Schecter Brothers and Integrity

Estimated Time: 90 minutes

**Hubris:** To tell the truth, expose untruths, and keep one’s promises.

**Essential Question**

Why is it important in a healthy civil society for individuals to act with integrity?

**Guiding Questions**

What are some possible consequences of not keeping one’s promises?

What are the elements required to act with integrity?

What are the risks of acting with integrity when it is unpopular or puts one at risk?

**Objectives**

Students will use the story of the Schecter Brothers to identify acts of integrity and how they affect civil society.

Students will reflect and analyze previous experiences to recognize integrity in their lives.

Students will identify beliefs that are important to themselves and how they can stay true to these beliefs when they are challenged.

**Procedures**

The following lesson asks students to consider the virtue of integrity. Students will engage with the story of the Schecter Brothers as they consider the question: **Why is it important for a healthy civil society for individuals to act with integrity?**

The main activity in this lesson requires students to read and analyze a narrative that explores how the Schecter Brothers made decisions based on integrity. Students may work individually, in pairs, or in small groups as best fits your classroom. The analysis questions provided can be used to help students comprehend and think critically about the content. As
the teacher, you can decide which questions best fit your students’ needs and time restraints.

Additionally, students will apply what they learned about integrity to identify beliefs that are important to themselves and how they can stay true to these beliefs when they are challenged.

Lastly, the lesson includes sources used in this lesson for further reading and suggestions for cross-curricular connections.

**Resources**

**Student Resources**
- Engage Handout: What does ‘integrity’ mean?
- Schechter Brothers & Integrity Narrative
- Virtue in Action Handout

**Teacher Resources**
- Analysis Questions
- Virtue in Action
- Journal Activity
- Sources for Further Reading
- Virtue Across the Curriculum

**Engage**

*Scaffolding Note:* You may use this activity to prepare your students and introduce the vocabulary and ideas discussed in this lesson.

Distribute the Engage Handout: What does ‘integrity’ mean?

Introduce the vocabulary word **integrity:** To tell the truth, expose untruths, and keep one’s promises.

Have students read and respond to the quote in question 1 individually: “The time is always right to do what is right.” - Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, Oberlin College Commencement Address, June 1965.

Have students share their responses to the quote with a partner.

With the same partner or in a small group, have students think of a scenario in which they, someone they know, or a fictional character struggled to “do the right thing” or act with integrity. Students should discuss the prompts on the handout with their partner/group.

Ask for volunteer groups to briefly share the example they came up with.

Lead students in a class debrief by asking them to think of patterns they noticed across their examples.

- *What was at the root of each person’s struggle? For instance, was it peer pressure or the influence of other groups, a conflict with conscience or core beliefs?*

- *Was something about the situation outside of their control?*
Transition to the Schechter Brothers narrative: Next, we’ll look at the story of four brothers who struggled to keep true to their religious beliefs when faced with new regulations and oversight from the U.S. government.

Explore

Transition to the Schechter Brothers & Integrity Narrative. Students will learn and analyze the story of the Schechter Brothers to understand the virtue of integrity.

Scaffolding Note: It may be helpful to instruct students to do a close reading of the text. Close reading asks students to read and reread a text purposefully to ensure students understand and make connections. For more detailed instructions on how to use close reading in your classroom, use these directions. Additional reading strategies (See Appendix) are provided for other options that may meet your students’ needs.

Essential Vocabulary (See Glossary for Definitions)

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<th>Integrity</th>
<th>Embezzlement</th>
<th>Persevered</th>
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Transition to the analysis questions. Have students work individually, with partners, or as a whole class to answer the questions.

Scaffolding Note: If there are questions that are not necessary to your students’ learning or time restraints, then you can remove those questions.

Analysis Questions

1. Note the definition of “integrity” as a civic virtue that follows the Schechter Brothers and Integrity narrative. Describe the various ways the Schechter brothers acted with integrity in their communities.

2. With what crimes were they charged?

3. Describe your reaction to learning of the crimes with which they were charged. What does your instinctive response reveal about whether what happened to the Schechter brothers was right or wrong? How does this affect your ideas about whether an objective right and wrong exist?

4. “How did the actions of the Schechter brothers help the entire country?”


6. One scholar noted that, at the time the Schechter brothers’ case was being heard in court, much of the coverage of the case was biased against them: “[c]overage of the case …was highly tinged with the standard anti-Semitism of the time, especially because the Schechters were … immigrants with their Eastern European cadences
and traditional Jewish dress.” How does this information help you understand this historical event?

7. How do the Schechter brothers’ actions help you understand integrity as a civic virtue? Given the economic conditions of the time, how could many other individuals demonstrate integrity like the Schechter brothers and contribute to the social fabric of the whole United States?

8. In what ways does their story also help you understand courage? Explain. How does courage relate to integrity?

9. Explain how the level of freedom in a society relates to a person’s ability to demonstrate integrity in society.

10. Why might the U.S. Founders have believed that the virtue of integrity was essential in a constitutional republic?

Assess & Reflect

Virtue in Action

Scaffolding Note: You may use this activity to help your students reflect on and apply the content they learned about the Schecter Brothers and integrity.

Distribute the Virtue in Action Handout and review the direction with students.

Help students think of core truths or principles by using the concept of natural rights as an example think aloud:

- A core principle in the United States is the equality of humans. Where did this idea come from?
  - The Declaration of Independence.

- What is the Declaration of Independence?
  - It is a Founding document that says that all humans are equal in their rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

- How might this belief or principle be challenged?
  - Think of a time in U.S. history when this idea was challenged or threatened in some way (the most obvious example is the existence of slavery in the American republic until 1865).
• How can you remind yourself to stay true to this belief and act with integrity?

  Throughout history, men and women like Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth (just two examples of many) reminded Americans that slavery violated Founding principles of human equality through their words and actions.

• How can you remind yourself to act in accordance with their belief when it is challenging?

  Learning about the example of abolitionists, activists, and agitators throughout U.S. history calling for a faithful application of the Founding principle of equality is both a tutorial on how to work for change and act as well as an inspiration on how to act with integrity.

AND/OR

Integrity Journal Activity

The Schechter Brothers were told that they needed to set aside their beliefs to obey laws designed to alleviate the unprecedented economic issues caused by the Great Depression. Consider a situation where you are told that you need to sacrifice your values for the good of others.

Have students self-reflect and answer the question in their journals:

  • Would it be virtuous for you to do so? Explain. If not, how can you align your values so they align with the good of others?

Extend

Sources & Further Reading

Explore the following list for additional sources and further reading on the Schecter Brothers.

  
  
  
Virtue Across the Curriculum

Below are corresponding literature suggestions to help you teach civic virtues across the curriculum. Sample prompts are provided for the key corresponding works. For the other suggested works or others that are already part of your curriculum, create your own similar prompts.

- **Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass (1845) by Frederick Douglass**
  - Frederick Douglass’ memoir recounts his time as an enslaved worker, his escape from slavery, and his new life as a free man. When does Douglass realize his own power? How does integrity play a role in his life from this point forward?

- **Harriet (2019) directed by Kasi Lemmons**
  - This biographical film follows the life of Harriet Tubman. How does Tubman live her life with integrity, from her time as an enslaved woman on the Eastern shore of Maryland to her service in the Union Army during the Civil War?

  **Note:** This film is rated PG-13.