HEROES & VILLAINS

The Quest for Civic Virtue

A CHARACTER EDUCATION IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE
Equip teachers for character education that lets them do what they do best, in the context of subjects they already teach.
What are the deepest, truest aims of character education? Think about the character education you already do at your school—whether formal or informal. What are you really trying to accomplish? Though we value our students’ character formation, it can seem a daunting task. So many expectations are laid at our doorstep. So many demands pull at our time. How do school leaders ensure that, amidst competing demands, our highest aims aren’t pushed aside? Could it be less complicated? Yes, it can. Satisfying character education can be profound—and as uncomplicated as Heroes & Villains: The Quest for Civic Virtue.

Heroes & Villains is a curricular supplement that equips teachers to integrate character education into their existing curriculum, then gets out of the way to let them do what they do best ... in the context of the subjects they already teach. Teaching civic virtue can be robust, yet adaptable enough to tailor to your teachers and students. In fact, the more flexible it is, the more you can harness the power of the strongest element your school already has: the relationships among faculty, students, and staff.

At the Bill of Rights Institute, the ideas and ideals of the Constitution are at the heart of our work. This is why we developed a resource to reinvigorate the teaching of civic virtue based on primary sources, grounded in critical thinking, and focused on history. Better yet, because we know the constraints teachers face daily, we designed it to be easily
tailored to your existing curriculum, to your own school, and to the students who walk its hallways.

Character education is often viewed as an “add-on program” that distracts from “real teaching”. But it should be a rich teaching experience, not a demand—and certainly not a costly, off-the-shelf “add-on”. Even more, it can be a seamlessly integrated part of curriculum and instruction. The key? Simplicity. *Heroes & Villains* is neither costly nor an add-on. Instead, it is a straightforward and adaptable curricular supplement. Based on the content history and English teachers are already teaching, it provides a clear framework for extending that very content into the realm of character and civic virtue.

We respect that you and your faculty—not any one program or book—bring the most vital elements to the character-education table: knowledge of your own school, its faculty, and its students. This guide is for faculty who supervise curriculum and character education. With a small investment of time up-front, you can determine how your colleagues and students can get the most out of *Heroes & Villains*. The “Working Notes” section will get you started as you tailor this surprisingly simple resource to your own school.

Look at the *Heroes & Villains* overview and see how you can bring the virtues of Aristotle and the Founders to your students. Start with the “Working Notes” on page 11.

If you don’t already have a copy of *Heroes & Villains*, contact us at info@billofrightsinstitute.org. We’ll get it into your hands so you can get started.

*We believe that increased understanding of virtue will lead to more individuals acting virtuously in school, and these changes will pay dividends in improved school climate.*
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John Quincy Adams, future president of the United States, whose mother Abigail instilled in him as a boy the necessity of virtue — those qualities that “wake into life the character of the hero and the statesman.”
At an age when most children today are beginning their high school education, young John Quincy Adams was practicing French along with statesmanship skills on a diplomatic trip to Europe with his father. He had not wanted to go. His mother Abigail wrote him a wonderful letter expressing her hope that he would not regret the journey. She wrote:

“Great necessities call out great virtues. When a mind is raised and animated by scenes that engage the heart, then those qualities, which would otherwise lie dormant, wake into life and form the character of the hero and the statesman.”

Mrs. Adams knew that her son held those qualities in his heart and closed her letter with this stirring admonition:

“The strict and inviolable regard you have ever paid to truth, gives me pleasing hopes that you will not swerve from her dictates, but add justice, fortitude, and every manly virtue which can adorn a good citizen, do honor to your country, and render your parents supremely happy.”

Indeed, to the Founding generation, virtue was inseparable from freedom; self-government depended on a virtuous people. Abigail Adams’ son, as an adult, said, “Public virtue cannot exist in a nation without private [virtue], and public virtue is the only foundation of republics.”

But what happens to a republic when virtue withers? In a nation founded on principles such as
individual liberty and consent of the governed, civic and character education must be central to all that we teach. Indeed, to teach civic virtue is to help preserve our republic.

In his Second Inaugural Address, President Barack Obama alluded to the need for citizens to live virtuously every day:

“What makes us exceptional, what makes us America, is our allegiance to an idea articulated in a declaration made more than two centuries ago: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal. That they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, and among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness…’ History tells us that while these truths may be self-evident, they’ve never been self-executing. That while freedom is a gift from God, it must be secured by his people here on earth. …You and I, as citizens, have the obligation to shape the debates of our time, not only with the votes we cast, but the voices we lift in defense of our most ancient values and enduring ideas.”

IMBUING civic virtue into every aspect of school life will lead to deeper understanding, and that greater understanding will lead to an improved school climate and culture.
Ancient Values, Enduring Ideas, Daily Difference

Those “most ancient values” include commitments to justice, perseverance, initiative, and other virtues of citizenship that allow a free people to govern themselves. These are among the citizen virtues that the Founders believed were necessary for self-government.

The goals of the narratives, discussion guides, lists of resources, and journal prompts in this program include an increased understanding of civic virtue on the part of both students and teachers. We invite you to engage students with the resources not only in U.S. History, but also in World History and English classes, as well as the wider school community through department meetings, faculty meetings, lunch-and-learns, assemblies, or other creative options that could work best for your school. We believe that imbuing civic virtue into every aspect of school life will lead to deeper understanding, and that greater understanding will lead to an improved school climate and culture.

We can address challenges common to the school environment with a richer and more complete understanding of civic virtue. For example, does bullying occur because a student is seeking “respect”? Does cheating or plagiarism take place because students lack understanding of—or experience with—perseverance? A deeper and historically-grounded understanding of virtue can be arrived at through discussion in which all take part. When all in the school, students and adults, discuss the deepest and historically-grounded understandings about civic virtue, both the whole school and the community benefit.

The lessons were valuable because they made the students reevaluate their own ethics. Although many of our students are “good” people, these lessons help reinforce the virtues and standards that we would like our students to embrace and display as citizens.

—FIELD-TESTING TEACHER
“If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten.”

—RUDYARD KIPLING

The same is true of virtue. People of all ages are naturally drawn to stories. While Mrs. Adams wrote to her son about “scenes that engage the heart,” her son was living those scenes in two countries in revolution, the fate of the new nation at stake. Her lesson—that trying times are tests of virtue—endures when young peoples’ minds are raised by studying historical examples. Within the selection of visual and historical narratives in this program are examples of civic virtue to be identified, discussed, analyzed, and evaluated. In the stories of villains from history are opportunities to analyze the actions of individuals who perhaps strove for virtue, but failed.

The materials in this resource were selected to engage the heart as well as the mind. Through discussion of all the narratives, students will implicitly judge: Why do we admire heroes? On the other hand, why do we harshly judge individuals like Benedict Arnold? The virtues (and lack thereof!) highlighted in these stories—along with self-reflection, discussion, and journaling—encourage teachers and students to make these virtues a habit.

Educators don’t simply reach students in their schools and classrooms; their influence extends beyond into times and places unpredictable and unknown, and may shape the lives of generations. As Abigail wrote to her son in 1780, we hope these materials on civic virtue will help you “transmit this inheritance to ages yet unborn.”

These lessons serve a vital purpose and prompt interesting conversations that connect past events to current events and to students themselves.

—FIELD-TESTING TEACHER
The lesson—that trying times are tests of virtue—endures when young people study historical examples.
This civic education resource stays away from shallow topics, instead inviting teachers and students to dive straightforwardly into robust, history-based topics. Through rich narratives, critical questions, meaningful discussion, and personal application, teachers and students will examine the “civic virtue” assumptions of our nation’s Founders and their relevance today.

- Ten narratives, photo-narratives, or primary sources convey stories of individuals who faced crises of civic virtue—including Benedict Arnold, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Eckford, and more.
- Journaling exercises engage individual students’ hearts and minds.
- “Virtue in Action” supplements provide ideas for demonstrating civic virtue in schools and communities.
- Cross-curricular connections make it easy for faculty and staff to work together toward the same character goals within the context of their own classrooms.
- Suggestions for further reading from literary and historical primary sources.

These exercises, based on historical events, are definitely more effective in getting students to examine their own commitment to these virtues.

—FIELD-TESTING TEACHER
Working Notes and Ideas for Implementing

HEROES & VILLAINS
Laying the Groundwork with Your Faculty

• As you introduce Heroes & Villains to faculty and staff for the first time, ask them to recall their favorite stories from childhood or early adulthood.

• Transition to a discussion about successful storytelling in the classroom. Chances are teachers are already comfortable with a storytelling approach. (e.g., history narratives, Supreme Court cases, stories of science discoveries, or lab reports done as story structure).

• Maintain an atmosphere that allows faculty to feel confident discussing virtue with students. Assure them that when discussing with students, they can emphasize that civic virtue may include, but does not require, religious belief.

• In keeping with the above, affirm for teachers that they can encourage students who do have a faith tradition to relate their thinking about virtue to it. Allow those who wish to do so to reflect on examples from their own faiths. (For example, individuals from sacred texts who acted virtuously, religious teachings, etc.)

• Acknowledge that all schools and all curricula do teach values or virtue, whether implicitly or explicitly. You are merely providing a language that enables free and open discussion.

• Request that teachers review the materials and hold “listening sessions” for them to come to you with any questions about their use of Heroes & Villains.

• Encourage teachers to share information with families, and invite parents to come to class for discussions.
First things first. Let’s define our terms. In Heroes & Villains, virtue is defined as:

*Conduct that reflects universal principles of moral and ethical excellence essential to leading a worthwhile life and to effective self-government. For many leading Founders, attributes of character such as justice, responsibility, perseverance, etc., were thought to flow from an understanding of the rights and obligations of men. Virtue is compatible with, but does not require, religious belief.*

Next, what virtues do we include and how do we define them? Based on writings of the U.S. founders, we could have chosen a number of civic virtues that were important to their understanding of the running of a constitutional republic. Of that number, Heroes & Villains addresses the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civic Virtue</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contribution</strong></td>
<td>The discovering of your passions and talents, and the use of them to create what is beautiful and needed. Working hard to take care of yourself and those who depend on you.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Courage</strong></td>
<td>Standing firm in being a person of character and doing what is right, especially when it is unpopular or puts you at risk.</td>
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<td><strong>Humility</strong></td>
<td>To remember that your ignorance is far greater than your knowledge. To give praise to those who earn it.</td>
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<td><strong>Integrity</strong></td>
<td>To tell the truth, expose untruths, and keep your promises.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Justice</strong></td>
<td>To stand for equally applied rules and to make sure everyone obeys them.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Perseverance</strong></td>
<td>To stay the course, choosing not the easy path, but rather the right one.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Respect</strong></td>
<td>To protect your mind and body as precious aspects of your identity. To extend that protection to every other person you encounter.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Responsibility</strong></td>
<td>To strive to know and do what is best, not what is most popular. To be trustworthy for making decisions in the best long-term interests of the people and tasks of which one is in charge.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Governance</strong></td>
<td>To be self-controlled, avoiding extremes, and to not be influenced or controlled by others.</td>
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THE QUESTION

How can we make character education seamless and integral to our school’s culture?

Get outside the “character curriculum box.” Instead, stop to think about the following three aspects of your school: **Leadership**, **Understanding**, and **Informing Instruction**. As you do, you’ll naturally discover ways to weave the themes of *Heroes & Villains* into the processes and culture that already exist among your faculty, students, and staff.

As you, with your faculty, plan to integrate *Heroes & Villains* into your school’s teaching and culture, these three areas will provide you with the clearest path to implementation.

**Leadership**
- Faculty & staff buy-in and participation
- Implementation
- Integration with existing character education efforts
- Role-modeling
- Parent & community involvement

**Understanding**
- Staff education / professional development
- Teaching the content
- Cross-curricular efforts
- Year-round reinforcement of ideas
- Peer discussions
- School-wide, all-department application

**Informing Instruction**
- Behavior management
- School-wide: classrooms, offices, cafeteria, gym, hallways
- Faculty & staff performance reviews
- Classroom rules
- Home-school communication
Before using *Heroes & Villains* at your school, describe the current school culture, character strengths, and areas for growth. Use the following prompts to help you do just that.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Our School’s Best Cultural Attributes Are…</th>
<th>Our School Culture Could Be Improved by a Focus On…</th>
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Our Ideal School Culture Would Be…
Let’s start with… Leadership

Below, and on the following pages, are some leadership-related items to consider as you integrate Heroes & Villains into the curriculum and civic education at your school.

Faculty Ownership
• Among your faculty, who are the key influencers whose leadership can help make this happen?

• How will we incorporate staff feedback to tailor this to our school?

• How might that feedback inform your use of Heroes & Villains?

Integration with Existing Character-Education Efforts
• What existing character efforts, formal or informal (if any), does your school employ?

• How can Heroes & Villains content bolster those efforts? What tensions may exist?

Role Modeling
• How do your faculty and administrators already exemplify these virtues for the school community?

• How might this role-modeling look in different areas of school life (rehearsal rooms, athletic fields, classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, etc.?)
Athletics & Extracurriculars

- How might coaches, resource teachers, directors, and other extracurricular and facility staff extend these ideas beyond the classroom?

Parents & Community Involvement

- How involved should parents be in this process? What opportunities exist to extend these ideas beyond the classroom?

- How might you involve the larger community (outside speakers, authority figures such as law enforcement, older students mentoring younger students, etc.)? What about volunteer opportunities?

On what other leadership areas may you want to focus as you implement Heroes & Villains?
Next, look at... Understanding

Use the prompts below to plan how you will ensure that everyone in the school community shares the same understandings as you use Heroes & Villains.

Staff Education and Professional Development
• How will these civic virtues be understood and reinforced among your school’s faculty?

• Who will be primarily responsible for this effort?

• What opportunities will the faculty have to discuss these ideas with each other on an ongoing basis?

Teaching the Content
• How will social studies and/or English teachers address this content?

• How many teachers in each department will cover this content?

• Will the content be taught all at once, periodically, or throughout the year?

• What cross-curricular efforts would be helpful? What, for example, could this look like in a math or science classroom?

• Will we evaluate students in some way? If so, how?

• How will these virtues be reinforced year-round…
  ☐ in social studies or English classrooms?
  ☐ in other classes?
  ☐ in school assemblies, communications, or daily announcements?
Peer Discussions and Mentoring: Students

- Identify students whose leadership could move others in the direction of these goals.

- What opportunities will older students have to mentor younger students?

- In what contexts can you envision getting students to discuss these ideas?
  - In class…
  - Outside of class…

- How might student clubs, student government, or other school groups reinforce these goals in your school?

On what other areas of student and faculty understanding may you want to focus as you implement Heroes & Villains?

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“Nobody ever listens to a teenager. Everybody thinks you should be happy just because you're young. They don't see the wars that we fight every single day.”

–FROM FREEDOM WRITERS
**Thinking about...**

**Informing Instruction and Implementation**

Below, and on the following pages, are feedback-related items to consider as you and your faculty implement *Heroes & Villains*.

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**Your School: Start with Your Strengths**

- Look back at what you noted on your “School Climate and Culture” chart on page 11. Which civic virtue does your student body currently reflect most fully? Which virtue is currently weak? *(Full list on page 9.)*

- Consider the civic virtue that is strongest at your school. How can you reinforce it? How can you harness it to improve in the weakest area?

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**Policies & Language**

- Given the language and format of *Heroes & Villains*, how might your feedback to students (both positive and constructive) be revised?

- How might classroom and school policies be revised to reflect these civic virtues?

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**Faculty Feedback**

- What could positive accountability look like in relation to these virtues? Are there ways to incorporate these concepts into existing feedback systems?

- Identify some informal ways colleagues can hold each other accountable for role-modeling these civic virtues.
Home-School Communication
• How can discussions about conduct be used to reinforce these civic virtues with students and their parents?

• How can written communication to parents incorporate the language of civic virtue?

What additional feedback-related ideas do you have as you integrate Heroes & Villains into your school curriculum and culture?

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“The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be felt.”

—FREDERICK BUECHNER
Integrating Heroes & Villains Throughout the School and Across the Curriculum

Each narrative includes a “Virtue in Action” section with concrete suggestions for making civic virtue both active and a habit. In addition to these examples, you may consider some of the following suggestions.

**In the Social Studies Classroom**

- Complete the activities for one narrative per month during the school year.
- Acknowledge that “heroes” are not demi-gods but human and, therefore, imperfect.
- Encourage teaching of history as “philosophy teaching by example.” Have students work as detectives to find virtues in history. For example, individuals who acted courageously in pursuit of justice; great historical moments involving what Aristotle called righteous indignation: American Revolution; Abolition; Women’s Suffrage; Civil Rights Era; etc.

**In the English/Language Arts Classroom**

- Students could write short historical fiction stories based on the lives of the individuals in the narratives.
- Select companion stories or poetry for a literature class that reflect the same virtue being studied in the historical narrative. (See Further Reading and Virtue Across the Curriculum resources included after each of the book’s narratives.)
- Acknowledge the complexity of life and literature — even “good” characters may do bad things.
In Classrooms, in Rehearsal Rooms, on Athletic Fields, and Beyond

- When affirming students who achieve excellent results, emphasize character traits such as **perseverance** and **responsibility** rather than innate intellect or talent.

- George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and other great leaders saw themselves as role models; within the school community, we are all role models. The question is not **whether** we will be role models, but **which virtues we will model**.

- If students wish to reflect on **examples of virtue** from sacred texts, encourage those contributions to the discussion.

- Encourage awareness of **humility**, **contribution**, and **justice** on the playing field.

- Distinguish between aggressor and defender in bullying cases. Praise the **courage** of those who defend the weak.

- Include references to these character traits, and use specific language, when communicating with parents—including report card narratives, and in parent meetings.
Use the map below either to brainstorm your ideas, or to begin to organize the “Who/What/How” for the ideas that you may already have brainstormed with your faculty.

**Brainstorming Map**
*Heroes & Villains*

- When:
  - ____________________
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  - ____________________
  - ____________________
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  - ____________________

- When:
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  - ____________________
  - ____________________
  - ____________________
  - ____________________
  - ____________________
  - ____________________
  - ____________________

- How/Who:
  - ____________________
  - ____________________
  - ____________________
  - ____________________
  - ____________________
  - ____________________
  - ____________________
  - ____________________
What will the implementation of *Heroes & Villains* look like across the school year?
Use this space to plan.

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<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Students</th>
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<td>September</td>
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What are the very next steps you want to take as you begin integrating *Heroes & Villains* into your school's curriculum and instruction?

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In December of 1784, when he sought recommendations for a tutor for Martha Washington’s two grandchildren at Mount Vernon, George Washington wrote a letter to George Chapman, former headmaster of the grammar school in Dumfries, Scotland. In the letter, Washington wrote,

“My sentiments are perfectly in unison with yours sir, that the best means of forming a manly, virtuous and happy people, will be found in the right education of youth.”

Whatever your next steps may be, they are significant. You have the affirmation of George Washington himself.
“Giving the students a role model of the virtue is a great way to teach civic virtue. The stories do a great job of giving the students characteristics to emulate.”

“I find myself drawn to, and using, more and more primary sources. The students enjoy deciphering pictures, especially, and then discussing their context and importance.”

“The cross-curricular approach was great! I was able to do the historical aspect and discussion, and the English teacher worked with them on writing their essay … It was a great lesson for everyone.”

Heroes & Villains: The Quest for Civic Virtue is a program of the Bill of Rights Institute. For more information or to order, visit www.BillofRightsInstitute.org