

Activity Plan: Introduction to VIA Character Strengths

Content Focus— Interdisciplinary unit		
Technical	Academic	21 st Century Skills
Communication Critical thinking Leadership	Writing Oral Presentation Counseling A1 Improve Academic Self-Concept Achieve School Success AB Plan to Achieve Goals	Multimedia Editing Developing Grit and Determination Being active in the local community Exposure to work-based learning skills

Activity Outline— Evening Open House – Gathering of Historical Figures		
Time	Sequence	Description of Extension Activity
Week 1	Team meeting	<p>Collaborate together to decide teacher involvement in participating. This activity works well for teams that believe in Interdisciplinary curriculum that builds toward an outcome. Effective practices from my experience include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers work in grade level teams. • Teachers decide what standards are being incorporated into the lesson. • Teachers choose the date for the culminating event. (Administration works with teachers to determine an exchange of time, whether or not to run busses on an alternate schedule, and/ or a day of exchange for the extra work time invested. If this event becomes a regular part of operations, it can be included on the school calendar to allow long-term planning each year. Be sure the expectations regarding this time are clear and collaborative before proceeding.)
Week 2	Create curriculum and lesson plans	Teachers meet to create a continuum of skills to be taught, to determine the organizing themes, and to plan for the desired Student outcomes. For younger students, a guiding document or multimedia presentation with questions may be helpful. In the

	Administration works through logistics	<p>first years of the activity generating weekly activities was helpful. Shared documents for tracking student progress were also valuable.</p> <p>At the end of the first week, the activity is officially rolled out to students. However, teachers may choose to begin discussing it with students during the week in order to generate enthusiasm. The norms regarding this are discussed by the student planning teams.</p> <p>Administration is responsible for determining the number of community participants anticipated. If a culinary class is involved, the teacher can assist in meal planning, and other specific logistics. Other options might include the inclusion of a Parent-Teacher organization Our school used this event as a fund raiser for the learning community, held raffles, and other drawings to increase revenue to offset the cost of the meal and so funds were available for other student events. Ultimately, in our setting we determined a suggested donation to the school was an effective means of making this happen without causing undue hardship for families.</p> <p>Administration can also determine if buses will be necessary to transport students to their homes, for those whose families can't attend the event. If buses are used, a later start may be desired on the day of the event.</p> <p>Administration begins publicizing the event. Inform the local school board, and other appropriate community members. Student art works, radio commercials, or other items can be generated over the course of the years this event occurs.</p>
Week 3	Implement the curriculum.	<p>In the first year, teachers have to provide an introduction and overview of the event. In later years, students will be able to draw on their experiences from prior years. Students who are interested or part of a media class can be asked to record footage and photos during the event. This material allows for promotional materials for the following year. A student team of historical journalist personalities can be added to allow such students to participate while documenting the event. If the school has a performance and production class, such students might prefer to tackle this role. Knowledge of media release status for students is an important part of documenting the event.</p>

		<p>Students research individuals they might want to “be” for the open house. I usually introduced it on a Friday, and the students were asked to choose who they wanted to “be” by the following Monday. For those who are indecisive, adults can assist and allow extra time as appropriate.</p> <p>Teacher teams meet regularly to troubleshoot and collaborate. Updated curriculum materials are developed and archived for future use. Generating a list of necessary supplies is an imperative and ongoing part of this project. Shared documents and trackable electronic communication becomes important as individuals need to stay connected to the team. As students research their characters, they will need to start thinking of the apparel of the time period. A local thrift store can serve as a resource for many students. Over the years, a ‘drama closet,’ stocked with some materials donated after the performances will likely develop. The oldest students will also start considering the use of props or digitized backgrounds that will allow them to be transported to a different place and time.</p>
Week 4	Student work time	<p>Teacher teams meet regularly to troubleshoot and collaborate. Development of rubrics for specific performances begins and continues throughout the process. Using rubrics during rehearsals and video evidence to support the evaluation can be useful.</p> <p>Students immerse themselves in the study of their character. Teachers receive and evaluate artifacts from students.</p>
Week 5	Student work time	<p>Teacher teams meet regularly to troubleshoot and collaborate.</p> <p>Students generate a written or recorded version of the presentation they expect to perform for the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For sixth graders, this can be a script of their individual person. • For seventh graders, this can be a list of questions with answers that those they are serving may ask – in order to figure out their identities. • For eighth graders, this is an overview of the person they will depict in their scene as well as a description of individual personalities and mannerisms. Video or audio resources may be helpful. The students will work collaboratively to select a real or likely event that occurred for their characters in history.

<p>Week 6</p>	<p>Student work time and dress rehearsals</p>	<p>Teacher teams meet regularly to troubleshoot and collaborate. Schedules of events are prepared so they can be distributed to members of the community. One of the best ways to make the event friendly to the community is to be as close to on schedule as possible for the events. Being respectful of time is an important aspect of these gatherings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seventh grade students who will be serving the meal are trained in being waitstaff. Crews are assigned that rotate throughout the meal. They receive training regarding appropriate hand washing, means of interacting with customers, and other work-based skills. They practice with one another and teachers using mock scenarios to prepare. • Selected students are trained in how to collect appropriate photos and media from the event. Recording devices are tested during dress rehearsals, and may be used as part of a debrief in illustrating student improvement. • Eighth grade scripts are generated and finalized, props and sets are assembled, and practices are conducted. <p>Set up, cooking, and clean-up crews are important and will need to be created in accordance with the local community norms.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sixth grade student performances required little clean-up. • Seventh grade students managed the majority of the clean-up in the dining areas. • Eighth grade students cleaned up the performance room.
<p>Week 7</p>	<p>Post event debrief, student, parent, staff survey</p>	<p>Genuine feedback forms and surveys assist this event in improving.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic pre and post testing specific to team developed goals are best developed by teaching teams. • Logistical evaluation generated by administrative staff was most beneficial, especially when administrative staff responded to community concerns. • Staff feedback can be gathered in team debriefs with the administration and, if a staff has a habit of ongoing

Individual discussions with administrators, individual staff can discuss the event privately.

Celebrate the Successes:

If money is generated in excess of costs, share where the funds can be used.

Student media team creates a video that can be looped on a screen of highlights from the evening.

Give staff a teacher appreciation gift following the event.

Troubleshoot any glitches or unintended outcomes.

Materials and Resources—What do you need to assemble and prepare before the event?

- Internet access.
- Recording devices. (Live streaming if desired)
- Creative, interested, and invested staff.
- Community support.
- Food, a space for preparation and serving, and the staff and students to serve the community.
- Materials for costumes and props.
- Time for teacher teams to collaborate.
- If a school uses schoolwide rubrics, it can be useful for this type of event.

Reflection—

Is the energy invested in this event worth continuing to implement it?

What other ideas do we have for schoolwide events?

What other skills can we focus on in our school that relate to activities students may use after their formal education ends?