

Integrity Curriculum
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Beacon Hill Friends Meeting
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Lesson 3: Partial Truths

*** This is an interactive lesson but the interaction is talking. If it's a restless group, have doodling materials on hand. ***

Silent worship. Begin with 5 minutes of silent worship. Use a candle or other object (like the jar of water with sludge slowly sedimenting down) to help kids center down. Display a prompting query that kids can use if they need something to think about: What would my daily life look like if I believed as strongly in Truth as Thomas the Quaker did from last week's story?

Quotes – keep these on display throughout the lesson without comment.

"Integrity is the essential Quaker test." - Wilmer Cooper, Pendle Hill pamphlet on Integrity

"... and the truth shall set you free." – John 8:32

"If you tell the truth, then you don't have to remember anything." – Mark Twain

Review (5-7 minutes, Jeopardy style – quick response, treat for correct answer)

1. Who can remember the definitions of Integrity, and use it in a sentence?

1. *The state of being complete, undiminished, free from damage or defect.*
2. *An unimpaired condition*
3. *Adherence to a code of values. Respecting the truth.*

2. What is the origin of the word 'integrity'? What might its original meaning have to do with its current meaning of 'respecting truth'?

Latin 'integritas' = entire, complete, undiminished.

3. Give two historical examples of Quaker custom that have their roots in the Integrity testimony. What was the reason?

- *No oaths. Quakers did not -- and still don't -- swear oaths, for example in a court of law. (to do so was to admit that there were two standards for truth, in and out of court, and implied that it was ok to lie out of court).*
- *Single price. Quakers sold goods at the same price to everyone (believing that the item had one inherent, 'true' value).*

Last time we read a story of some Quakers from the 1600's who had an extreme allegiance to total truth. They voluntarily moved themselves from one prison to another, without a guard, because they had given their word they would not run away. We talked about the cost of telling the truth, and the cost of not telling the truth.

Underscore that when you are a difficult crossroad between truth and falsity, there is usually a cost to be borne either way. The point here is to render visible that NOT telling the truth bears a cost too. Is the lie worth it?

Today we talk about partial truths: in a situation, how much of the truth do you decide to tell?

In the heat of the moment, most people's instinct is to act in self-preservation – the temptation to lie is very strong if it saves your skin. The costs of lying aren't the first thing to come to mind – saving your skin is. The costs of lying usually become apparent at a lag – only after you've told the lie (e.g. your conscience bothers you, you get stressed out keeping all your lies straight, etc).

However, by “spiritual training,” you can learn to weigh the costs of truth versus lying quickly, in the heat of the moment, and make the best decision at the time the situation is happening (not after).

Spiritual training – strengthening your “moral muscles” -- is like physical training: the more you do it, the easier it becomes.

Today we will play a game in which you pick a situation out of a hat, and you have 20 seconds to decide how much of the truth you would tell. According to what factors do we decide how much truth to tell? In each case, what are the costs of telling the truth? The costs of lying?

The game below illustrates some reasons (listed below) people might choose to obscure the truth. Do not say them out loud. Play the game first and let the kids come to these themselves.

- *Compassion – not hurting someone’s feelings*
- *Defense – saving someone*
- *Self-preservation – saving oneself (from punishment, shame, etc)*
- *Fun – the pleasure of deception (is it really, at base, about the pleasure of having power over people via deceit?)*

Game (20 minutes):

Each child takes a turn to select a scenario out of a bag, reading it out loud. Everyone has 20 seconds to decide (on their own) how much of the truth they would tell. Then briefly discuss as a group. E.g. why did you decide that? What was the cost of telling the truth in this case? Of telling a partial truth (or lying)? What factors did you take into account in making your decision (e.g. someone might get hurt; the lie might be discovered, etc)

Note: this game can be brief or long (we took two classes to do all the scenarios), depending on how much discussion there is.

A possible variation is to do several “talking” rounds, then have kids work together on a scenario, or act it out.

1. Some kids you really want to be friends with invite you to do something with them. You want to but you’re ashamed of the reason why you can’t (scared, can’t afford it, aren’t very good at it, etc). What do you say?
2. You have just gotten rotten grades. An elderly person who thinks you walk on water asks you how you’re doing in school. What do you say?
3. You see your friend lying to hide something they’re embarrassed about. e.g. friend brags about taking an expensive trip somewhere you know they could never afford. Do you expose the lie?
4. A friend of yours has gotten him/herself in trouble. You really want to help them but it means lying to someone you respect. e.g. friend tells a respected teacher they didn’t get their homework done because they had to help you in a crisis last night. Do you confirm it or do you expose it?
5. Some bullies are chasing a small child. The child hides behind a bush. The bullies come by and ask you if you saw the child. What do you say?
6. Your family’s way of living (car, food, customs, values, etc) is something other kids mock without knowing that’s how you live. When the subject comes up, do you join in mocking that thing? Do you admit your family lives that way?

Do you allow other kids to actually see it (e.g. offer them a ride in the car, invite them home etc)

7. You see a rich person drop several \$50 bills by accident and move on. You remember your neighbor needs some money for something important (food, medical care). You also really want a new video game. Do you tell the person they dropped the money? What if the person does not look rich?
8. You get into a movie for free because the absentminded ticket clerk forgot to charge you. Do you tell them?
9. Your best friend got an awful haircut and asks your opinion. Do you tell him/her? What if the friend just had spinach between his/her teeth?
10. Your aunt gives you a terrible birthday present. What do you say?
11. You have a chance to trick a stranger into thinking you have a life that is totally different than it really is. Do you do it?
12. You are in a class taking a test. The teacher walks out. Some kids cheat. The teacher walks back in and asks did anyone cheat. What do you say?
13. You live in an authoritarian state. The secret police suspect your parents are criticizing the government, which is illegal. They ask you to spy on your parents and report back everything they say. Do you do it?
14. You are working for a wealthy company. You find out your coworker is stealing lots of money from the company. What do you do? What if the person stealing is your boss and could fire you?