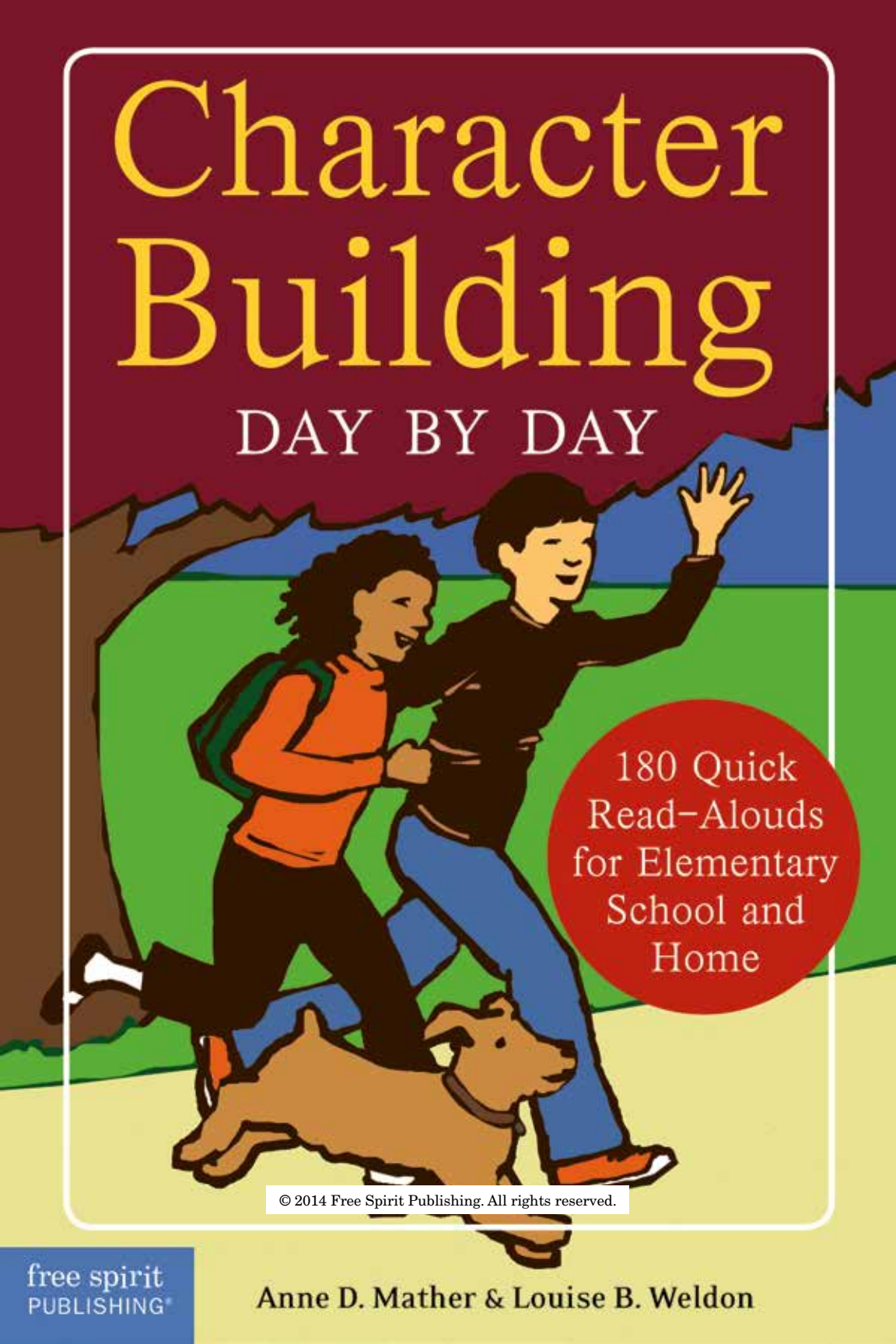


Character Building

DAY BY DAY

An illustration of two children, a girl with curly hair wearing an orange shirt and a boy in a black shirt and blue pants, running happily on a path. A brown dog is running alongside them. The background features a green field, a blue sky, and a tree on the left. A red circle on the right contains text.

180 Quick
Read-Alouds
for Elementary
School and
Home

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PUBLISHING®

Anne D. Mather & Louise B. Weldon

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by

Anne D. Mather & Louise B. Weldon

Edited by Eric Braun

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PUBLISHING®



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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mather, Anne D.

Character building day by day : 180 quick read-alouds for elementary school and home / by Anne D.

Mather and Louise B. Weldon.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-1-57542-178-0

ISBN-10: 1-57542-178-X

1. Character—Juvenile literature. 2. Children—Conduct of life—Juvenile literature. 3. School children—Conduct of life—Juvenile literature. I. Weldon, Louise B. II. Title.

BJ1631.M37 2006

170'.44—dc22

2005028622

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Portions of this book originally appeared in *The Cat at the Door and Other Stories to Live By* (1991) and *The Cats in the Classroom* (1995), by Anne D. Mather and Louise B. Weldon, Hazelden Information and Education Services.

Cover design by Marieka Heinlen

Interior design by Michele Dettloff

15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8

Printed in the United States of America

Free Spirit Publishing Inc.

Minneapolis, MN

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www.freespirit.com

Free Spirit offers competitive pricing.

Contact edsales@freespirit.com for pricing information on multiple quantity purchases.

Dedication

For Brian and in memory of John

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge our editor, Eric Braun, for diligence and creativity; our acquisitions editor, Douglas Fehlen, for generosity and cooperation; Sam Harris for cheerfulness and helpfulness; and Sulou Rose for loyalty and generosity. Thanks to teachers KaTrina Wentzel, Jeff Krause, and Abigail Vare for reading and commenting on the manuscript.

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Introduction

In schools everywhere, it's not uncommon to see a character trait of the week or month—such as honesty, cheerfulness, or courage—displayed on bulletin boards, printed in students' day planners, and even posted on marquis at local businesses as entire communities get into the spirit. Teachers and students examine the meaning of each character trait and discuss ways to live up to the best standards of each trait.

The subject they're studying is character education, and in recent years it has become a part of school curricula worldwide. But character education itself is not new. In families and faith communities, adults have long taught children about character. In fact, wherever adults and children are together, grown-ups are teaching kids about character whether they realize it or not. However, finding time in the classroom for character education curriculum can be a challenge in this era of ever-increasing teacher responsibilities and academic standards. Teachers have a responsibility to offer character education that is substantial, even if time allotted for the preparation and teaching of that subject is brief. And, of course, character education remains as important as ever for families (where time together often is limited) and communities. That's why we wrote *Character Building Day by Day*—to provide quick but substantive character education for classrooms, families, faith communities, and youth groups.

How to Use This Book

Character Building Day by Day is a collection of short fictional stories based on the character traits used most frequently in the character education programs we examined in schools and communities in the United States. We've included 36 traits, one for each week of the school year, with five stories about each trait—one for each day of the week.

2 Introduction

The stories show kids in true-to-life situations, faced with decisions or circumstances that reflect, change, or help form their character. The stories are designed to be read aloud by an adult leader or student, then discussed by your class, youth group, or family. The stories and discussions will stimulate young people to think about how their actions reflect their character—and about what character is.

In addition to the stories, each of the character trait sections is introduced by a thumbnail description of the trait. We recommend reading this description at the beginning of the week to provide context for the stories, and perhaps referring back to it throughout the week.

The character traits in this book are arranged in alphabetical order so teachers, leaders, parents, or students can easily look up the traits they need. If your school has a word of the week, you most likely can find that word—or a similar one—in this book. Read those stories during the week. If you are using this book independently of another program, or as the basis for your program, you may choose to present traits that correspond to lessons you have planned each week. For example, for a two-week lesson on civil rights, you might read the stories in Fairness one week and those in Integrity the next. Or you might pair studying of World War II with stories from Peacefulness, and Acceptance and Tolerance. If you are using this book at home or in a youth group, you can match up traits with discussions you've had or events you've done or planned. For any audience, matching traits or stories with events on the calendar or in the news can be very effective.

Character Building Day by Day is designed to be flexible. The daily story and discussion can be completed in five minutes if that's your schedule, or it can be expanded with activities and/or tied to other lessons to last 30 minutes or more. You can choose the sections and stories you want to use, and you can create your own activities. Following are some tips on basic discussions and activities.

Leading Discussions

To get the most out of the stories, encourage lively discussion by your class or group after you've read each day's story. Many kids may be shy at first, and creating discussion may be difficult. But if you lead with provocative questions, you'll find most kids love to talk about stories, what they mean, and how they relate to their own lives.

An effective way to begin discussions is to ask for volunteers to summarize what happened in the story. This will get kids thinking in broad terms about what the story means and what the main conflict is. We've also provided Talk About It questions at the end of each story to help stimulate discussion with your class or group. Finally, if time allows, you might continue the discussion with questions like the following:

- How does the story relate to (caring, leadership, responsibility)?
- What decisions did the character in the story make? Were the choices difficult?
- Would you have done the same thing? Why or why not?
- Has something like this ever happened to you? If so, what did you do? (Be sure to let several children answer this question.)
- What does it mean to show (assertiveness, courage, loyalty)?

To clearly demonstrate the character traits, many of the stories in *Character Building Day by Day* end with the main character making a positive decision or doing what might be called “the right thing.” Of course, real life isn't always so clear—or easy—and it's critical you acknowledge and address this in your discussions. Encourage children to consider a variety of possible alternative endings, both positive and negative, that could occur in every story. What other decisions could the main character in the story have made? What would have been the result or consequence of that?

Older kids may be ready for more complicated discussions, particularly of how certain character traits affect each other in certain situations. For example, ask students if they can think of a time when it's not possible to be both fair and kind. Or, ask them what they would do if keeping a friend's secret (being trustworthy) means lying to someone else (being dishonest). Or if cooperating on a project means giving up some personal creativity. The right thing to do isn't always clear. Often there isn't one right answer, and asking students to weigh their values in different situations can lead to important discussion.

Encourage a positive and safe atmosphere for discussion, making it clear that all ideas are valid and important. It's okay to disagree, but everyone deserves to be respected—it's unacceptable for students to interrupt or make fun of others. This is particularly important when kids are sharing personal experiences.

Other Activities

You also can explore the stories and character traits through other activities. Role-playing, in which two or more children act out a situation or conflict, is fun and engaging for kids. You may have them play roles from the story you read that day or, if it's appropriate, have them perform a different story (perhaps based on a lesson you're working on or something that happened in your classroom, family, or group). Older kids can even sit down together and plan their own skit. Alternatively, you may simply ask kids to perform spontaneously with a directive, such as, "Pretend you are in the situation in this story. How do you react?"

Another effective activity is freewriting. Use a Talk About It question or one of the questions from page 3—or another question you think is appropriate—as a prompt, then have students respond in writing in a journal, in a notebook, or on a computer. Freewriting should be limited to one to three minutes, and students should keep writing the entire time. If you're having trouble getting your group to discuss the stories,

have them do a brief freewriting activity first. This gets them thinking critically about the story and the character trait and usually opens the door to more engaging discussion.

Other activities to consider include drawing, making posters or other art projects, and brainstorming exercises such as webbing and listing.

Finally, don't be afraid to make adjustments if certain activities work better than others. You're in the best position to judge how well your character program is going, and flexibility is the key to success.

We'd love to hear how this book worked for you. Let us know which stories were popular with your class, group, or family and which ones provoked the most discussion. You can contact us by regular mail or email at:

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We hope to hear from you, and we wish you great success in your character education program.

Anne D. Mather and Louise B. Weldon

The Stories

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Acceptance and Tolerance

Acceptance and tolerance mean appreciating and respecting differences in people. When you are accepting and tolerant you understand that others may have different feelings, behaviors, or beliefs from you. You don't judge others because they are different from you. Being accepting and tolerant doesn't mean you have to agree with everyone. It means you respect them, even if they are different from you.

Corn Flakes and Apple Juice

Matt and Kyle stayed awake until after midnight Friday night. The two friends never seemed to run out of things to do. So Saturday morning they were glad to get to sleep in late. At 10:45 a.m., they got up and sleepily picked their favorite kind of cereal to eat for breakfast. Kyle's mouth was wide with a yawn and his eyes grew almost as wide as he watched Matt pour apple juice over his corn flakes.

"Matt, stop. Wake up! That's the apple juice," he exclaimed.

"I know," Matt said calmly. "I put juice on my cereal because I'm allergic to milk."

"Isn't juice on your cereal gross?" Kyle asked.

"No, it's not gross."

"What would happen if you drank some milk?" asked Kyle.

"I get a really bad stomachache and my sinuses hurt. And milk's in a lot of things, like cheese and chocolate, so I have to be careful."

Kyle let that sink in. Then something dawned on him about Matt's allergy. "If you're allergic to milk, you can't eat ice cream!" he said in horror.

"I have a substitute for that, too," Matt replied, smiling. "It's called sorbet. That was the frozen peach dessert we had last night."

"That was really good," Kyle said. After a few minutes he added, "I'm sorry you have to go through all that. It sounds like a real hassle not to be able to have milk."

Talk About It

What did Kyle do when he learned of his friend's allergy to milk? How do you think Matt felt about answering Kyle's questions? How did each boy show acceptance toward the other?

The Cat's Meow

Felicia's cat was very unusual. He suffered a high fever when he was 6 months old, and Felicia and her parents were afraid he might die. They stayed up with him all night, rocking him gently. The cat lived, but his meow changed completely. Now he gave a funny little trill, almost like the sound a spring frog makes. The fever also affected his purr. Now you could hear it only if you put your head right up to his throat.

One afternoon Felicia and her friend Melissa were playing with the cat in the grass. When Melissa heard the cat's unique meow and purr, she said, "Hey, this cat has some special features."

"That's a nice way of putting it," Felicia said. "It sounds better than 'weird,' which is what some people call him."

"I know all about special features," Melissa said. "When I was younger I had one of my own." Melissa told Felicia how her left eyelid used to droop, and how she had trouble focusing her eye straight ahead. She had to wear a patch over her good eye to help strengthen the weak one. Lots of kids teased her and called her a pirate.

"That must've been hard," Felicia said.

"It was at first, but then I started to think of it as my special feature. That made it easier."

Talk About It

What's the difference between saying someone is "weird" and saying the person has "special features"? Does the difference matter? Why or why not?

Set of Wheels

Barry showed up late for hockey practice and he was mad. It was his sister's fault—she had to be dropped off at physical therapy. Barry's little sister Amanda had muscular dystrophy. He really liked her—most of the time. She was spunky and never felt sorry for herself because she needed a wheelchair. In fact, she called it her “set of wheels” and learned to do tricks like wheelies. Barry thought that was pretty cool.

But other times, like today, he got angry when his sister's needs seemed so much more important than his. Barry was ready on time, but their dad had to take Amanda first. Barry had been late many times because of her—he'd even missed games.

He skated at top speed around the rink, warming up. He tried to concentrate on his stick handling and his skating, but he was still thinking about Amanda. Suddenly he felt a jolt to his body as he crashed into another player and fell hard. He hadn't been paying attention to where he was going. A pain burned up from his right elbow to his shoulder. He'd broken his right arm, the arm he did everything with.

For a while he needed help dressing, bathing, and writing. Barry learned how difficult it was not to be able to reach for things easily and to have to depend on someone else to help with his personal needs. It got him thinking about what life might be like for Amanda in her wheelchair.

continued 

Set of Wheels (continued)

One day in the library, Barry found a book about having a handicapped brother or sister. He checked it out and read it. In the book he learned some ways to deal with being Amanda's brother and he also gained an even greater respect for his sister.

Barry became very interested in making things easier for Amanda. He decided that when his arm healed he would make her a shelf in her room at a level where she could reach things better. And he would help her find other ways to become more independent.

Talk About It

Why did Barry gain greater respect for his sister? Have you ever gained respect for someone different from you after learning more about him or her? What happened?

Really Scary

Brandon and his friend Nina were walking past a convenience store when someone in the parking lot yelled at them. “Go back to your own country!” a man hollered from his car. Nina put her head down and walked faster. A little confused, Brandon quickly followed.

“What was that man talking about?” Brandon asked when he caught up to Nina.

“Sometimes people say mean stuff to me because of my race,” Nina said. “It happens a lot.”

“But this *is* your country. Why would he say to go somewhere else?”

“I’ve heard worse than that. One time someone spray painted mean words on our house. We were afraid someone might try to hurt us.”

“That’s really scary,” Brandon said. He was scared right now. The two walked quickly to Nina’s block and down to her home. “Don’t you get scared?” Brandon asked.

“A little. But this wasn’t bad,” Nina said. “Just some guy yelling.”

Brandon hugged Nina. “I’m so sorry your family is being treated this way,” he said.

Talk About It

Have you or has someone you know ever experienced anything like Nina did? Why are people intolerant sometimes? What are some ways to help change this?

Resource Class

It was only the second week of school and resource class was already a big problem for Janey. She hurried into the room to avoid being seen, then sat down and caught her breath. Being in resource class meant only one thing to Janey—that she was different. Twice a day, she was separated from her friends to get extra help with her subjects. And sometimes she was teased by other students as she entered the resource classroom.

“I wish I could make myself invisible when I come through that door,” Janey said. “I’m sick of being teased.”

The other resource class students nodded. They knew. Ms. Miller, their new teacher, listened. She also knew.

“It’s tough feeling different,” she said to the class. “I really do understand. I was in resource class when I was in elementary school.” Then Ms. Miller told the class they could help each other come up with ways to respond when they were teased.

At first the group thought this was silly and didn’t want to do it. But finally Janey volunteered. Janey knew she was smart, but she had problems with reading and writing. When she looked at words on a page, the letters got all jumbled up and backwards in her mind. Her teacher was really nice and let her do assignments by reading answers into a tape recorder and turning in the tape. But other kids teased her and called her a dummy.

Janey's classmates suggested she respond to the teasing by saying this: "I'm not dumb. I understand everything fine. I just have a hard time reading and writing words."

"Nice idea," Ms. Miller said. "That way you *explain* how you're different. And remember, if you don't act upset when you're teased, that also will help. Teasers want you to cry or get really mad—if you don't, they'll get bored with teasing you."

Each student who wanted to get help from classmates had a turn. They found ways to respond to teasing that could help the teasers learn more information about their learning differences.

This was the best resource class ever, Janey thought.

Talk About It

Why do you think some kids make fun of others who they think are different? What can you do to prevent that kind of teasing?