

Character in *ACTION*

Winfred Rembert Jr.: Integrity in the Face of Danger

When eleven-year-old Winfred Rembert Jr. first moved with his family to New Haven, Connecticut, neighborhood gang members tried to get him to sell drugs. "It wasn't like they asked anyone. It was like a telling," Winfred remembers. He ignored them and walked away. Gang members continued to harass him, one time stealing his new basketball. Winfred refused to fight.

When he was 15, gang members tried to lure him into drug dealing in the school cafeteria. They promised him fast money. "They were throwing money down on the cafeteria table, you know, trying to bribe me," he explains. But Winfred ignored them again and went about his business of growing up. He grew *way* up—to 6 feet 3 inches by the time he was 16 and a basketball player for Hillhouse High School. And he still refused to sell drugs or to join the gang.

One evening, Winfred was in his backyard when a parking lot attendant tore across the street to tell him his family was in a gang fight. His 14-year-old brother Edgar didn't like drugs either, and the gang had roughed him up and damaged his bicycle.

Winfred dropped his basketball and charged up the block. In the distance he could see his mom, dad, and brother trying to fight off the gang. As Edgar fought back, a kid Winfred had known at school for three years pulled a gun and aimed it at Edgar. His mother was standing right by Edgar's side.

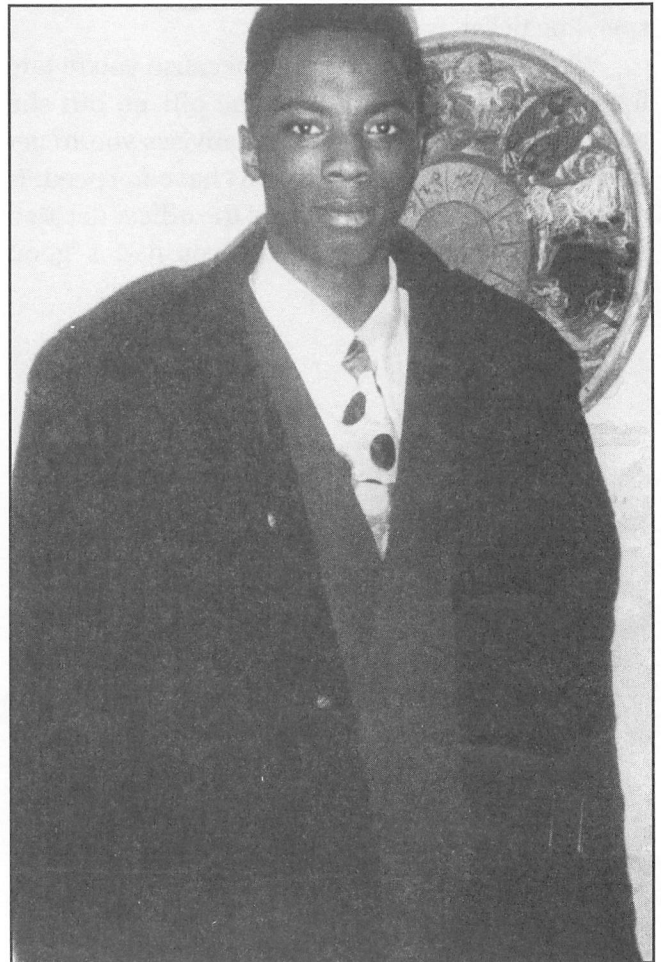
Winfred pumped his legs like pistons, leaped through the air, and shoved Edgar, knocking him out of the line of fire. Then he threw his body across his mother just as the gun discharged. Winfred clutched his stomach and fell backward, taking the bullet meant for his brother.

While Winfred was lying in the hospital, a news reporter asked him if he regretted having sacrificed himself for his brother and mother. Although Winfred swallowed hard, he shook his head. When another reporter asked him why he thought the gang member had shot him, Winfred replied "I think he shot me to make a point to the neighborhood that you can't say no to them. They never before had anyone stand up to them and actually say no."

The gang member was arrested on a first-degree assault charge. Winfred had two operations. The bullet was extracted and he recovered. He still sometimes wakes up in the night with a fleeting pain in his abdomen.

Winfred's integrity didn't go unnoticed. Albertus Magnus College, a private liberal arts college in New Haven, offered him a full scholarship for standing up for his beliefs. He accepted and chose to study sociology with an emphasis on criminal justice.

Winfred knows exactly why he refused to join a gang or sell drugs. "I want a better life," he insists. "I was doing something I believe in, and that's why I wasn't afraid. You've just got to do what you think is right."



Think about all the ways the word “justice” is used. The United States Pledge of Allegiance ends with the words “. . . with liberty and justice for all.” Superman fights for “Truth, Justice, and the American Way.” So do the members of the Justice League of America, to name other comic book characters. We have a criminal justice system to deal with people who commit crimes, and a juvenile justice system for those who aren’t yet adults. A person who “flees justice” runs from the law; if he’s caught, he’s “brought to justice.” In the days of the Wild West, “frontier justice” often meant taking the law into your own hands. If you’re given a task, assignment, or job and you “do it justice,” you’re giving it a good effort. “Social justice” calls for the fair distribution of goods. If we lived and practiced social justice, all children would have a safe place to live, clothing to wear, food to eat, and adequate medical care.

The legendary U.S. defense attorney Clarence Darrow once said “There is no such thing as justice—in or out of court.” What do you think he meant by that? Do you agree?

“Justice cannot be for one side alone,
but must be for both.”

Eleanor Roosevelt

CHECK IT OUT



What Are My Rights? 95 Questions and Answers About Teens and the Law by Thomas A. Jacobs, J.D. (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 1997). Covers laws related to the family, school, workplace, growing up, and more that pertain specifically to teens. Ages 12 & up.

Legal Pad Junior for Teens

<http://www.legalpadjr.com/teens.htm>

Chats, clubs, a newsletter by and for teens, online legal help, and more.

Fairness

“Fairness is what justice really is.”

Potter Stewart

You probably learned about fairness long before you heard the word justice. As a child, you were taught to “play fair,” “be fair,” and “act fair.” This usually meant taking turns, sharing, and waiting your turn in line. When someone wouldn’t take turns, refused to share, or cut into the line, you hollered to your parent or teacher “So-and-so isn’t being FAAAAAIIIIIIIRRRRRR!”

When you’re fair, you’re impartial and honest. You make decisions free from bias, prejudice, favoritism, or self-interest (“what’s in it for ME?”). You follow the established rules, and you don’t cheat. Your family, friends, and teachers know that they can trust you and count on you. When you announce that you’re throwing a pizza party for everyone in your class, you really do invite *everyone*—even the kid who steals your lunch and calls you names. People who have a sense of fairness make good leaders and mediators.

Equality

“As long as you keep a person down, some part of you has to be down there, to hold him down, so it means you cannot soar as you otherwise might.”

Marian Anderson

If your parents give you and your brother the same opportunities to go to school, take guitar lessons, and do the dishes, you might say that they’re treating you as equals. Does this mean that you *are* equals? What if your brother is older than you are? What if you’re older than he is? What if he does better in school than you do? What if you do better in school than he does? What if you’re both boys? What if you’re a girl? And what does equality really mean?

Most people struggle with this concept at one time or another. It’s complicated, and there are no easy answers. To some people, equality means treating everyone the same. But everyone *isn’t* the

same, so this doesn't always work and can create big problems. Take school, for example. In a class of 30 students, some will be gifted, some will be "average" (another tricky word!), and some will have learning differences and need special help with things that average students learn more easily and gifted students might already know. What if the teacher treats everyone exactly the same? The average students might be okay with this, but the gifted kids and those who struggle to learn probably *won't* be okay.

The Declaration of Independence says that "all men are created equal." Does this mean that women aren't created equal? Is that what the signers meant to say, or was the word "men" supposed to include women, too? If it was, why did women have to fight for the right to vote, and why did it take until 1920 (and a constitutional amendment) before they were given that right? Does "all men" include men (people?) of all races and cultural backgrounds? If so, why do we need affirmative action . . . or do we?

"Men their rights and nothing more;
women their rights and nothing less."

Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton

You might have asked yourself questions like these. Or you might have talked about equality with your family, friends, classmates, and teachers. Keep asking, talking, and thinking about equality, because it's important to do so. What you feel and believe about equality will determine how you treat other people throughout your life—and how you expect them to treat you. Continue gathering information and opinions, then form your own conclusions about equality. You might start with these basic ideas:

- ▲ Equality isn't about sameness. It's about access, rights, and opportunity.
- ▲ Every person is unique, and all people should be able to reach their full potential without encountering artificial barriers of gender, race, religion, class, or cultural background.
- ▲ Hatred, harassment, discrimination, and prejudice have no place in a society that promotes equality.

CHECK IT OUT



Three organizations that fight for equality and fairness are:

Anti-Defamation League (ADL)

823 United Nations Plaza

New York, NY 10017

(212) 490-2525

<http://www.adl.org/>

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

4805 Mt. Hope Drive

Baltimore, MD 21215

Information hotline:

(410) 521-4939

<http://www.naACP.org/>

National Organization for Women (NOW)

1000 16th Street, NW, Suite 700

Washington, DC 20036

(202) 331-0066

<http://www.now.org/>

Tolerance

"Every bigot was once a child
free of prejudice."

Sister Mary de Lourdes

You've probably heard the word "tolerance" often over the past few years—at school, in your faith community, and at home. We all need to learn to be more tolerant of others, regardless of whether their "differences" are due to race, cultural background, gender, age, intelligence, physical capabilities, or any other reason.

When you're tolerant, you have sympathy for beliefs or practices that are different from your own. You may not share or even agree with them, but you recognize their right to exist. You don't let prejudice and bigotry determine who your friends will be. You treat people with respect no matter who they are.

Why should you be more tolerant? Here are four great reasons:

1. The more tolerant you are, the more open you are to learning about other people. Have you ever

had a preconceived notion about a person or group, then found out you were wrong once you got to know them? What if you hadn't gotten to know them? You'd still be stuck in your old ways of thinking. When you're not learning, your brain becomes stale.

2. *The more you learn, the less you fear.* Remember when you were sure there were monsters under your bed? Or how afraid you were the first time you went swimming and put your face in the water? Then you looked under the bed or dunked your face in the water a few more times and suddenly you weren't afraid anymore. Unlearning prejudices works the same way. Once you learn that you have nothing to fear, you become willing to try more new things, ideas, and relationships. As you practice tolerance and become more comfortable with other people's differences, curiosity replaces fear. Your mind opens. You start respecting other people's opinions, practices, behaviors, and beliefs. You gain a deeper understanding of yourself and others. It's easy to hate a stereotype, hard to hate a friend.

3. *The less you fear, the more comfortable you feel around all kinds of people.* Wouldn't you like to feel safer and more secure anytime, anywhere? Studies have shown that people who get along with different kinds of people are emotionally and physically healthier—and more successful in their careers—than those who don't.

4. *The more people you know (especially different kinds of people), the more interesting your life becomes.* What if you were allowed to read books by only one author? If you had to wear blue jeans, a white T-shirt, and black sneakers every day? What if you were never permitted to try anything new, not even a new soft drink or computer game? What if all of your friends looked, thought, and behaved exactly alike? What if they all had to be the same age, religion, gender, and race?

How can you learn to be more tolerant of others? Here's how:

1. *Be willing to meet new people.* Don't ever judge a whole group of people by one person's actions.

That's poor deductive reasoning, and it leads to prejudice and discrimination.

2. *Be willing to listen and learn.* Ask people to tell you about their backgrounds, beliefs, and traditions. Sometimes this can challenge your own ways of thinking and make you reexamine your own ideas. It can also open the door to new friendships and experiences.

3. *As you're learning about differences, look for similarities.* You probably have more in common than you know.

"If four-fifths of the world's population consists of people of color, why are they still called 'minorities'?"

Lynn Duvall

CHECK IT OUT



Respecting Our Differences: A Guide to Getting Along in a Changing World by Lynn Duvall (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 1994). Real-life examples, activities, and resources encourage readers to become more tolerant of others and savor the rich diversity of America's changing culture. Ages 13 & up.

Teaching Tolerance

400 Washington Avenue

Montgomery, AL 36104

(334) 264-0286

<http://www.splcenter.org/teachingtolerance/tt-index.html>

A national education project dedicated to helping teachers foster equity, respect, and understanding in the classroom and beyond. *Teaching Tolerance* magazine is available free to teachers.

Character Dilemmas

For journaling or writing essays, discussion, debate, role-playing, reflection

Suppose that ...

1 In Florida in 1993, a young boy named Gregory Kingsley tried to sue his mother for divorce. He wanted to be adopted by a family that had been caring for him. The Circuit Court ruled that Gregory had the right to do this. His mother took the case to the District Court of Appeals (a

higher court), which overruled the lower court and said that Gregory did *not* have this right. What do you think? Should children have the legal right to divorce their parents? Should they have the right to choose which parent to live with when parents divorce? What should the parents' rights be?

2 There are two different ethnic groups in your school. They don't like each other and are constantly arguing, pushing each other around, and even fighting. One day, a new student arrives, and soon you start to think that you'd like to have him for a friend. The problem is, you're in one group and he's in the other. What should you do? What might be the consequences of your actions? Could you accept the consequences?

3 A college has a limited number of scholarships to award. How should it decide which students should receive the scholarships? Should the decisions be based on 1) financial need (which would help students from low-income families), 2) affirmative action (which would help women students and those from minority groups), or 3) merit (which would help students who have earned good grades and high test scores in high school)?

4 You know that one of your neighbors doesn't pay her income taxes. Instead, she reports her earnings in a way that takes illegal advantage of tax shelters. Do you think that people should have the right to decide whether or not to pay taxes? Who should decide how much they must pay? What, if anything, might you do about your neighbor?

5 A student in your class at school has been very ill this year. You learn that he needs a heart transplant; in fact, if he doesn't have one soon, he'll probably die. His parents belong to a religion that doesn't allow heart transplants, and they refuse to let your friend have the surgery. Do parents have the right to decide whether their children get medical help? Do they have the right to decide what kinds of medical help their children can have? Explain your answer—but first, try to see both sides of this dilemma.







6 You're an employer, and you're looking for someone to fill a job. Your favorite applicant is a man. But because of affirmative action, you have to hire a woman. What are the pros and cons of affirmative action? What do you think is the best thing to do in your situation?

Activities

GUESS THE PUNISHMENT OR CONSEQUENCE for each of the following crimes or infractions. Try to be just and fair. If you do this activity with your class or club, you might brainstorm punishments and consequences as a group. Afterward, invite a law student or an attorney to visit your class or club. Share your guesses, then ask for a legal point of view.

- During a locker search of your school, two cans of beer are discovered in a student's locker.
- The governor of your state accepts a bribe from a lobbying group.
- Your best friend borrows his parents' car without their permission, and the two of you go to a movie.
- Your older sister "borrows" money from your dresser without permission.
- The school secretary dips into the school lunch money to buy food for her family.
- A high-ranking officer in the military sells government secrets to another country.
- A drunk driver hits a child, causing minor injuries, and drives away.
- The owner of a small, struggling business doesn't report all of his earnings on his income tax return.
- One of your neighbors grows marijuana in her basement.
- Gang members graffiti your school.
- A student at your school has a handgun in the glove compartment in her car. She says it's so she'll feel safe.
- One of the clubs at your school refuses to let a new student join. You overhear the president say that it's because the new student is of a different race.

LEARN ABOUT FAIRNESS AND EQUITY LAWS. Research one or more of the following, then report your findings to your class or club. You might do this orally, in writing, or creatively (make a bulletin board or poster, have a debate, create a comic book, perform a skit, etc.).

-  The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-352) prohibits race-based discrimination in public places including hotels, restaurants, and buses.
-  The Civil Rights Act of 1965 (Public Law 89-110) makes it illegal to use literacy tests and other unfair practices to prevent citizens from voting.
-  Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects people against sexual harassment, including unwelcome sexual advances, contact, or conditions of employment.
-  Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 bans discrimination on the basis of sex. It applies to any educational program that receives federal funds, including school athletic programs.
-  The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 provide equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. Under these laws, schools that receive federal funds must provide accessible facilities for *all* of their students.
-  The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) states that "Equality of Rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex." Written in 1921 by suffragist Alice Paul, the ERA has been introduced in Congress every session since 1923 but has never been ratified by the 38 states needed to make it a law. Find out why. Do *you* think it should be ratified? Why or why not?

CHECK IT OUT



Guide to American Law: Everyone's Legal Encyclopedia (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Company, 1983, supplemented annually). If you enjoy reading about landmark laws, look for this 12-volume set and its supplements at your library reference desk or local law library. It's written in language that even non-lawyers can understand.

Teen Court TV

<http://www.courtTV.com/teens/>

An educational site with court cases of interest to teens.

HOLD A MOCK TRIAL of a fairy tale character. *Example:* Put Goldilocks on trial for breaking and entering, or the Wolf for destroying the Three Little Pigs' property. Make sure that your trial is just and fair. Write the history of the case. Assign people to play various roles: judge, defendant, prosecuting attorney, defending attorney, witnesses, experts, bailiffs, clerks, jurors. Allow time afterward for discussion and analysis.

FIND OUT IF THERE'S A TEEN COURT, Youth Court, or Student Court in your state, county, or community. If there isn't, contact your principal, mayor, state representative, or governor and ask that one (or more) be established. Teen courts are becoming increasingly popular alternatives to juvenile court for first-time offenders ages 16 and under including kids caught drinking, using drugs, or exhibiting other problem behaviors. The jurors, attorneys, bailiffs, and clerks are all teens; the judge is usually, but not always, an adult. The teen jurors decide on the punishment, which usually involves service, educational classes, and future jury service on the court rather than the traditional fines and sentences. When the defendant completes the sentence, the misdemeanor charge is usually dropped from his or her record. Since most teens must wait until age 19 to have their teen crimes erased, many young offenders are choosing to be tried in teen courts instead of regular courts.

CHECK IT OUT



American Bar Association
Division for Public Education
541 North Fairbanks Court
Chicago, IL 60611-3314
(312) 988-5735

<http://www.abanet.org/>

The ABA has materials available to help teachers hold lively mock trials in the classroom. It also offers a free packet of information about teen/youth/student courts, including a national directory of existing courts.

Center for Civic Education

5146 Douglas Fir Road
Calabasas, CA 91302-1467
1-800-350-4223

<http://www.civiced.org>

The Center for Civic Education wrote the national standards for civics and government education (available on their Web site), as well as CIVITAS and other educational materials concerning concepts, principles, and values of democracy for K-12.

Constitutional Rights Foundation

601 South Kingsley Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90005
(213) 487-5590

<http://www.crs-usa.org>

The Constitutional Rights Foundation provides educational materials and sends out an excellent newsletter that includes discussions about law-related topics.

MAKE A TIMELINE ABOUT PRAYER IN SCHOOLS. In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Engel v. Vitale* that a school district can't compel students to pray in schools. Since then, there have been many lawsuits involving prayer in schools. Research several and show them on a timeline. TIP: See the *Guide to American Law* (page 147).

Variation: Debate both sides of this issue. Consider these questions: 1) Should students be *allowed* to pray in school? 2) Should they be *encouraged* to pray in school? 3) Should they be *prevented* from praying in school? 4) Who has the right to decide?

"As long as there are tests, there will
always be prayer in schools."

Anonymous

LEARN ABOUT THE INTERNET and free speech. Research one or more current "hot topics." *Examples:* Should certain types of information be censored? What if Person A posts instructions for how to build a bomb and Person B finds them, uses them to make a bomb, and kills a dozen people? Should Person A be held accountable for the bombing? Should scientific information be screened before it's made public? Should people be allowed to slander each other? Should people be fined or punished for using bad language? For posting or accessing pornography? Learn as much as you can about your issue and write an essay that considers both sides.

Variation: Research the history of the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and/or the Communications Decency Act (CDA) of 1966.

CHECK IT OUT



The Electronic Frontier Foundation

<http://www EFF.org/>

A nonprofit civil liberties organization working to protect privacy, free expression, and access to public resources and information online, as well as to promote responsibility in new media.

Yahoo's Censorship and the Net Links

http://www.yahoo.com/Society_and_Culture/Civil_Rights/Censorship/Censorship_and_the_Net/
Links to arguments for and against free speech on the Internet.

WRITE IN YOUR JOURNAL² about how it feels to be treated unfairly. Think about a time when it happened to you. Maybe you were accused of something you didn't do. Maybe a parent or teacher didn't believe you when you told the truth. As you write, consider these questions:

1. How did you feel then?
2. How do you feel now?
3. What might you do to prevent that from happening again?
4. Is there anything you can do to clear the air between you and the person who treated you unfairly? Can you talk with him or her? Or is it too late?
5. Do you need to apologize for anything?
6. Do you need to replace or fix anything?
7. Have you tried forgiving the person who treated you unfairly?³
8. What have you learned from the experience?

IMAGINE THAT YOU'RE A PARENT with four children. You have \$25 a week to hand out in allowances. Your children are 1) a 15-year-old boy, 2) a 12-year-old girl, 3) an 8-year-old boy, and 4) a 5-year-old boy.

² See "Endurance," pages 88, 89, and 92, for journaling resources.

³ See "Forgiveness," pages 94-102.