

Excellence through Ethics™

Session 6

Education?—A Matter of Perspective



Middle School



Junior Achievement®



Excellence through Ethics
Middle Grades
Session 6

Education?—A Matter of Perspective

Content: Ethics and Education as a Priority

Methods: Role-Playing

JA Foundational Pillars: Ethics, Work Readiness, and Entrepreneurship

Contents

| | |
|---|-------|
| Guide for Volunteers and Teachers | 3 |
| Student Handout | 11 |
| Appendix | 12-18 |
| Volunteer and Teacher Welcome | 12 |
| Program Introduction and Overview | 13 |
| Program Acknowledgements | 16 |
| <i>Excellence through Ethics</i> Pilot Cities | 17 |
| <i>Excellence through Ethics</i> Evaluation | 18 |

Acknowledgements

Sponsorship

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Education? — A Matter of Perspective

Overview

Groups take the roles of high school students, parents, employers, and guidance counselors to examine society's competing pressures on young people to get jobs or concentrate on continuing their education. An economist and an ethicist add insight to the discussion.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify the opportunity costs of working after school.
- Describe some of the economic considerations related to working.
- Discuss the points of view of others in the community.
- Demonstrate that certain decisions have significant ethical dimensions.

Preparation

Review the activity. Prepare the necessary copies and session materials.

Group work is incorporated into this session. You may consult with the teacher to determine how best to form the groups.

Post Key Terms and definitions in a visible place.

- **Ethics:** The standards that help determine what is good, right, and proper.

Closely review the role of the ethicist. Read and consider the ethical component of each group's issues in advance of the activity.

Make copies of the Possible Issue Responses for each adult role player. Separate Role-Playing Issue Cards for each group.

Recommended Time

This session typically takes 45 minutes to complete. Ask the teacher to help you keep track of time.

Materials

- Role-Playing Issue Cards (1 per group)
- Possible Issue Responses (1 per volunteer and teacher)
- Large chalkboard space or flip charts, markers, and tape
- Pens or pencils (1 per student)

Presentation

Introduction (5 minutes)

Greet the students. Ask students to list their goals for the future. Have student volunteers share their answers.

Ask students to brainstorm how staying in school and doing their best will help them reach their goals. Emphasize that staying in school significantly increases their earning power over the course of their careers.

Ask, “Who is responsible for achieving their goals?” Emphasize that, ultimately, they are.

Activity

Education Issues Role-Playing (35 minutes)

Separate the class into four groups. Assign each group a specific role: high school students, parents, employers, and guidance counselors.

Note: You and the teacher have roles in this exercise. You will play the role of economist, helping the other groups see the economic consequences of actions they suggest. Either you or the teacher will play the role of ethicist, helping groups weigh the ethics of particular courses of action.

Students should spend 3-5 minutes writing several goals for their assigned group. For example, a goal of high school students is to pass their classes with good grades and graduate. A goal of employers is to hire dependable, skilled employees. A goal of parents is to educate their children. A counselor’s goal is to help students adopt and attain reasonable goals for themselves.

Not all employers have the same goals, nor do all students or all parents; encourage groups to include individual goals.

After the groups have set several goals, have a spokesperson share his or her group’s goals with the class. One student from each of the groups can write the group’s goals on the board for all to refer to during this activity.

You should state your goals in your roles of economist and ethicist, respectively, and then list them on the board:

- The economist’s goals will be to point out financial implications of particular actions, advise on tradeoffs and opportunity costs, review the costs and benefits of a good education, and help with budgeting and saving issues.
- The ethicist’s goals will be to point out the ethical implications of particular actions. For instance, are certain actions good, right, and fair for other groups or oneself?

Distribute the appropriate sections of the Role-Playing Issue Cards to students in each group. Have groups sit or stand in front of their goal statements.

Call on a volunteer from the High School Student group to read aloud “Issue A” from their handout. Give the other groups a minute or two to come up with responses to the problem posed. Groups do not need to respond to all problems. Call on spokespersons from the other groups to state their views. Add the views of the ethicist and economist when appropriate.

Now, have the Parents group read their “Issue A” from their handout, and allow the other groups to respond. Continue with the remaining groups until all issues have been presented or until only 5 minutes remain for the class.

Remind students their comments should be appropriate for their roles, but encourage them to be creative in their presentations.

A set of possible responses is included below. These can also be used as suggestions to spark discussion.

Summary and Review (5 minutes)

Briefly review the vocabulary introduced in the session.

From their group’s point of view, how would students resolve the competing pressures to stay in school and to earn money?

If they could wave a magic wand and make everyone do what is best for young people, what would students, parents, and employers do? One suggestion might be for students to work only on weekends or during the summer.

Conclude by reminding students that there is no magic wand, and that they are the ones ultimately responsible for reaching their goals.

Session Outline

Introduction

- Greet the students.
- Ask a few students to share their goals.
- Ask how staying in school will help them reach their goals.

Activity

- Separate the class into four groups. Assign each group a role: high school students, parents, employers, and guidance counselors.
- As a volunteer, you will take the role of economist. Ask the teacher or a business colleague to take the role of ethicist.
- Each group writes its goals on the board.
- Distribute the Role-Playing Issue Cards.
- Facilitate the role-playing activity.

Summary and Review

- Review the Key Terms for the session.
- How can students resolve the competing pressures to stay in school and to earn money? How can others in the community help?
- Remind students that they ultimately are responsible for reaching their goals.
- Thank the students for their participation.

Possible Issue Responses

Responses to High School Students' Issues

A.

- Counselors: Come to my office so you can reaffirm your goals and set priorities to achieve them.
- Parents: You must cut back on your hours at work.
- Economist: Do you really want to trade off a good education for a low-paying job with a limited future?
- Employers: We just advertise jobs; we don't force kids to take them.

B.

- Ethicist: It's wrong to lie. You know you didn't get your diploma and that you have a job under false pretenses. You will always fear being found out. It feels better to earn one's rewards. Also, many employers conduct background checks to verify that prospective employees are telling the truth and place great importance on a prospective employee's character and integrity.
- Employers: It won't take long to know if you really are the capable worker we expect. We conduct background checks to verify that prospective employees are telling the truth and place great importance on a prospective employee's character and integrity.
- Parents: The high school education we are paying for has to benefit the community. We want our kids to have a "good life" and fulfill their potential.
- Counselors: If a student does not learn to be responsible about schoolwork, he or she probably won't be responsible on the job.

C.

- Counselors: Plan your schoolwork ahead to fit the time you will have available.
- Employers: If we find out you weren't really sick, we will not think highly of you as an employee.
- Ethicist: Lying is not the answer. It is better to tell the truth and see if you can get the time off. Promise yourself not to get into this situation again.

Responses to Parents' Issues

A.

- Employers: We need trained workers.
- Students: Some of us have to work to help our families. We also have to pay for gas and entertainment.
- Counselors: It's hard for students to catch up on missed time in class, which causes them to become discouraged.
- Ethicist: The community pays for public education so that each generation will have the tools to be self-supporting and contributing citizens. Students have no right to waste taxpayers' money. They should learn as much as possible in school.
- Economist: It costs most school systems thousands of dollars per year to provide an education to each student. When you calculate the investment per student per day and compare it to the opportunity cost of earning minimum wage in an unskilled job, you can see the advantage of staying in school.

B.

- Students: I have to work the hours my boss assigns, or I'll lose my job.
- Ethicist: Employers should take students' schoolwork into account when assigning their work schedules. A solution might be to assign more kids to work fewer hours.
- Counselors: We have discussed this issue with employers, and some have changed their requirements after considering the schools' point of view.
- Economist: The problem is that young people are the least likely to speak up to an employer. They work part time for minimum pay and without benefits. That is one reason they are hired.
- Employers: As long as people are willing to take these jobs, we'll hire them. We don't force anyone to apply.

C.

- Students: This will make me want to work even longer hours. And, if I leave school, I'll get my own apartment.
- Economist: It is very difficult to keep up with living expenses while earning a minimum wage.
- Counselors: This puts too much pressure on kids to work longer hours and neglect school, when they really should be working less.

Responses to Employers' Issues

A.

- Students: We have to quit our jobs when a sport season starts. Some of these jobs are so boring. I got a job that pays more.
- Counselors: Unless a student's career goal is to manage a retail store or restaurant, he or she won't be interested for long. Most entry-level jobs teach few skills.
- Economist: Along with pay, job satisfaction is important in the long run.
- Ethicist: Unless he or she has promised an employer to stay on the job through the sport season, it is not wrong to quit if the job gets in the way of other priorities.

B.

- Parents: This is why we pay taxes: to support a school system that prepares our young people for their futures.
- Students: We know we need an education, but sometimes it takes too long.
- Economist: Most new jobs require an educated workforce. Unskilled work is phasing out or being moved overseas, where payroll and production costs are lower.

C.

- Parents: Cutting lawns or babysitting in the neighborhood is one thing, but it's too soon for a regular job. I'm at work when my kids get out of school, so I would be happy if they had something useful to do in the afternoons.
- Ethicist: Just because some young students would take the jobs offered, businesses should not take advantage of them.
- Counselors: A regular job will distract these students from the responsibilities of school.
- Economist: Entry-level jobs can be done just as well by 16-year-olds as by 18-year-olds.

Responses to Guidance Counselors' Issues

A.

- Parents: We agree, but earning their own money is tempting and helps our kids feel independent.
- Students: We have immediate needs, like earning money for gas, car insurance or the prom. Sometimes it's hard to keep our long-term goals in mind.
- Economist: Remember you'll earn significantly more with an education than without.

B.

- Students: All the other kids have cars.
- Parents: I want my child to have a car because he can feel independent and learn responsibility.
- Ethicist: It concerns me that some of their pay goes for purchases that parents would not approved of.
- Economist: Learning the value of money and how to budget it is a valuable life lesson.

C.

- Ethicist: This is unfair to taxpayers who want results for their money, and unfair to the rest of the class, who want a good education.
- Parents: We want our children to learn all they can in school so they'll be productive and informed adults.
- Economist: Every day of learning lost or repeated has a cost – to the student and to taxpayers.

Role-Playing Issue Cards



High School Students' Issues

- A. I've been coming to school tired from work and have not completed my assignments.
- B. How will anyone know if I don't get my high school diploma? Can't I just say I got it?
- C. I have a big science project due in two days. I'd like to call in sick and skip going to work today so I can finish the project.



Parents' Issues

- A. As taxpayers, we're paying a great deal of money to educate kids, but their school attendance is quite poor. A lot of them aren't taking advantage of this opportunity.
- B. Can employers consider school schedules and homework loads when assigning work shifts to students?
- C. Now that our son is working, we think he should pay for his own clothes and entertainment. If he quits school, he also will have to pay us for room and board.



Employers' Issues

- A. We have a problem with employee turnover; it's hard to keep workers on the job long enough for them to become good managers.
- B. We need an educated workforce in our high-tech business.
- C. We like to hire younger students to work after school because of their energy and enthusiasm, and before they get involved in extracurricular activities.



Guidance Counselors' Issues

- A. I want students to succeed, have reasonable goals, and work to achieve them.
- B. I know that some kids work to help support their families, but I worry that they get jobs just to pay for their cars, music, and parties.
- C. When kids come to school tired and unprepared, the teacher has to keep reviewing, which holds back the rest of the class.

Appendix

Welcome to Junior Achievement's *Excellence through Ethics*

As a Junior Achievement (JA) volunteer or teacher, you are joining other teachers and volunteers from across the United States in providing students with a unique educational experience. Junior Achievement's *Excellence through Ethics* offers students learning opportunities to share knowledge and information regarding ethics in business. JA strives to show students how business works, and to better evaluate organizations that conduct their operations in the right way.

Excellence through Ethics is designed to equip volunteers and teachers with supplemental, ethics-based activities for use with JA in-class programs for grades four through twelve. All these activities provide students with current and essential information about business ethics.

These activities are designed to reinforce students' knowledge and skills, teach them how to make ethical decisions, assist them in learning to think critically, and help them to be better problem-solvers. All the activities are hands-on, interactive, and group-focused to present the material to students with the best instructional methods.

Within these supplements, you will find sections to help you effectively implement the activities in your volunteer experience. Materials include: (a) an introductory discussion of business ethics, marketplace integrity, and the growing capacity of students for ethical decision-making; (b) activities and student materials that connect to and expand current classroom-based Junior Achievement programs; and (c) a functional glossary of terms relating to a wide spectrum of ethics, quality, service, and social responsibility considerations in business.

JA greatly appreciates your support of these important and exciting activities. If you have comments about the *Excellence through Ethics* program content, curriculum, and/or instruction, please access <http://studentcenter.ja.org.aspx/LearnEthics/> and choose the “*Excellence through Ethics* Survey” link located in the middle of the page.

Appendix

Introduction and Overview

- *How do I do the right thing in this situation?*
- *Should I be completely honest, even if it puts others in jeopardy?*
- *What kind of community do we want to be?*
- *How do we do what's best for the long term?*
- *Who should cover the cost of "doing the right thing"?*

These are all questions having to do with business ethics. They are valid and necessary questions, and good business people have asked them for generations. They form the backdrop of vital discussions as business, community, and political leaders grapple with significant issues. Many students would ask these questions, even if Junior Achievement hadn't developed this ethics curriculum.

Business Ethics Discussions Are Here To Stay

Business ethics has been in the spotlight for much of the past decade, especially as examples of wrongdoing come to light in the media. New technologies and international competitive pressures cause a steady focus on the question, "Is it possible to be competitively successful in business today and still operate in an honest and ethical manner?" The past decade has seen individuals search for deeper personal meaning in the workplace, which has contributed to lively ethics discussions in the business realm. For these reasons, the discussion of business ethics is not a passing fad; it's here to stay.

Many graduate schools of business have either required ethics coursework or integrated ethics principles throughout all areas of study. That is commendable. We believe this vital area of exposure and instruction also should happen at earlier ages and continue throughout the students' educational journey. Many of today's students haven't had access to a well-rounded education in economics and free enterprise or have come to see these in a very negative light. They have limited awareness of the extent to which good business leaders engage in the challenging exercises of ethical decision-making amid heavy competitive pressures. As students learn the general principles of economics and business, it's critical that these be underpinned with a strong foundation in ethics. This will accentuate the best in American business traditions, while laying the groundwork for students' continued evolution into future generations of leaders.

Integrity in the Marketplace?

Many adults and young people choose to believe that the marketplace is driven only by greed. They view it as bringing out only the worst in human behavior, demoralizing the human spirit, and driving out any sense of idealism. While elements of greed and extreme self-interest among some individuals cannot be denied, solid research has shown time and again that companies with a long-term focus on ethics and a broad consideration of stakeholders' interests are much more profitable than those lacking such a focus.

James A. Autry, in his book *Love and Profit: The Art of Caring Leadership*, said it well: "I do not doubt the presence of greed in the marketplace because I do not doubt the presence of greed in people. But, I also do not doubt the ennobling aspects of work, of the workplace, of the community, of endeavor, of

Appendix

the marketplace. So I choose to believe that most of the marketplace is driven by people who want to do good work for others and for themselves.”

Excellence through Ethics accepts the challenge of educating youth in the basics of economics and business while establishing a positive balance on the side of well-informed, ethical business practice. This may appear to place a heavy burden on Junior Achievement volunteers, who are not trained ethics experts. The following informational pages will not turn you into an ethics expert. That’s not what we’re striving for here. What students need most is meaningful interaction with people who are willing to engage in a discussion of these vital issues.

Lively Practitioners Rather Than Dry Theorists

This program is more about day-to-day ethics practice than the nuances of ethics theory. Some believe that working in business requires a disconnect from one’s personal ethics. We do not believe this is the case. Students need to know that what they learn about fairness and honesty in general also applies to business. While business ethics may address some specific areas of business practice, it’s not a separate and distinct specialty to be set apart from the general ethical principles that apply in other areas of life. Young people need to encounter the wisdom of age and experience that volunteers bring to the classroom.

Students’ Growing Capacity for Ethical Decision-Making

Excellence through Ethics is designed to foster discussions at the appropriate level for each age group. The curriculum developers have designed the ethics activities with sensitivity to student’s mental maturity. At the late elementary and middle-grades levels, students’ capacities for ethical reasoning tend toward good personal behavior as determined by adult rules and authority. In relationships, personal trust, loyalty, and respect are of paramount importance. For these students, corporate ethical behavior is viewed in much the same light as their own personal behavior: it’s governed by rules.

As students advance into high school, their ethical decision-making moves into the larger arena of social contracts and systems that guide and govern societal and group behavior. Here the rationality and utility of laws are scrutinized, as students become more capable of higher-ordered, principled thinking. Students are increasingly aware of the diversity of values among different cultures and communities. At this level, students’ capacities for processing the complex, ethical dilemmas that may be encountered in business are greatly enhanced.

You will gain confidence as you come to realize that conducting a robust, provocative discussion with students is more important than “having the right answer.” The activities have been designed to leave room for lively discussion and multiple points of view. Having the courage to share your own experiences is very valuable to students.

Appendix

You don't have to apologize for the excesses students may see in business. Don't assume responsibility for actions that are not your own, and do not try to defend the indefensible. While accentuating the fact that most businesses operate ethically, it's okay to scrutinize the unethical players in the marketplace who give business in general a bad name.

Continuing Education

Teaching this material to students will no doubt strengthen and enhance your own ethics awareness and continuing education. Some students will challenge your best reasoning capacities. Having your own support network of professional colleagues with whom you can share and discuss some of these issues is very valuable. It's also helpful to seek out colleagues with philosophical views that differ from your own. This serves as a valuable "cross-pollination" function because you will be able to understand and discuss a variety of views with students, as well as share students' perspectives with your colleagues. In this way, everyone learns.

Finally, please be assured that your contributions here have tremendous value to students and will serve to upgrade business ethics in the future. We're dealing with the future generation of leaders in their formative years. We can take pride in the fact that we've had a hand in shaping the very people who will be responsible for business ethics and social responsibility in the future.

Appendix

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Many educators, economists, businesspeople, and consultants have contributed to the development of *Excellence through Ethics*. We would like to acknowledge the following individuals and groups for their efforts, creative talents, and support in creating these materials:

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Appendix

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Appendix

Excellence through Ethics Evaluation

Junior Achievement has discontinued all paper versions of program surveys. However, we greatly appreciate your comments and feedback about *Excellence through Ethics*. Please help us improve the quality of *Excellence through Ethics* by sharing your comments through our new online survey process. The online survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete.

If you have comments about the *Excellence through Ethics* program content, curriculum, and/or instruction, please access <http://studentcenter.ja.org/aspx/LearnEthics/> and choose the *Excellence through Ethics* Survey link located in the middle of the page.

Thank you for participating in JA!



Excellence through Ethics Volunteer Survey

1. Including this session, how many individual sessions of Excellence through Ethics have you presented? _____

2. Do you feel that the students were engaged through this session?
 - A. Not at all
 - B. Somewhat engaged
 - C. Engaged
 - D. Very Engaged
 - E. Unsure

3. Do you feel the session was relevant to students?
 - A. Not relevant
 - B. Somewhat relevant
 - C. Relevant
 - D. Very relevant
 - E. Unsure

4. Do you feel students are more prepared to make ethical decisions after participating in this session?
 - A. Significantly more prepared
 - B. Somewhat more prepared
 - C. Somewhat less prepared
 - D. Significantly less prepared
 - E. Unsure

5. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being excellent), how would you rate the overall quality of the Excellence through Ethics session? _____

6. After this JA experience, how likely are you to volunteer for JA again?
 - A. More likely to volunteer
 - B. Less likely to volunteer
 - C. No more or less likely to volunteer
 - D. Unsure

7. What comments or suggestions do you have regarding the overall session (including format, content, etc.)?

Optional: City _____

State _____ Country _____

Email _____

Excellence through Ethics Student Survey

1. What grade are you in? _____

2. Please fill in the circle that best describes how you feel about the following statements.

There is no right or wrong answer.

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither agree or disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| This topic is very important. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I am able to apply what I learned in this session to the real world. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The activities were interesting. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| I learned something about ethics from this session. | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

3. Do you feel more prepared to make ethical decisions after participating in this session?

- A. Significantly more prepared
- B. Somewhat more prepared
- C. Somewhat less prepared
- D. Significantly less prepared
- E. Unsure

4. I saw someone at my job taking money from the cash register, I would:

- A. Ask someone I trust what I should
- B. Tell a supervisor
- C. Talk to the person taking the money
- D. Do nothing
- E. Not sure

5. To help us better understand who you are, please answer the following questions: How do you describe your ethnicity (family background)? (Fill in all that apply)

- A. African American
- B. Asian American
- C. Latino (a) or Chicano (a)
- D. European American (white)
- E. Native American
- F. Other – how do you identify yourself? _____

6. Do you have any additional comments regarding this session?

Optional: City _____ State _____ Country _____