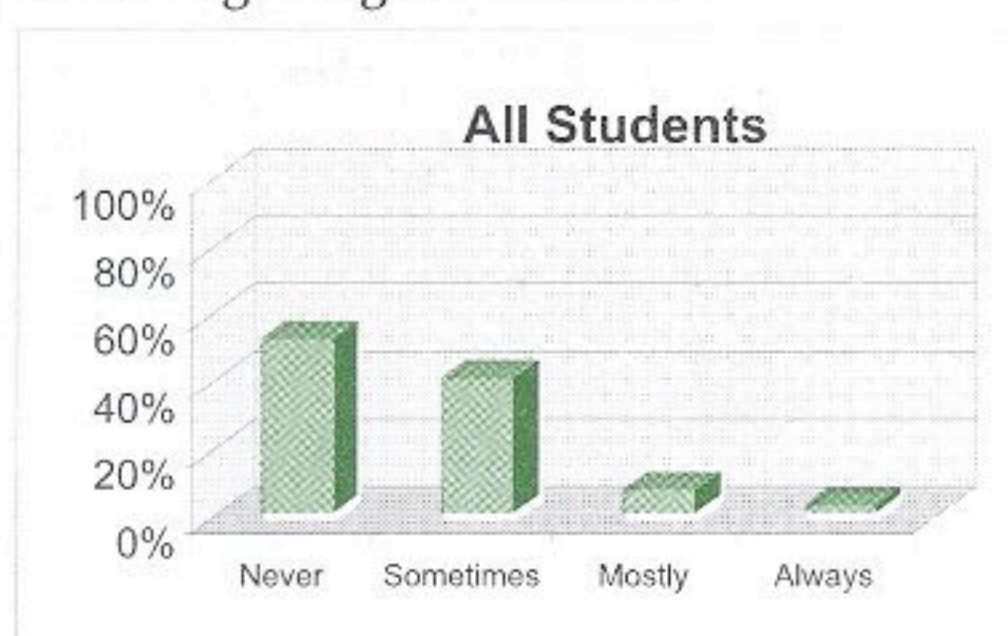
## Lying

When given a scenario where lying would get them out of trouble, 51% answered that they still would never lie, but 40% responded that they sometimes would. However, when asked directly if it is important not to lie, an overwhelming 72% answered that it was "Very Important," with a further 20% saying that it was "Important." It would seem that students' values against lying are clear, however when placed in a particular situation, they are less certain. This makes sense, since lying can often incorporate grey areas such as "white-lies" which are meant to spare someone's feelings.

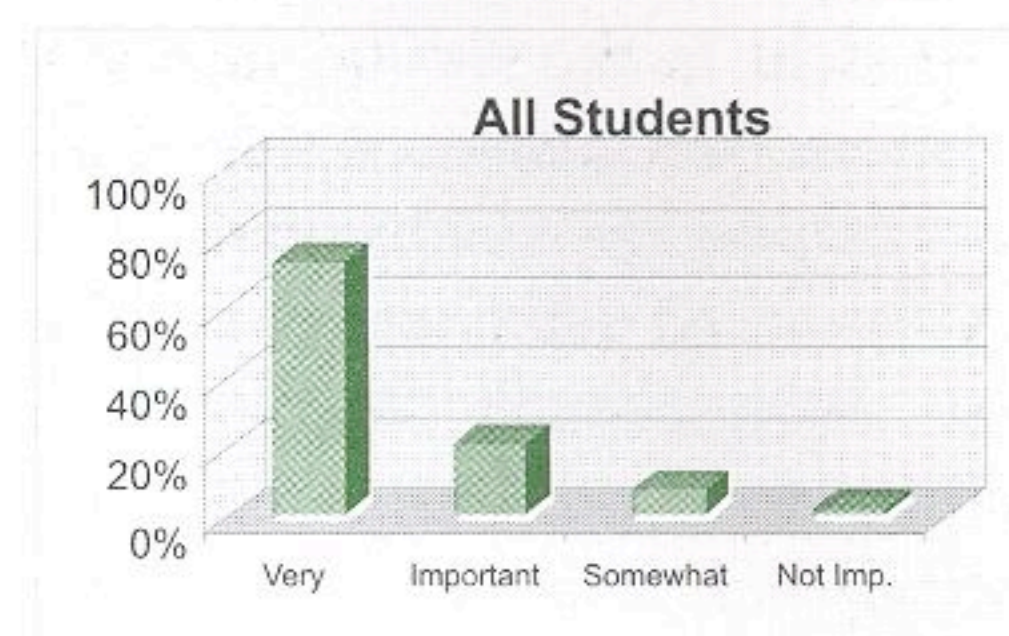
Interestingly, students were split in choosing a statement that explained their answer. A third of those surveyed answered that one shouldn't lie, because people don't trust liars, and another third,

that telling one lie leads to ten more to cover it up. Self-preservation was on the minds of 13% who responded that they wouldn't want to lie, but getting out of trouble was more important. Another 13% answered that by lying one can get away with just about anything, and 8% said that lying is all right, as long as no one is hurt.

You and your group of friends get caught while bunking physical education class. You can get away easily by lying about your ankle injury from last week. Would you lie to avoid getting into trouble?



How important do you think it is to tell the truth?



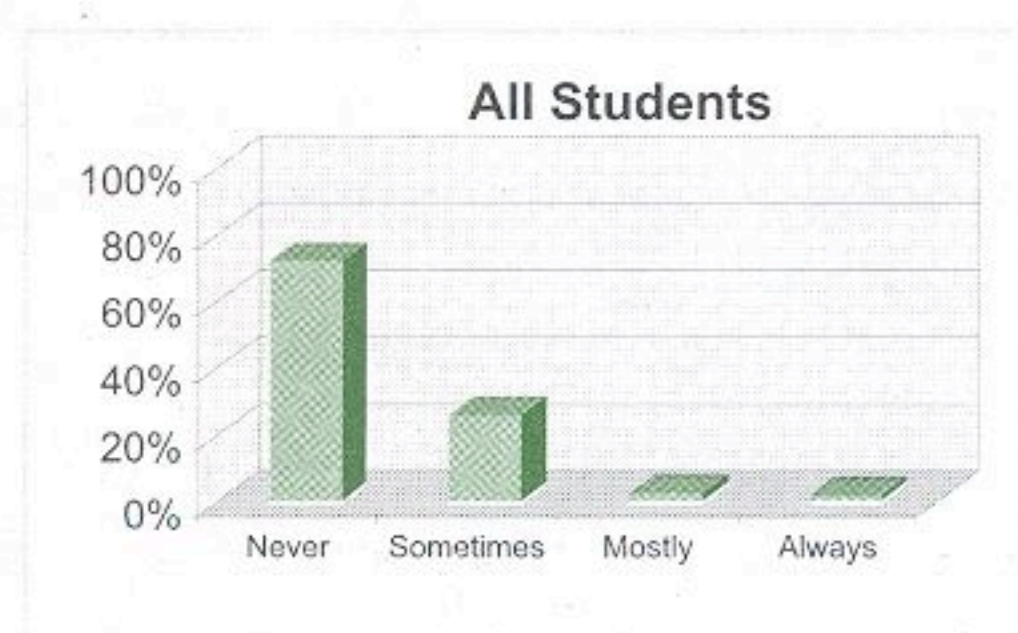
Which of the following statements best describes the reason for your answer above?

	Answers	Percentage
I should not lie because people don't trust liars.	333	32.3%
It's ok to lie, because everyone around me is doing it.	24	2.3%
Lying is all right as long as nobody's getting hurt.	85	8.2%
By lying you can get away with anything.	136	13.2%
It's bad because to hide one lie, you end up telling ten more.	316	30.6%
I don't want to lie, but I don't want to get in trouble either.	138	13.4%

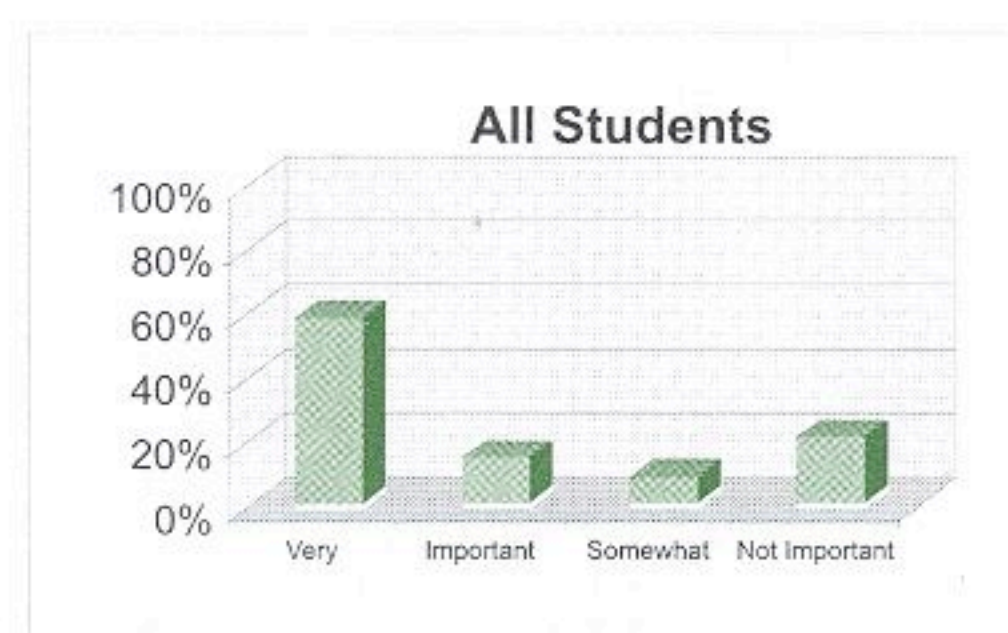
## Cheating

One might assume that cheating has been emphasized and enforced throughout most students' academic lives. The answers in this case, seem to support that theory, with a majority of 71% answering that they would "Never" cheat.

You're about to sit an exam and you're not sure you're prepared. A friend offers you a sheet with the answers. Would you cheat?



Do you think it's important not to cheat?



Which of the following statements best describes the reason for your answer above?

	Answers	Percentage
If I cheat, it isn't fair to the students who have studied and are not cheating.	451	42.8%
If I always cheat, I will never really learn the material.	377	35.7%
If I cheat I'll make sure I get good marks.	30	2.8%
It doesn't matter because it's just a school test.	44	4.2%
If I got caught, I would be in trouble.	131	12.4%
Cheating is also a skill that I might need in the future.	22	2.1.0%

Despite these strong convictions though, an honest 25% stated that they would "Sometimes" cheat if given the opportunity. When asked directly of the importance of not cheating, 20% answered that it was "Not Important," which seems incongruous, but may either be a case of students filling out the form incorrectly, or not feeling that cheating is as serious as other infractions.

When given six statements to choose from, 43% felt that cheating was not fair to students who had actually studied, and 35% that they would not learn the material if they cheated. The fear of getting caught was given as justification for not cheating by 12.5%.

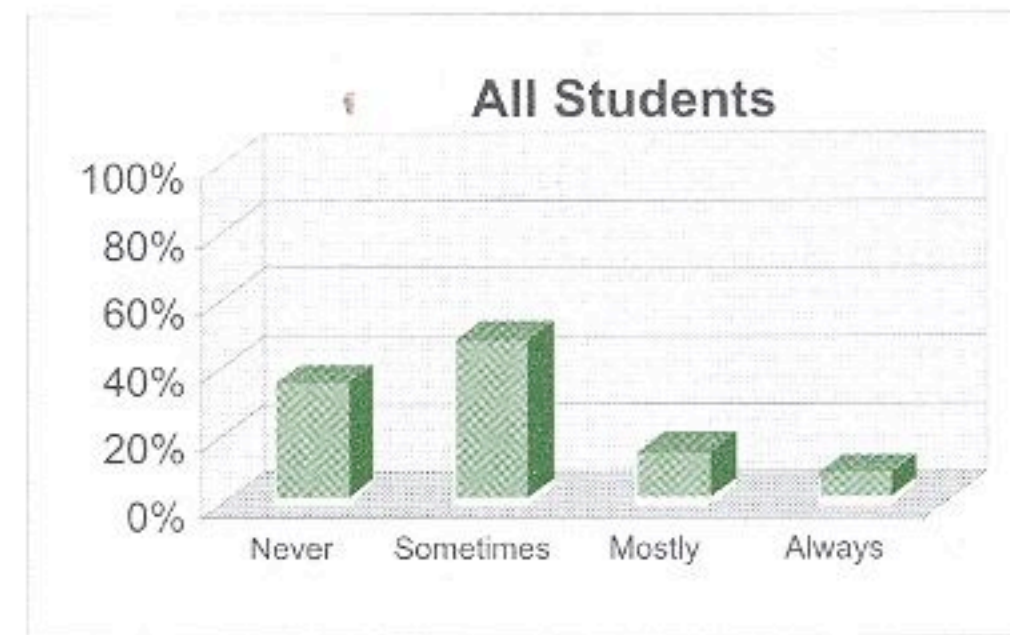


## Littering

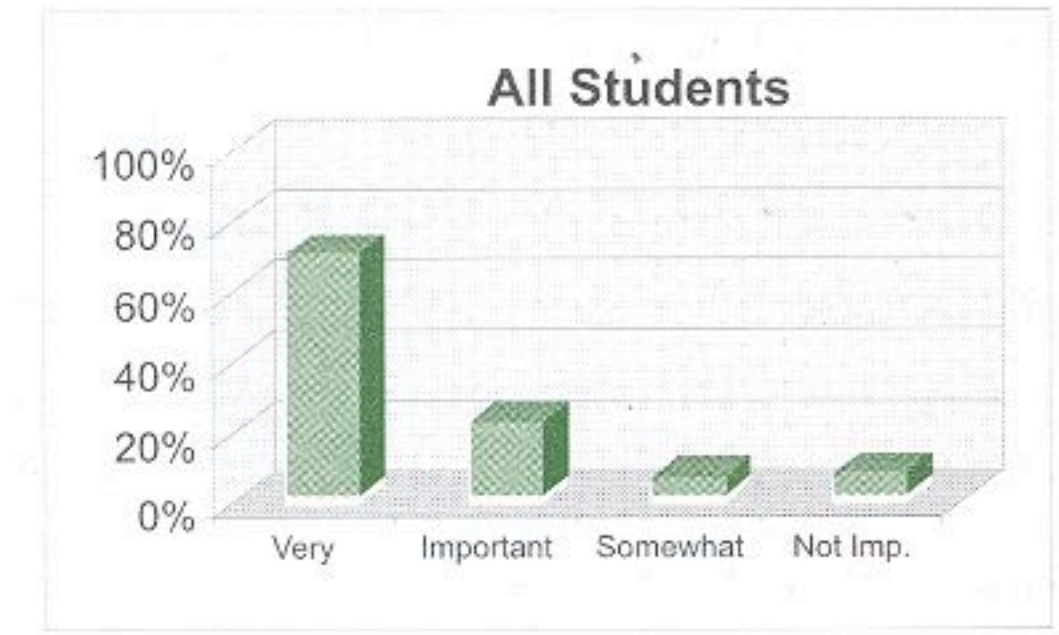
Here, we see a marked difference between the responses to the scenario question and the direct question. When asked directly, a strong majority of nearly 70% agreed that not littering was “Very Important.” But when given a scenario to imagine, only 33% said they would “Never” litter. The honest answer seems to be with the 46% who answered that they would “Sometimes” litter in certain situations.

When asked why they answered the way they did, the majority (43%) said that if everyone were to litter, our city would become very dirty. A sense of responsibility governed another 21% who felt that if they chose not to litter, then they would be setting a good example for others. Others were practical, with 17% answering that they wouldn’t want to litter, but neither did they want to carry trash around with them all day. The students’ environmental awareness was apparent as well, with 12% responding that our environment needs to be protected because plastics take centuries to biodegrade.

You’re walking with your friends and have just finished a snack. There are no trash bins nearby. Would you throw your garbage on the road?



How important do you think it is not to litter?



Which of the following statements best describes the reason for your answer above?

	Answers	Percentage
If everyone throws their trash around, our city will become very dirty.	460	43.2%
It doesn't matter, because it's usually just a small wrapper.	26	2.4%
Plastic takes centuries to biodegrade, and we need to protect our environment.	124	11.6%
Why should I care if there are no trash bins and everyone else does it?	37	3.5%
If I don't litter, someone may follow my example.	230	21.6%
I try not to litter, but I don't want to carry trash around all day.	189	17.7%

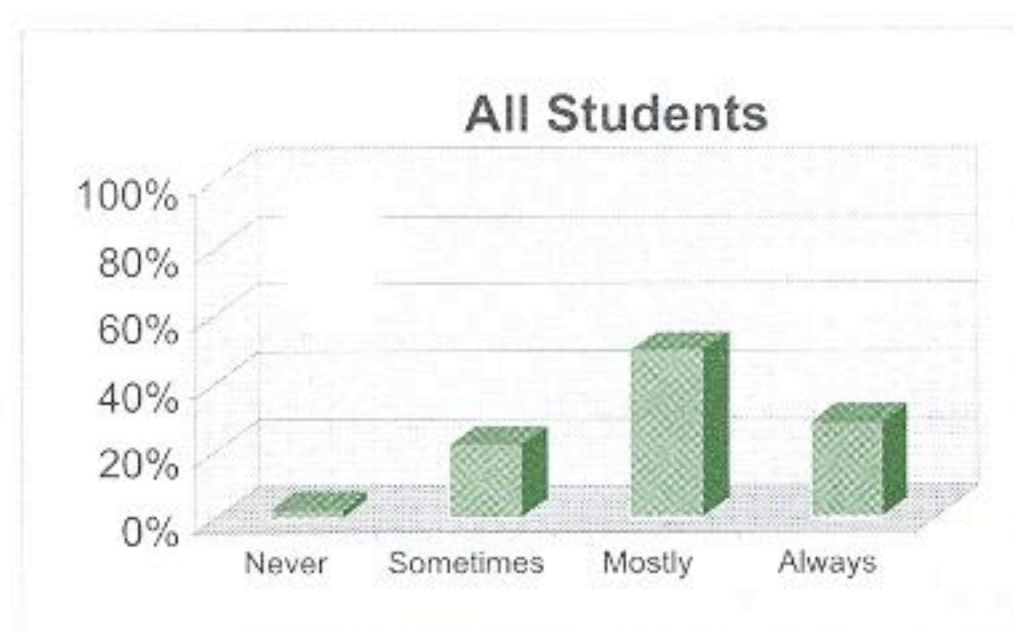
## Punctuality

Since punctuality is often casually ignored in our society, where early-evening wedding functions can easily begin after midnight, we were interested to discover the students’ thoughts on the subject. When asked if they are generally punctual, only 28% answered “Always,” which perhaps shows an admirable measure of honesty. Almost half said they were on time “Most of the time,” and 21% responded that they were sometimes on time. Even though students admitted that they are often not punctual, the majority (72%) felt that it was “Very Important” to be on time, and 23% that it was “Important.”

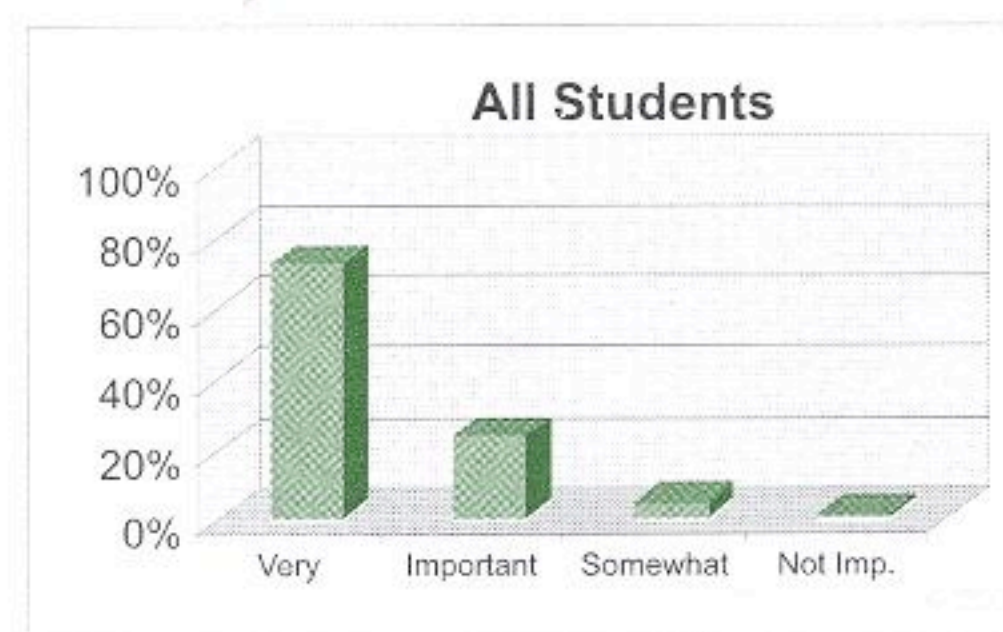
This suggests that students are well aware of the importance of being punctual, but it proves more difficult to uphold the ideal in practice.

When choosing a statement to justify their answers, 36% stated that being punctual would lead others to believe that they were dependable. A civic responsibility led 24% to answer that if everyone is always late, society will become disorderly, and another 24% that being late inconveniences others. Interestingly, 7% answered that it should not matter if they are only slightly late, and 7% that in Pakistan everyone knows you will be late anyway.

Are you a punctual person? Are you on time for appointments, school or even dinner?



How important do you think it is to be a punctual person?



Which of the following statements best describes the reason for your answer above?

	Answers	Percentage
If I am consistently on time, people will know that I'm dependable.	439	36.4%
Whoever I'm meeting will probably be late too.	40	3.3%
If I'm late, I will be inconveniencing others.	282	23.4%
If I'm only a little bit late, why should it matter?	77	6.4%
If everyone is always late, society will become very disorderly.	288	23.9%
In Pakistan, everyone knows you'll be late anyway.	80	6.7%

## Respecting Others

In many ways, all of the other categories involve “Respect” at a certain level, but we wanted to approach the topic directly. The majority of those surveyed said that they would not play their music loudly if it was disturbing others, but a large percentage answered that they “Sometimes” might. It seems though, that most students have been taught to be respectful since almost 70% answered that respect was “Very Important” and 23% that it was “Important.”

When choosing a phrase that reflected the reasons behind their answers, 36% answered that they would respect others, since they expected similar treatment in return. Another 31% replied that you should always think about whether you’re disturbing others. Additionally, many students (15%) opted for a

moderate choice, that they would not be loud all the time, just with their favourite songs, for a few minutes.

## Conclusions

Despite our frequent fears that modern influences have corrupted the youth, it would seem that the values of our country’s young citizens are still intact. When asked directly of the importance of these particular elements of character, the majority answered exactly as one might hope they would. The students clearly stated that stealing, cheating, lying and plagiarism were wrong, and that respect for others and punctuality were extremely important.

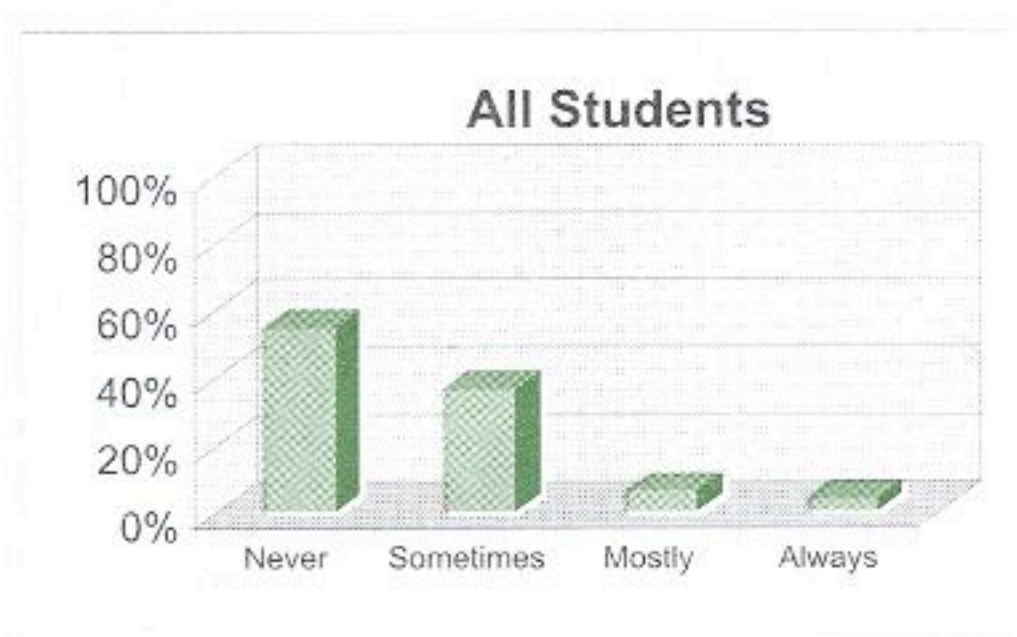
Things changed slightly, however, when the students were asked to imagine their response to certain scenarios. When answering to the abstract concept of each category, students were consistent in their inherent value systems, but when confronted with real-life situations their answers were more likely to vary. In fact when faced with a scenario, only outright stealing was still unanimously proclaimed as something students would never do. Cheating, lying, plagiarizing and respecting others still maintained strong majorities in the “correct” answer categories, although imagining themselves in the scenario caused a greater spread of responses.

Littering and Punctuality were the only categories where the majority shifted away from the “obvious” answer. Students admitted that they sometimes littered and that they were often not on time. It could be that students found these categories to be less serious than the others and were unafraid to admit their infractions. However, in both cases, the majority stated that both qualities were “Very Important.” Perhaps it is safe to assume that these two categories are also areas where students have not been led by example, and there are no repercussions involved. There are not many incentives for students to be on time or to refrain from throwing trash on the streets. In the case of littering, many students were conscious of the environment and replied that they did not want to litter, but that there were no trash-bins available. These responses should be incentive for all of us to push for better services in keeping our city clean.

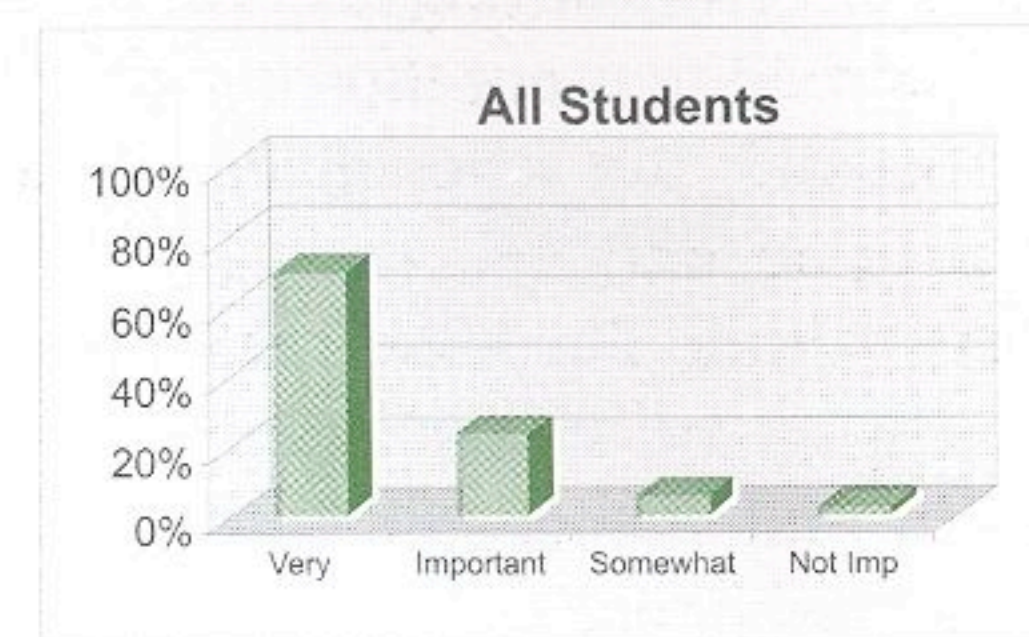
Plagiarism is another interesting case. With the availability of information on the Internet, plagiarism has become a serious issue in schools. It is a form of theft; however, students do not view it in the same way as shop-lifting, for obvious reasons. Although the majority (48.5%) claimed they would never plagiarize, the other half stated that they would to varying degrees. This shows that we should be emphasizing the importance of original work, creativity, and proper acknowledgement of sources in the classroom. In a country where pirated movies play on legitimate cable channels, enforcing the importance of copyright and intellectual property will be a difficult task, but a challenge that must be undertaken.

Overall, although there are certainly areas that could improve, the majority of students show the markings of solid young citizens. If anything, our character survey proves that the values of the young fall well within our hopes and expectations. The next time any of us are tempted to judge a book by its cover, it might pay to flip it open and read a few passages; there might be more there than expected.

Your favourite song is on the radio and you want to listen to it LOUD, but you know it will bother other people in your house. Would you play it anyway?



How important is it to respect others in this way?



Which of the following statements best describes the reason for your answer above?

	Answers	Percentage
I want others to respect me, so I should respect them.	379	35.6%
Every time I go to a wedding, they play loud music until very late and no one seems to care.	27	2.5%
I can't enjoy my favourite music unless it's loud.	68	6.4%
You should always think about whether you're disturbing someone else before you do something.	326	30.6%
There is already so much noise. I wouldn't want to add more.	97	9.1%
I wouldn't be loud all the time, just with my favourite songs for a few minutes.	167	15.7%

## Survey Schools

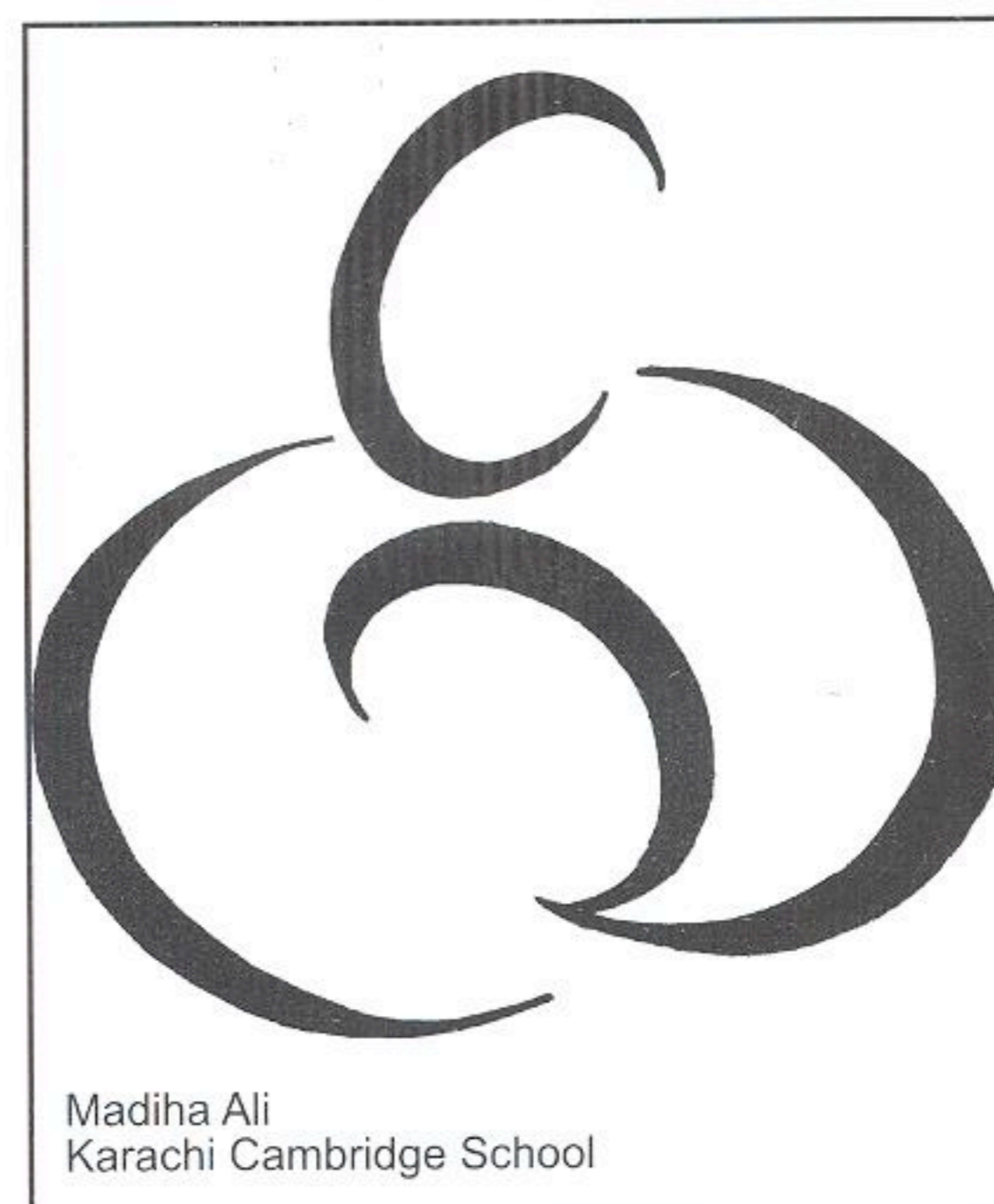
We would like to extend our gratitude to the staff and students of the following schools who participated in our CHARACTER COUNTS! Survey:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Aitchison Model School                                 | 18. Lilies Montessori                                  |
| 2. Al Madrassa-tus-Saifiah-tul Burhaniah                  | 19. Mahmood-e-Niswan Boys' Elementary School           |
| 3. Allama Iqbal Boys' Elementary School                   | 20. Mahmood-e-Niswan Girls' Elementary School          |
| 4. Baba-e-Urdu Moulvi Abdul Haque Girls Elementary School | 21. Major Ziauddin Abbasi Boys, Elementary School      |
| 5. Bahria Educational Services                            | 22. Maula Muhammad Husain Azad Girls' Secondary School |
| 6. Beaconhouse School System                              | 23. Memon Education Board                              |
| 7. Convent of Jesus and Mary                              | 24. Nasra School                                       |
| 8. Fatimiyah Girls' School                                | 25. P.E.C.H.S Girls' School                            |
| 9. Habib Girls' School                                    | 26. Progressive Public School                          |
| 10. Habib Public School                                   | 27. Qamar-e-Bani Hashim School                         |
| 11. Happy Home Secondary School                           | 28. Rana Liaquat Ali Khan Girls' Secondary School      |
| 12. Ibrahim Ali Bhai Boys' Secondary School               | 29. Rashid Minhas Girls' Secondary School              |
| 13. Ibrahim Ali Bhai Girls' Elementary School             | 30. Shahwilayat Public School                          |
| 14. Ibrahim Ali Bhai Girls' Secondary School              | 31. Shamsi Model School                                |
| 15. Karachi Cambridge School                              | 32. St. Michael's Convent School                       |
| 16. Karachi Public School                                 | 33. The Mama Parsi Girls' Secondary School             |
| 17. Lahore Grammar School                                 | 34. V.M. Public School                                 |

### Illustrations

The illustrations in the issue of *Ilm o Amal* are the artistic creations of students from the following schools:

- Karachi Cambridge School
- The AMI School
- Mrs. Haque's School
- Cover Illustration created by:  
Madiha Ali, Class VIII A  
Karachi Cambridge School



# Mixed Messages

Sabah Baxamoosa

Unfortunately, what students learn in school is often undermined by what they observe in their homes and communities. It is important that we try our best to act appropriately and set a good example for our children. Mixed messages create confusion and eventually lead to an acceptance that rules and values can be bent when they don't suit us. It is important to impart to students that just because "Everyone does it" does not make it right. Consider the following two scenarios and the mixed messages confronted by the characters:

## Scenario 1

"It's Earth Day today! It's Earth Day today!" shouted six year old Sehr as she came racing down the stairs. "We have to go to school early today, we have to make preparations and projects and decorate our classrooms!" Sehr gulped down her breakfast, grabbed her bag and set out for school.

At school, the children did all sorts of activities and time flew by. Before anyone knew it, it was time to go home. Sehr's elder brother came to pick her up from school. He was also the first one she told about her exciting day at school. She told him all sorts of fun facts about the Earth, shared information about the pollution humans cause and other things she had learned in class. Sehr's brother had no particular interest in hearing about her day at school. He was thinking about the new video game that he wanted to buy and play with his friends. He was eating a packet of chips and sipping on some Coke, and without thinking twice he threw all the garbage out the window.

Sehr was ready to cry. Here she was, telling her brother how the Earth is being destroyed, and he had just littered the streets! Realizing his sister's feelings, her brother explained, "That's just what grownups do."

Sehr went home and thought about what her brother had said. She told her mother about "Earth Day," but her mother shrugged it off as a special day at school where the children took part in activities, and couldn't see what Sehr was fussing about.

Towards the evening, Sehr was outside having ice cream with her friends. She looked at the wrapper in her hand; there were no trash bins in sight. She kept staring at it. With all the mixed messages she had received, what was she supposed to do?

## Scenario 2

Haroon read a story in school one day. It was about a little girl who was taking lunch to her ill grandmother. The teacher said the story was about respecting your elders. "You should listen to them, take care of them and always respect them because they are older than you." With this lesson in mind, Haroon left through the school gate and promptly greeted the *chawkidaar* and the *makai wala*. Haroon's smile made their face light up.

Haroon's father had come to pick him up from school and was irritated to find himself stuck in traffic. He started to chide the driver for making rash decisions while driving, and taking the wrong turn. He said things like: "You are such a fool, don't you think when you drive? No wonder you are just a driver!" Haroon couldn't understand. *Baba* was so much older than his father, how could his father talk to *Baba* like that?

When he went home he found his mother screaming at the *aayah*. Haroon could not make sense of what was going on. On the one hand all the stories he read told him to respect his elders, and on the other hand everywhere he looked people were venting their anger on their elders.

A week later, Haroon decided to buy *makai* after school. Unfortunately, the *makai wala* put too much *masala* and too little *nimbu*. Haroon found himself riling in anger, "You are such a fool!..." and it broke the *makai wala's* heart.

You should consider sharing these examples with your class. Can they think of other mixed messages that they have encountered? Try to think about ways that you can help the students apply what they learn in school within their community. For example, after lessons on the environment, consider having students organise campaigns to keep the school yard clean, have trash bins installed in their neighborhood, or lobby for local stores to stop using polyethylene plastic bags.

## Sabah Baxamoosa

Sabah spent three months with us at TRC as an intern during a semester off from her university studies. Sabah is now back at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, working toward completing her degree in Social Theory and Political Economy.

# Character Building Activities

Here are some activities to start you on your way towards a classroom where Character Counts! Some of these activities are designed for younger children, just as others are suitable for older students. However, with a little initiative, you can adapt the basic concept of these activities to benefit whichever age-level you are teaching. For example, discussion based activities can be simplified or made more complex as the case may be. Use these activities for inspiration, and then let your imagination and intuition do the rest. In all cases, remember that the objective is to foster the six pillars of character (given on page 19): **Trustworthiness; Respect; Responsibility; Fairness; Caring and Citizenship.**

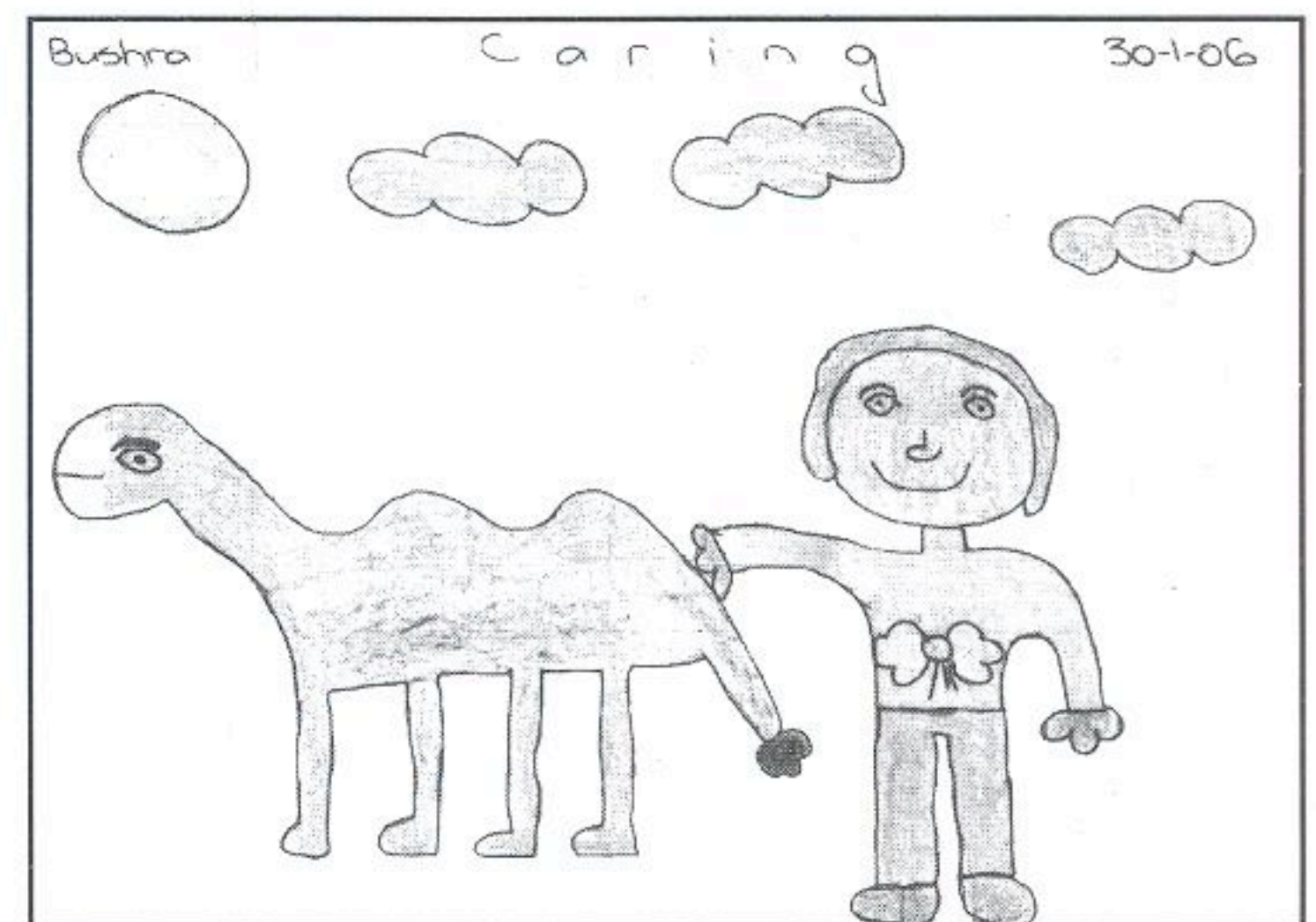
## A Special Friend

### What you need:

- A book that talks about friendship
- Paper, glue, scissors, and any other materials for a collage

### What to do:

- Read the book about friendship to the children.
- Ask them what they thought of the story, and which were their favourite parts.
- Talk about times when we are feeling sad or lonely, and about people who might help us during those times. Ask them if other class members can help in this way.
- Ask the class what makes a good friend. Have them tell you what friends do for each other, and how to be friendly to new children in the class.
- You can also guide the discussion to involve simple words we use to describe our friends, such as kind, helpful or caring.
- Other important points to discuss might be times when we argue with friends; how to become friends again; or times when pupils want to be on their own.
- Have the children illustrate their ideas about friendship by creating a "Friendship" page. This could be a drawing of their best friend, or a group of friends playing together. Children could also be encouraged to cut out pictures from magazines etc. that they think represent friendship to paste together in a collage.



Bushra  
The AMI School

## Acting it Out!

### What you need:

- Small slips of paper

### What to do:

- Tell the pupils that you will be exploring the ways that we treat people around us, and the ways that others treat us.
- Brainstorm with the class to gather ideas for scenarios that involve pupils interacting. Make sure that each scenario has two sides to act out. Here are some examples, however, you should ensure that you keep them in the context of your class and school:
  - A new pupil in school gets lost taking the register to the office and asks for help from two other pupils. One is unkind and doesn't help the newcomer, the other does.
  - It is playtime and some friends are playing together. Another pupil arrives, wanting to join in. Some of the original group say he can't play, others say he can.



Sara Anwar, Class VIII-A  
Karachi Cambridge School

- Write the scenario suggestions in point form on the blackboard and have one volunteer copy them onto slips of paper.
- Divide the class into groups of three or four, depending on your class size.
- Place all the slips of paper together and have each group select one scenario at random, and explain that each group will be acting out that scenario for the class.
- Give the groups a few minutes to discuss the scenario and rehearse how they will act out the roles.
- Have each group act out their scenario when it is completed, ask the class what they think each person in that scenario would have felt like inside. Also, ask what the wronged individual learned from the behaviour of the others.
- Depending on the number of scenarios and the time available, this activity can be repeated several times.

## Words of Wisdom

### What you need:

- Enough copies of the Proverb Worksheet provided on page 18

### What to do:

- Tell the class that they will be doing an exercise involving proverbs. Explain that proverbs are short but memorable sayings that usually express some kind of basic truth.
- Pass out copies of the Proverb Worksheet. This worksheet can be completed singly or in groups.
- Have pupils match the proverb with its meaning.
- Bring the class together to discuss the answers to the worksheet.
- After they have discussed the sayings' meanings, have them discuss how they could apply the wisdom of the traditional sayings to their own life. Can they think of a situation when one of these proverbs applied to their lives?

### Extension Activities:

- After the initial activity, you can have pupils add any proverbs or sayings that they might know for discussion. Encourage them to think of expressions in their mother tongue.
- Pupils can be encouraged to talk to their parents, grandparents and other family members to find out other traditional sayings. Have the class try to guess the meanings of these phrases as well, and discuss them in the same manner as above.
- The wisdom of proverbs can often be completely contradicted by another proverb. Your pupils may have noticed this. For example: *Haste Makes Waste* urges us to take time to consider our actions, whereas *He Who Hesitates is Lost* implies that opportunities are lost if we wait too long. You could have students try to find as many contrary pairs of phrases as they can. Hold a discussion about how these contradictions happen and how different wisdom often applies to different situations.

## Take a Look in the Mirror

### What you need:

- A box or bag or container of some sort

### What to do:

- Have the students write a description of themselves on a sheet of paper. They should not sign their names; the descriptions should be anonymous.
- Emphasise that the students are to concentrate on their positive characteristics.
- The descriptions should include physical attributes such as, eye-colour, hair, skin, height. Other non-physical attributes should also be included, for example, loves to play jokes on friends, always smiling, very helpful, never late for school, is unselfish, and plays fair.

- Get the students to fold their self-descriptions and place them in a box or bag.
- Have a student select a folded sheet from the box or bag and read the descriptions to the class. The class will then try to guess the mystery person's identity.
- This process should be repeated until all the slips of paper have been picked.
- As each person is correctly identified, discuss how other students were able to determine the correct identity. Again, keep the students focussed on positive traits.
- Next, pair the class off. Have them write positive descriptions about their partner and take turns sharing with each other.
- Ask students to describe how they felt as their friends or partners read all the nice things about them.
- Also ask them to compare the statements they wrote about themselves with those their classmates have written. Ask if the descriptions were basically the same, or if people saw them differently than they saw themselves.
- Have the students discuss which is more important to them: what others see or think about them, or what they see and think about themselves. Ask them to provide a rationale for their answers.

## If I Wasn't Me, What Would I Be?

### What you need:

- No materials required

### What to do:

- Divide the class into small teams.
- Each team may select any one of the suggested category choices listed below and complete the following open-ended statements:

*If I wasn't me, I would like to be \_\_\_\_\_.*  
*My rationale for wanting to be \_\_\_\_\_ is because \_\_\_\_\_.*

- The team, however, must come to a unified consensus about their choice of what they would like to be. Each team member must then contribute to explaining why that selection was made.
- Be sure to emphasise that they are to use their knowledge across various subjects of the specific traits and unique elements of their selection to justify their answer.

### Category Choices:

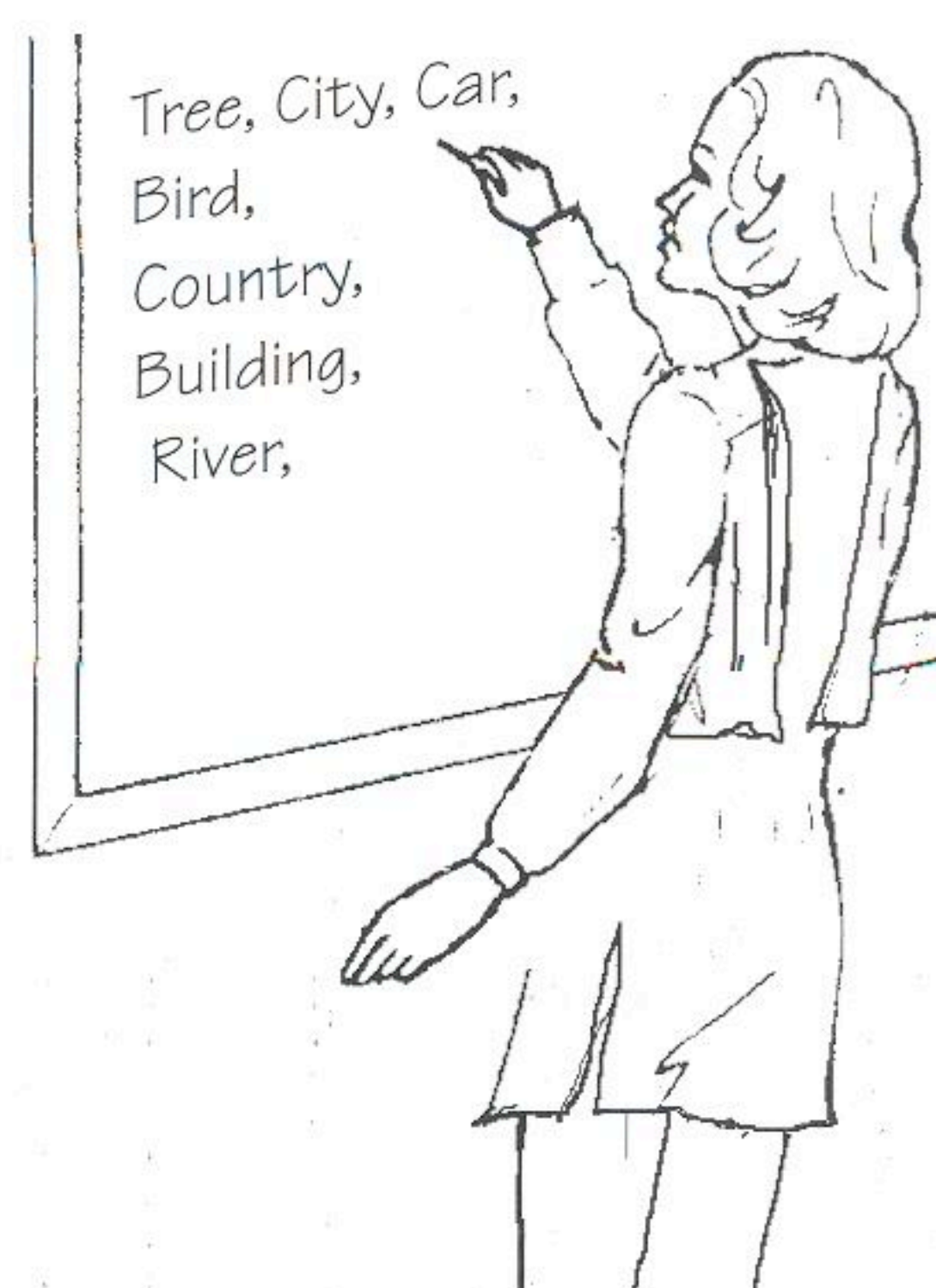
Remember that these are categories, and pupils should complete their statements with a specific element from one of these categories. These are only suggestions, you should think about what categories would best suit your class.

- |                   |                  |                |
|-------------------|------------------|----------------|
| • Tree            | • Building       | • Ocean        |
| • City            | • Number         | • Bridge       |
| • Car             | • Part of Speech | • Country      |
| • Date in History | • Author         | • President    |
| • Bird            | • River          | • Book         |
| • Country         | • Song           | • Professional |

### Example:

Category: River

If I weren't me, I would like to be the Nile River. My rationale for wanting to be the Nile River is because I would be the longest river in Africa. I would have ruins from ancient civilizations on my bank. I would supply the land with water and let people grow crops on my banks.



## Values Jar

### What you need:

- Poster board in six distinct colours
- Poster making materials
- Clear glass jar
- Marbles, gumballs, beads, jelly beans or buttons in the same six colours

### What to do:

- Explain to the class that you will be doing a long-term activity that involves character building.
- Write the six pillars of character building on the board, and discuss the values of each category (given on page 19). Have the pupils give examples of each category.
- Divide the class into six groups and have them design one section of a bulletin board display outlining the six values. Assign each group a dominant colour to represent that value.
- Assemble the six sections into one bulletin board or wall display.
- When the display is complete, announce to the class that you will be on the lookout for behaviour which demonstrates one or more of the six values.
- Hold up the empty glass jar and explain that if you spot an act of character (which isn't planned just for this activity), you will place a marble of that colour in the jar. So, for example, if caring is noticed, a red one; blue for trustworthiness; yellow for respectful acts; green for responsibility, orange for fairness; and purple for an act of good citizenship.
- Each day, you can have pupils tell you something that they have done at home and have the class decide which category of marble will go in the jar.
- When the jar is full, the entire class will have a celebration.
- It is important that this activity not be a race. Emphasise quality, not quantity. Look for out of the ordinary displays of good character, and make sure they are genuine. Of course, each time an act of good character is recognized, you should be sure to acknowledge the pupil's behavior.
- Keep the jar in view and comment periodically on which colours are prominent in the jar and which are not well represented.
- Remember not to get too large a jar. You will have to estimate its size so that it fills fast enough to maintain the pupils' interest, but takes long enough to get the message across.
- Make the class celebration as significant as possible. Perhaps a pizza party for the class or a special field trip. Let them help plan the event. If you have used an edible colour coding system, like gumballs or jelly beans, you could distribute them amongst the class for the party.



## To Fight or Not to Fight

### What you need:

- No materials required

### What to do:

- Introduce the word "conflict." Make sure everyone understands what it means before proceeding.
- Remind the pupils that people often overlook things that they have in common and usually do not listen well when they disagree. Explain that we must always show respect for other people's ideas and try to work things out calmly.
- Guide the discussion towards reasons why arguing and fighting aren't good solutions: Often the conflict is not



resolved by fighting, one person may become even more upset, and usually the stronger, more vocal person will win the fight, regardless of who is right.

- Divide the class into small groups. Give each one a conflict scenario and ask them to discuss what would happen if the characters fought and alternately, how each situation could be solved if they show respect for each other. Some sample scenarios might be:
  - Zaid and Zara are brother and sister. They both like to have a snack after school. One day there was only one *samosa* left in the refrigerator, which both of them wanted. What could they do to show respect for the other?
  - Sameer is in one second grade class. Hamza is in the other. One day during recess, both boys ran to the playing field at the same time. Sameer said, "Our class is going to play hockey this recess. We need the playing field." Hamza said, "But our class is going to play cricket. We need the field." What could they do to show respect for each other?
- Have each group role-play their scenario twice. The first time, they should act out what would happen if the characters fight to solve the problem. The second time, they should show them respecting each other and finding a solution.
- When the role-playing is done, conclude the discussion by talking about the solutions that each group explored.

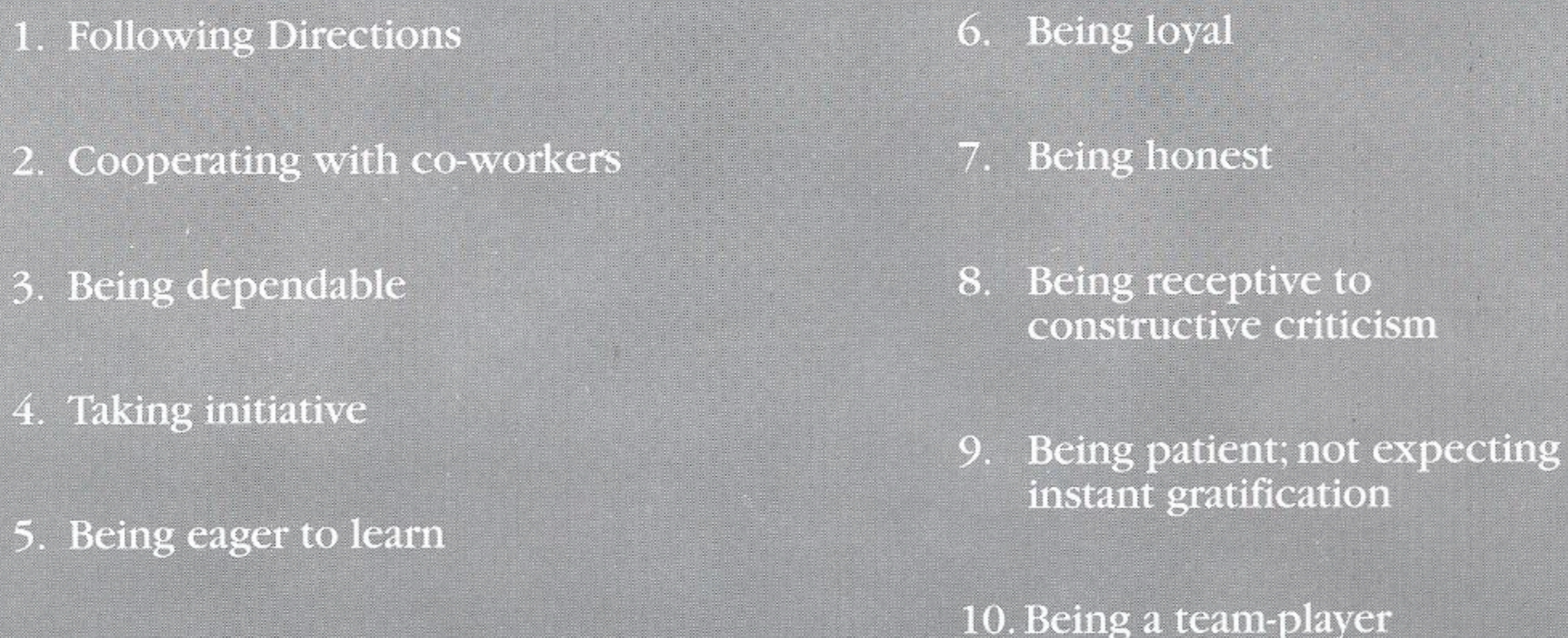
## Work Place Skills

### What you need:

- No materials required

### What to do:

- Tell students that you are all going to discuss having a job and getting promoted rather than fired.
- Have the class brainstorm a list of some of the factors that are important for keeping a job. Take down all the answers on the chalkboard. Try to guide the discussion so it include values such as:

- 
1. Following Directions
  2. Cooperating with co-workers
  3. Being dependable
  4. Taking initiative
  5. Being eager to learn
  6. Being loyal
  7. Being honest
  8. Being receptive to constructive criticism
  9. Being patient; not expecting instant gratification
  10. Being a team-player

- Be sure to point out that the expectations of the work place are very similar to those at school. Ask why these aspects are important.
- Ask them where else, besides work and school, it is important to practice all these factors.
- Now guide the discussion into reasons why a person might lose a job. Answers may include coming in late, calling in sick too often, talking instead of working, not following directions, arguing with the boss and co-workers.

## A Hero is a Hero!

### What you need:

- Paper plates
- Colouring and decorating materials

### What to do:

- Ask the class what they think being a “Hero” means. Write down their responses on one side of the blackboard.
- Then ask the pupils to name people that they feel are heroes. Ask them to explain their choices and write these down as well.
- The pupils will most likely name celebrities, patriots, politicians, movie characters and superheroes. Encourage them to think about people who are heroes in their own lives. Share with them that a hero is someone that has courage and compassion for others. We usually think of a hero as being someone famous that we learn about at school or see on television or on the movie screen. Explain that anyone can be a hero... even a pet!
- With these ideas in mind, have students share stories about how people they know (friends, family, neighbours, pets) are real-life heroes.
- Ask pupils to pick one person who they feel is a real-life hero in their lives and draw pictures of that person on a paper plate. Assist them in writing a short message stating why that person is their hero. Decorate the plates with art materials.
- Invite pupils to show their display to the class and share why that person is their hero.
- Combine plates to create a gallery of the class’s heroes.

### Extension Activities:

- Students could be encouraged to research their favourite hero in the library or on the Internet to present to the class.
- A class visit to museums, such as Mohatta Palace, provides ample displays and pictures that involve famous or historic figures. Have pupils “collect” as many heroes as they can find during the visit.



Yousuf Hafiz, Class VIII-O  
Karachi Cambridge School

### References / Resources

[www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/ce/strat121.htm](http://www.urbanext.uiuc.edu/ce/strat121.htm)

[www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/coolplanet)

[www.pbskids.org/clifford/parentsteachers/activities/help-othus/05\\_help\\_others.html](http://www.pbskids.org/clifford/parentsteachers/activities/help-othus/05_help_others.html)

[www.charactercounts.org/howto/teaching-tools.htm](http://www.charactercounts.org/howto/teaching-tools.htm)

- CHARACTER COUNTS! Lesson Plans reprinted with permission of the Josephson Institute of Ethics.

# Words of Wisdom...

Connect these popular sayings on the left with their meanings on the right.

- When it rains, it pours.
- You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink.
- Don't count your chickens before they hatch.
- Birds of a feather, flock together.
- The early bird gets the worm.
- Do not judge a book by its cover.
- Opportunity seldom knocks twice.
- A bird in hand is worth two in the bush.
- A fool and his money are soon parted.
- Let sleeping dogs lie.
- The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.
- Don't cry over spilled milk.

Sometimes it's better to leave things alone instead of stirring up trouble.

Someone else's situation always seems better than yours, but that may not be the whole story.

If it's not one thing, it's the other. Problems always seem to come at once.

If you don't spend your money wisely, it'll be gone before you know it.

Take a chance when it comes, you never know if you will have that chance again.

It is better to recognise what you have, than to chase after richer treasures that you might not obtain.

Don't raise your expectations about something before you receive it.

There's no point getting upset over little things.

You can show your friend the right thing to do, but you can't convince him to do it.

Never base your opinion of someone only on how they look.

One way of judging a person's character is by examining who she spends time with.

If you are on time, and plan in advance, you will achieve your goals.

# Six Pillars of CHARACTER COUNTS!



## Trustworthiness

Be honest • Don't deceive, cheat or steal • Be reliable — do what you say you'll do • Have the courage to do the right thing • Build a good reputation • Be loyal — stand by your family, friends and country



## Respect

Treat others with respect • Be tolerant of differences • Use good manners, not bad language • Be considerate of the feelings of others • Don't threaten, hit or hurt anyone • Deal peacefully with anger, insults and disagreements



## Responsibility

Do what you are supposed to do • Persevere: keep on trying! • Always do your best • Use self-control • Be self-disciplined • Think before you act — consider the consequences • Be accountable for your choices



## Fairness

Play by the rules • Take turns and share • Be open-minded; listen to others • Don't take advantage of others • Don't blame others carelessly



## Caring

Be kind • Be compassionate and show you care • Express gratitude • Forgive others • Help people in need



## Citizenship

Do your share to make your school and community better • Cooperate • Get involved in community affairs • Stay informed; vote • Be a good neighbor • Obey laws and rules • Respect authority • Protect the environment