Catching a Thief

Key Ideas: The implications and cost of stealing/Good character is a valuable asset to possess
Character Traits: Honesty/Integrity/Self-respect
Level: Elementary

Good morning, __name of school__. This is __name of narrator__ with a few words of wisdom.

Sadly, there are some young people who steal what doesn’t belong to them. They steal from their classrooms, family members, and friends. When young people steal from their classroom, the teacher may not be able to replace those items and everyone in class loses. When young people steal from family members and friends, they lose the trust of those they care about.

There’s an old American proverb that goes:

*He who steals will always fail.*

You may say, “Well, I’ve stolen before and I didn’t get caught. I didn’t fail at stealing.” That may be true, but you failed the minute you took something that didn’t belong to you, because you robbed *yourself*. You stole your self-respect. You robbed yourself of good character. So don’t be a thief. You have too much to lose, and you deserve the goodness that comes from being an honest person.

With something to think about, this is ____________. Make it a great day . . . or not. The choice is yours.
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Key Ideas: The implications and cost of stealing/Good character is a valuable asset to possess

Character Traits: Honesty/Integrity/Self-respect

Concept: Students will examine the costs to themselves and others when they choose to steal and explore the concept of good character as a valuable asset to possess.

Materials: Suggested activities for art classes may require materials for creating a drawing, painting, or poster.

Directions: Read or ask a student to read aloud the Project Wisdom message that accompanies this lesson plan. Ask for volunteers to share responses to the following questions.

Discussion Generators
1. Why do you think young people steal when they know they could get caught and punished?
2. How does it cost all the students in a class when someone steals from the classroom?
3. What does it cost young people who choose to steal (e.g., it costs them their good character, it costs them a clear conscience, it can result in serious consequences like being arrested or suspended from school, it can cost them the respect of other people, etc.)?
4. How do you think young people make it “okay” to steal in their own minds? Why is it a bad idea to talk yourself into doing something that you know is wrong?
5. What character trait(s) do you need so you will choose not to steal from others? How does having that character trait help you?
6. People who are honest and do not steal are rich in character. Describe someone you know (or know of) who is rich in character. What character traits does that person own? Why would this person never steal something that didn’t belong to him or her?
7. Describe a time when someone stole something from you or from someone you care about. What happened? How did it make you feel? If you could have said something to the thief, what would you have said? Why?
8. What can you do if you know that someone has taken something that doesn’t belong to him or her?

Closing Comments – Your good character is one of the most valuable things you will ever own. If you are ever tempted to steal something, whether it’s from your classroom, neighbor, family member or friend, you need to remember that if you choose to steal, you are also choosing to rob yourself of your good character. You are risking losing people’s trust. You are putting your future at risk. So make the choice today to live a life based on honesty. You will live a richer life for it.
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Follow-up Activities

K-5

• Give each student a small piece of PLAY-DOH and have them shape the PLAY-DOH into a model of themselves while you read a short story from the list below. After the story, tell students to think about a time when someone stole from them, from the class, or from their home. Ask them to popcorn their feelings about that situation. (To “popcorn” means to allow students to just “pop in” without being called on.) Ask them to then poke their finger into their model and think again about the time someone stole something. How did they feel? Did the person apologize? How did they feel after the apology? Did it help? Bring attention to the hole left in their models and tell students that stealing causes a hurt that lasts a long time. Explain that even after an apology, the hurt can leave a little hole like the one left in their PLAY-DOH. Ask students to share how they can help that hurt to heal and how they can fill that little hole left by the person that stole.

• Give all the students a small piece of construction paper. Instruct them to draw a picture of something they value, something that is special to them. Students should then write a few words about why it is so special. Once completed, have the students fold the papers and put them in a box placed in the middle of the room. Tell students that they are to “steal” something special from the box. After everyone has “stolen” something, have the students share how they felt taking something that didn’t belong to them and that they knew was special to someone else. Then have students discuss how it felt to have that special something taken from them. At the conclusion of the activity, have all the students sign honesty pledge cards.

K-2

• Read aloud any of the suggested stories for K-2 or your favorite story about stealing. Discuss how the victim felt and how the character who stole felt. Be sure to guide the students to see that though the thief felt good at first, afterward he or she worried about being caught and then felt guilty knowing someone had been hurt. As simply as possible, have a few children act out the story. To save time and to give a few children a turn, dramatize only the theft, the discovery, and the confession. After doing the dramatization a couple of times, ask the children if they believe the victim ever forgot about the incident even after the thief confessed and said that he or she was sorry. Ask if the victim would treat the person who stole differently in the future. How?

3-5

• Read William Steig’s The Real Thief aloud to the class. (The story can be read to the class in two or three 15-20-minute sittings.) Point out Gawain’s good character traits. His job as Head Guard of the Royal Treasury would require his trustworthiness. Discuss the king’s feelings about Gawain. When the story reveals the real thief, draw attention to Derek’s feelings of guilt. Guide the discussion so the students understand that when Gawain was mistakenly accused, he also became a victim. Have a few students dramatize Derek’s confession to Gawain. Discuss how hard it is for Derek to admit to his crime. At the end, ask if the students agree with Derek and Gawain’s solution. How did the king have to change his way of guarding his treasure? What did it have to do with trusting others? When the story is done, have students write what they now understand about stealing, about trust, and about being a victim.
• Push a pencil into a chunk of PLAY-DOH and leave it there. Tell the class that the PLAY-DOH is the person’s memory, and the pencil shows a time that someone hurt them by stealing. Pull the pencil out and put it out of sight. Explain that it is when a person apologizes and says he or she is sorry that the pencil goes away. Now show the PLAY-DOH with the hole left in it. Explain to the students that even after saying “I’m sorry” for stealing, the hurt that was done is still there, like the hole is still in the PLAY-DOH. It’s like the scar that’s left after a bad scratch. Ask the children to talk about what they think of stealing.

Reading List

K-3
• *The Bear Ate Your Sandwich*, J. Sarcone-Roach
• *My Stuff, Your Stuff*, C. Larsen
• *The Sparkle Thing*, L.D. Brimner
• *Thief (Good & Bad)*, J. Amos
• *Who Stole the Gold?*, U. Weigelt

3-5
• *A Children’s Book About Stealing*, J.W. Berry
• *The Real Thief*, W. Steig
• *Ricky Sticky Fingers*, J. Cook