Activities

Activities for Teaching Responsibility

Grades: 1–2

Overview
A rich collection of activities to teach children about responsibility in personal behavior, money matters, community responsibility, and global responsibility in forms ranging from "Kindness chains" and journals to "adopting" elderly friends in nursing homes and debating changes in the world.

Introduction
"Responsibility" is a key word in the classroom and, as teachers, we play an important role in helping students become responsible — interpersonally, personally, at home, and in the local and global community.
School Responsibility

Behavior Journals
To get students to "own" their behavior, I have them create and decorate journals in which they write about their week's behavior and how they handled problems that came up. Every few days, I review a handful of journals and write my suggestions and encouraging comments. At the end of the week, kids take their journals home to share with their parents.

Kindness Chain
Near the front of my classroom is a basket with strips of paper and a pencil. Each time students do a good deed or perform an act of kindness, they write it on a strip of paper and tape the ends together to form the link of a chain. I display our chain in the classroom first, and then in the hallway as it grows through the year. It provides such a great incentive that students vie for the opportunity to do something they can add to the chain.

Let's Work Together
With this fun activity, students learn how to work with others and take responsibility for their part of a finished product. I organize my students into a small-group assembly line. Then I challenge them to make a product using materials I provide. One favorite product is a spider--students use two sizes of Styrofoam ball halves, pipe cleaners, and small round-topped map pins. Each student has the responsibility of adding a particular part of the spider. Once groups have created their products, a designated, impartial student inspector determines if the groups' products pass muster.

Personal Responsibility

Money Matters
To help students understand budgets, I give them a play money allowance and ask them to create a list of their needs and wants. I then provide a list of necessary expenses—rent, heat, food—on which they must spend part of their allowance. They can earn extra play money through classroom jobs,
and must draw a weekly "wild card"--an unexpected expense, such as needing to buy a new bicycle tire, or windfall, such as a belated birthday check from a relative. At the end of the week, they determine how much money is left and whether to save it or spend it on one of their needs or wants. We talk about their decisions and the importance of setting aside a bit of savings no matter what.

**At Home Responsibility**

**Helpful Hands**
I like to have my students create coupons for special tasks they will do at home to help their families. I emphasize that it's important for them to include tasks they don't do regularly, make only promises they will be able to deliver, and do tasks willingly. Then students present their coupons to family members. Afterward, we talk about how their family reacted to these helpful gifts and how these positive reactions made students feel.

**Clock Watch**
I ask students to create paper clocks that show their scheduled times for getting-ready tasks, such as getting up, eating breakfast, dressing, and leaving for school. I encourage students to post these paper clocks next to their real clock at home, to remind themselves when to do things. This is especially helpful for kids who tend to be tardy.

**Car Safety**
To reinforce what we know about being safe in the car, my class makes paper safety belts. Students work together to measure their waists with string or a tape measure, adding a hand's width to the waist measurement for fastening. They cut a safety belt from colored paper and decorate it with car safety rules we've discussed. Kids wear their belts home with notes they've written about family car safety.
**Community Responsibility**

**In Need**
My students help the needy throughout the year with food and necessity drives. I bring in a wicker basket to hold collections; then, each month, we choose the items to collect and places to make donations. One month we might collect combs and toothbrushes for a homeless shelter; another, canned foods for the local food pantry; and the next, toys for a pediatric unit. I ask parent volunteers to help deliver the donated items.

**Elderly Friends**
I've discovered wonderful learning opportunities when students "adopt" elderly friends at nursing homes or retirement centers. My students really like reading to their adopted friends. Beforehand, they rehearse their book selections with one another—great reading practice! Students also make audiocassettes of their stories to loan to the homes or centers.

**Global Responsibility**

**Rain-Forest Debate**
I divide my class into two groups: one native to the rain forest and the other needing rain forest land to make a living. Groups debate the use of the forest, then discuss the wants and needs that affect people's decisions. Next, my students survey their parents and neighbors concerning local environmental issues; as a class, we discuss the range of opinions and how this affects the ability to resolve problems.

**Our Responsibility: The Earth**
NASA has a wonderful free resource you can use for teaching students about their global responsibilities. The package is called "Our Mission to Planet Earth: A Guide to Teaching Earth System Science for K-3," and it was written by John Aldridge. The Guide packet contains color lithographs, including a picture of Earth from Apollo 17. Some of the topics covered include "Forces of

**Online Safety**
Understanding the "rules of the road" is essential for students who are exploring online computer resources. I permanently post these rules near our computer corner, and pass them on to parents, too.

- Don't tell anyone your password or the password of anyone in your family, class, or school.

- Watch out for anyone asking too many personal questions during online discussions--don't answer the questions and get an adult immediately.

- Check with an adult in your home/school if someone you don't know sends an "instant message" while you are online.

- Never give out your personal information (such as your last name, phone number, or home address) or that of anyone in your family, class, or school.

- Avoid anyone or anything online that doesn't feel right--trust your instincts.

**Booklist**

**Funny Responsibilities**

*Bartholomew and the Oobleck* by Dr. Seuss (Random House, 1949)
What happens when selfish King Derwin makes up a sticky weather that confounds the kingdom.

*The Biggest Bear* by Lynd Ward (Houghton Mifflin, 1952)
Johnny is responsible for the growing baby bear he brought back to his family's farm.
Taking Care of Oneself

Who Is a Stranger and What Should I Do? by Linda Walvoord Girard (Whitman, 1985)
Advice to kids for dealing with strangers in different circumstances.

Safety Zone: A Book of Teaching Children About Abduction Prevention Skills by Linda D. Meyer (Warner, 1985)
A resource for parents and kids to prevent kidnapping and sexual abuse.

Taking Care of the Earth

Caring for Our Air by Carol Greene (Enslow, 1991)
Understanding air pollution and what they can do about it.

Interesting information and projects for children.

Special Responsibilities

Angel in Charge by Judy Delton (Houghton Mifflin, 1985)
Angel and her little brother, Rags, must cope with unexpected crises when they are left home without a sitter.

Willy enters the National Dog Sled Race to win the cash prize for his discouraged grandfather.

Booklist compiled by Kathy Kim. See also Books Kids Will Sit Still For and More Books Kids Will Sit Still For, both by Judy Freeman (R.R. Bowker).

Subjects:
Curriculum Development, Character and Values