

Integrity

Consistency, constancy, honesty, honor

“One must not conceal any part of what one has recognized to be true.”

Albert Einstein

The chameleon is a curious lizard-like reptile. It can change colors from green, yellow, cream, or brown to blend with its surroundings. People can be like chameleons, changing their behavior and attitudes to please and accommodate others. For the chameleon, changing is a survival skill that protects it from predators. For people, changing can mean that they're not being true to themselves. In their eagerness to blend in, they sacrifice their integrity.

“Integrity” is one of those words that can be hard to define. If you look it up in a dictionary, you're likely to find definitions like these: “Steadfast adherence to a strict code of moral, ethical, or artistic values; incorruptibility; the quality or state

of being whole, entire, undiminished, or unimpaired; soundness; the quality or state of being undivided; completeness.” When you read between the lines, you can probably come up with a simpler definition: *Being yourself*. All day, every day, regardless of who's around. This doesn't mean that you'll never change. As long as you keep growing and learning, you'll continue to change in some ways. But *who you are*—your essential self—will stay rock solid.

When you have integrity, you're honest with yourself and others.¹ But integrity involves more than telling the truth. You talk the talk *and* walk the walk. You match what you do to what you believe. You have confidence in yourself because you know yourself. Other people have confidence in you because they can depend on you to be consistent and constant. Your friends look to you as a leader because they trust you; parents, teachers, and employers give you more freedom and responsibility.

Your integrity encompasses every part of your life, including your relationships with people (family, friends, neighbors, classmates, teachers), institutions (schools, faith communities, places of employment, organizations), society (community groups, clubs), your country (town, city, state), and yourself. You don't brag, exaggerate, name-drop, try to impress other people, or put them down with insults or cutting sarcasm. And you do the right thing, even if it isn't the easiest or most popular thing.



¹ See “Honesty,” pages 115–125.

You don't deceive people into thinking you have more money than you do. You don't tell some of your friends that you hate cigarettes, then light up with others so they'll think you're cool. You don't pretend to like someone and later stab him in the back. If you do, the time will come when you're not fooling anyone but yourself. When chameleons in nature change colors, they fade into the background, but people who act like chameleons stick out like sore thumbs.

"One must live the way one thinks or end up thinking the way one has lived."

Paul Bourget

When you have integrity, you're true to your values. Look for role models who can guide you in developing good values. Seek out honorable, trustworthy, genuine people in the present; study good examples from the past. Your values should not bring harm to other people, things, your country, or the world. They should support, respect, strengthen, and build.

What's great about having integrity is that you can approach each new situation calmly because you don't have to struggle inside to decide how to act. Your integrity protects you from making poor choices. Integrity is the cornerstone of building good character.

Values \longleftrightarrow Behaviors

INTEGRITY

Thoughts and Beliefs \longleftrightarrow Actions and Words

Character Dilemmas

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

Suppose that . . .

1 Your friend Evan is popular, well liked, and a great soccer player besides. Your school's soccer team is competing for first place in the district, and Evan is key to winning. During math class this morning, you saw him cheat on an important test. No one else noticed. If the teacher found out, Evan would be kicked off the soccer

team. Is it your responsibility to report what you saw? Is it anyone's responsibility? What are the consequences of reporting? What might be the consequences of *not* reporting?

2 You're paying for school supplies at your local discount store. The store is part of a huge chain with hundreds of stores across the country. When the cashier rings up your purchases, she undercharges you \$10 by mistake. You could call it to her attention . . . or you could donate the \$10 to a local homeless shelter you've been helping. You wouldn't be keeping the money for yourself, and the shelter needs it more than the big corporation that owns the store . . . right? Do you put the \$10 in your wallet and leave? Why or why not?

3 A friend asks you to trade shirts for a day. The style and color of your friend's shirt makes it look like a gang shirt. You don't like gangs, and you don't want anyone to think you're in a gang, but your friend is being very persuasive. If you say no, he'll accuse you of being a coward and broadcast it to the whole school. And it probably wouldn't hurt to wear the shirt for just one day. If anyone thinks you're in a gang, that's *their* problem for being judgmental. Do you agree to the trade? How might you handle this situation with integrity?

4 Someone you know is always true to her beliefs. She believes in cheating, lying, backstabbing, and putting herself first, and that's what people can count on her to do. Does this person have integrity? Or does having integrity mean being true to the *right* values? Who decides which values are right and which are wrong?

5 You're baby-sitting for a neighbor who's told you not to have your friends over when you sit. Around 10:00, two of your friends show up uninvited. The kids are in bed asleep, so you let them in. When one friend spills his root beer on the carpet, you make them both leave. You scrub the carpet and manage to remove the stain. Do you need to tell your neighbor that you let your friends inside the house? After all, you sent them home. The stain is gone. Your neighbor will never know they were there. If she did, she might never trust you to sit again. What should you do?

6 Your neighbor puts his house up for sale, knowing that it needs a new roof that would cost thousands of dollars. His realtor advises him to say nothing about the roof to prospective buyers. "You won't be lying," the realtor says. "You don't have to say anything unless they ask." Do you agree? If you were your neighbor, what would you do?

Activities

WRITE IN YOUR JOURNAL² about what integrity means to you. Do you have integrity? How do you know? Who are the integrity role models in your life? Write about a time when someone you know showed integrity. Tell how this affected you personally.

EVALUATE THE INTEGRITY OF POLITICAL candidates. If you're near an election time, read the papers, watch TV, and listen to campaign speeches and promises. Which promises do you think are made just to win votes? Are candidates exaggerating problems or making promises that probably can't be kept? How can you tell? Which candidates seem to have the most integrity? Consider volunteering to help them. Call their campaign offices and ask what you can do. You might answer phones, do surveys, pass out flyers, or encourage people to go to the polls on election day.

Variation: Research the campaign promises of one or two elected officials who've been in office for two years or longer. Have the officials done what they promised to do? Present your findings in a speech to your class or community.

RESEARCH PERSONALITY DISORDERS. Interview a psychiatrist or search the Internet for up-to-date information on mental illnesses that can lead to personality changes, disorders, or multiple personalities. Write a paper based on your findings. Is it possible that mental illness turns some people into "chameleons"?

CHECK IT OUT



MentalHealth.Com

<http://www.mentalhealth.com/>

A free encyclopedia of mental health information, designed by Canadian psychiatrist Phillip W. Long, M.D. Includes information on the 52 most common mental disorders, the 67 most common psychiatric drugs, links to other mental health sites, and more.

National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>

The official site of this U.S. Government agency includes a large "public information" section with information on specific mental disorders, diagnosis, and treatment.

INTERVIEW A RESEARCHER who is working with humans or animals. TIP: Call a university, an engineering laboratory, or a medical facility. Ask questions about integrity in research, like the following:

- ? What kind of research are you doing?
- ? What is the purpose of your research?
- ? What will your research add to our knowledge? Who or what will it help?
- ? Who are your research subjects (people or animals)?
- ? What procedures are you using?
- ? If you're working with human subjects, what do you tell them about your research? Do they know exactly what's happening and why? Have you told them the purpose of your research?
- ? Will you do any follow-up testing?

EVALUATE THE INTEGRITY of the U.S. government during World War II, when American soldiers were exposed to atomic radiation in the Pacific and in the American desert (Nevada and New Mexico). Find out 1) what the U.S. government told the soldiers, 2) whether the soldiers were informed about the health hazards of radiation exposure, 3) if the soldiers have experienced any health problems since then, 4) what the government has done to support or not support the soldiers. Form an opinion based on what you learn. Do you agree or disagree with the government's actions? Justify your opinion in a speech or report.

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

RESEARCH ATTEMPTS TO REGULATE INTEGRITY in government. *Examples:* The Ethics in Government Act (1978, 1983, 1985, amended 1990); the Public Officials Integrity Act (1978). Do you think it's possible to enforce the integrity of public officials? Why or why not? Debate this issue.

Variations: Research one or more of the following: Watergate (1972–1974); Iran-Contra (1985–1990); Whitewater (1985–still under investigation as of this writing). What happened in each case? What issues of integrity did the investigations uncover?

CHECK IT OUT



What Was Watergate? by Pamela Kilian (New York: St. Martins Press, 1990). Written especially for young adults and students, this book recounts the events of the Watergate scandal, which resulted in the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon. Ages 12–16.

The Center for Public Integrity

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Created in 1989, the Center for Public Integrity is a nonpartisan research organization that focuses on ethics and public services issues. It uncovers stories about political deception, scandal, fraud, and abuse and reports them to the public, helping people to understand the issues and hold public officials accountable. Founder and executive director Charles Lewis is a former investigative reporter and producer for “60 Minutes.”

SURVEY YOUR CLASS OR SCHOOL to find out how important integrity is to the students. You can copy and use the survey on page 140 or write your own statements. Distribute the surveys and set up a collection box where people can return their completed surveys anonymously. Afterward, score the surveys and compile the results. Graph them and display the graph in your classroom or school. On your graph, you might want to compare males to females (does one gender seem to be more concerned about integrity than the other?) and/or different age groups or grades. Your graph should include information about how the surveys were scored. *How to score the surveys:* For statements 1, 3–6, and 9, give 1 point for each “No.” For statements 2, 7, 8, and 10,

give 1 point for each “Yes.” *How to evaluate the scores:* 9–10 points: This is a person who values integrity. 8 points or fewer: This is a person who might want to reexamine what integrity means to him or her. (NOTE: You may disagree with this scoring scale. That’s okay. The point of this survey is not to judge, but to get people thinking and talking about integrity. You might want to discuss the scale with your teacher and come up with a different version to use with your class or school.)

TALK TO YOUR FAMILY ABOUT INTEGRITY. Ask your parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc. what they think integrity means. You might begin your discussion with one of the “Character Dilemmas” on pages 136–137. You might ask each person “In your opinion, who in our family has the *most* integrity? Why do you think this is true?”

Variation: Ask each family member to choose an aspect of integrity that he or she wants to work on. Chart your progress individually or as a family.

CREATE AN INTEGRITY MOBILE. List some examples of what integrity means to you. Illustrate them and hang them from a mobile in your classroom, club, or room at home. *Example:* If you write “Integrity means standing up for your beliefs,” you might illustrate a person standing and saying “I believe. . . .” Can you think of ways to illustrate integrity in dress, speech, action, patriotism, communication, teaching, medicine, politics, etc.?

WRITE A CHANT ABOUT INTEGRITY with your class or club. You might write it into your class goals or club charter. *Example:*

What you say is what you do.
Integrity is being true.
In speech, in action, and in dress
You do what’s right and don’t impress.

PLAY A “TOSS THE ARTICHOKE” GAME. This is a game of confusion, laughs—and discovery. You’ll need a group of 5–10 people and 5–10 used tennis balls. Paint each tennis ball a different color. (You don’t have to paint the whole thing. A big spot of color is sufficient.) Each color represents a different thing. *Examples:* Red = artichoke; green = hyena; orange = can of soda; blue = teddy bear. Make a list of what each color represents. When you’re ready, have the players stand in a circle. To play:

1. The leader takes one ball and passes it to the person on his or her right, saying “This is an artichoke” (or whatever the ball stands for).

2. That person passes the same ball to the right, saying “This is an artichoke.” The ball continues around the circle.

3. Meanwhile, the leader starts a second ball around the circle, saying “This is a hyena.”

4. The leader continues introducing new balls into the circle until all 5–10 are circulating.

5. Without warning, the leader says “Reverse!” and the balls have to travel to the left.

Continue until the game completely falls apart. Afterward, talk about what happened. Ask questions like this:

- ? Is it hard to keep track of who you are if you look like everyone else?
- ? If you try to be something you really aren't, is it easy to lose your identity?
- ? If you call a ball an artichoke, does it become an artichoke?
- ? If you tell someone else that a ball is an artichoke, does that make it an artichoke?

READ STORIES ABOUT INTEGRITY. Look for these books:

 *The Hero and the Crown* by Robin McKinley (New York: Greenwillow, 1984). The daughter of a witch sets out to win people's trust and to gain the Hero's Crown. On the way, she fights dragons, meets a wizard, and battles an evil mage. Ages 11–14.

 *Nothing but the Truth: A Documentary Novel* by Avi (New York: Orchard, 1991). A ninth grader's suspension for singing “The Star Spangled Banner” during homeroom becomes a national news story. Ages 13–17.

 *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles (New York: Scholastic, 1995). Six-year-old Ruby must confront the hostility of white parents when she becomes the first African-American girl in Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans in 1960. Ages 8–11.

 *The Unbreakable Code* by Sara Hoagland Hunter (Flagstaff, AZ: Northland, 1996). John is afraid to leave the Navajo reservation until his grandfather explains how Navajo language, faith, and ingenuity helped to win World War II. Ages 9–12.

 *The Well: David's Story* by Mildred T. Taylor (New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1995). In early 1900s Mississippi, David Logan's family shares their well water with white and black neighbors in an atmosphere of potential racial violence.