

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe
Middle School Lesson -- Responsibility and Trust
A lesson by Deborah Farmer
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C.S. Lewis' classic novel, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, serves as the focus for this unit on responsibility. The work also offers opportunity to examine many literary concepts and additional virtues. The lessons are based on the Internalizing Virtue Framework.

Awareness

- Before introducing *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, conduct an informal class poll. How many students are the eldest children? The youngest? The middle? An only child? What is it like to be the _____? What responsibilities do you have? Tell the students that *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* is about four siblings who love each other, fight with each other, have adventures together, and have different responsibilities. Invite the students to pay attention to the different characters -- oldest to youngest -- and the choices they make.

- Invite students to think about how their responsibilities have changed as they have gotten older. What new responsibilities do they have at home or at school? How do they think their responsibilities will change as they grow older?

Understanding (Week 1)

Before this discussion, students should have completed chapters 1 - 5 of The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe.

- Begin the discussion by asking the students to describe each of the four siblings--their personalities, actions, and relationships with one another.

- Share the following definition of responsibility with the students: Being dependable in carrying out duties and obligations. Showing reliability and consistency in words and conduct. Being accountable for your own actions.

- Discuss the definition of responsibility, mentioning that responsible people are often thought to be trustworthy. Discuss the connection between trustworthiness and responsibility.

- In the first five chapters, the trustworthiness of two characters, Edmund and Lucy, is questioned. Read aloud the following passage from chapter 5: "How do you know," [the professor] asked, "that your sister's story is not true?" "Oh, but--"began Susan, and then stopped. Anyone could see from the old man's face that he was perfectly serious. Then Susan pulled herself together and said, "But Edmund said they had only been pretending." "That is the point," said the Professor, "which certainly deserves consideration; very

careful consideration. For instance--if you will excuse me for asking the question--does your experience lead you to regard your brother or your sister as the more reliable? I mean, which is the more truthful?"

- Use the following discussion questions to help the students understand the connection between trustworthiness and responsibility:

1. Is this a fair question for the professor to ask? Can we judge how responsible a person will be based on his/her past actions?
2. How do the siblings know that Lucy is more responsible than Edmund? What do responsible people do?
3. If a person has a history of being irresponsible, can s/he change? How? How could Edmund regain his siblings' trust?
4. The discussion from questions two and three can lead to a discussion of what it means to be a responsible student. How do responsible students act? How can they earn the trust of their teachers and fellow students?

Assignment for Week 2

Question four foreshadows Edmund's eventual redemption...but he makes many mistakes before he changes his ways. As students continue reading, ask them to pay close attention to Edmund and the choices he makes. Why does he do what he does? Is he a happy person? The students might be assigned to respond to these questions in writing in preparation for the next meeting. They might share their responses in small groups.

Understanding (Week 2)

*Before this discussion, students should have completed chapters 6-11 of *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe**

- Divide students into small groups with one person acting as the recorder. The groups will discuss the following questions: 1. Why did Edmund lie to his family and join the White Witch? 2. Has Edmund been happy at any point in the story? Point out the specific part of the text that shows that Edmund is happy.
- Reconvene the whole class after about 10 minutes. The recorders will report on the group's answers. Lead a whole class discussion about the various responses.
- Ask the students if they have noticed any signs that Edmund is changing. Point out the following two passages from Chapter 11. "Oh don't, don't, please don't," shouted Edmund, but even while he was shouting she had waved her wand and instantly where the merry party had been there were only statues of creatures.... And Edmund for the first time in this story felt sorry for someone besides himself." "All round them though out of sight, there were streams, chattering, murmuring,

bubbling, splashing and even (in the distance) roaring. And his heart gave a great leap (though he hardly knew why) when he realized the frost was over."

- Ask the students to consider what they know about Aslan at this point of the story. Remind them of Mr. Beaver's first mention of Aslan: "Aslan?" said Mr. Beaver, "Why, don't you know? He's the King. He's the Lord of the whole wood, but not often here, you understand. Never in my time of my father's time. But the word has reached us that he has come back. He is in Narnia at this moment. He'll settle the White Queen all right. It is he, not you, that will save Mr. Tumnus."
- Point out that this quote reveals that Mr. Beaver has great trust in Aslan. Tell the students that the good animals of Narnia share in this trust and that the children, as they interact with Aslan, also come to trust him. Remind students of the previous week's discussion about the connection between responsibility and trustworthiness. Ask the students to predict why Aslan will gain the trust of the children.

Understanding (Week 3)

*Before this discussion, students should have completed chapters 12-16 of *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Read the final chapter aloud at the beginning of class.*

Action

- Invite students' final responses and thoughts about the book.
- Ask the students to focus on the character of Edmund. Does he change? When does he change? Why does he change? Has Edmund earned the trust of his family? Has he proven himself to be responsible?
- In chapter 12, Peter says the following of Edmund's treachery: "That was partly my fault, Aslan. I was angry with him and I think that helped him to go wrong." Ask the students to consider Peter's suggestion that he was in some part responsible for Edmund. What responsibility do we have for the actions of others? In what ways are students of your age responsible for their classmates? How can we assist others as they attempt to be responsible and earn trust?
- Ask the students to consider Aslan's deal with the Witch that saved Edmund. Why was he willing to risk death for a traitor? Remind the students of the conversation between Edmund and Aslan in Chapter 13. C. S. Lewis did not reveal the conversation to the reader. What do they think was said?
- As the siblings grew older and wiser, the inhabitants of Narnia added descriptors to their names: King Peter the Magnificent, Queen Susan the Gentle, King Edmund the Just, and Queen Lucy the Valiant. In many ways these names reflect the personalities and character traits they displayed as children. Have the students choose a name -- and therefore a trait -- that they would like to be known as when they are adults. What, specifically, can they do during the current school year to

become a person who possesses their chosen quality. Student responses to this assignment could be written in essay or poetic form. The finished products might be bound together and placed in the class library. They might be referred to during the year as the students work toward their goals.

- Peter took part of the blame for Edmund's actions upon himself because he believed that as the older brother, he should have done more to help his younger sibling. Ask the students to think about their role in helping younger students become successful and responsible. As a class, brainstorm possible long-term projects they might do for one or more primary classes. Some possibilities include tutoring, buddy reading, playground buddies, and collaborative service projects. Adopt one of these projects and help the students to plan and implement their ideas. Each student should be given a specific responsibility that will contribute to the project's success.

- *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* demonstrated the connection between responsibility and trustworthiness. Ask the students to consider the responsibilities of children their age. How does success/failure in carrying out these responsibilities contribute to how they are viewed by others? Ask students to identify a specific responsibility and describe the challenges that accompany it. How does this specific responsibility influence the level of trust they are granted? They might consider both a responsibility that they have successfully mastered and one that is a current challenge.

Reflection

- Ask the students to think about the actions of the four children and other characters in the story. What examples of responsible behavior can they remember? Did responsible behavior contribute to whether or not the character appeared trustworthy? Which characters would they students place the most trust in? Why? Which characters seem the least worthy of trust? Why?

- As the students plan and carry out their project with younger students, ask them to keep reflection journals. As the project develops ask the students to consider when being responsible was especially challenging. How did they overcome obstacles? Do they feel they have earned the trust of others (the younger students, classmates, teachers) through this project?

- In chapter 12, Peter says the following of Edmund's treachery: "That was partly my fault, Aslan. I was angry with him and I think that helped him to go wrong." Ask the students to consider Peter's suggestion that he was in some part responsible for Edmund. What responsibility do we have for the actions of others? In what ways are students of your age responsible for their classmates? How can we assist others as they attempt to be responsible and earn trust?