



PURPOSE

To distinguish human persons from the remainder of living beings with their power to choose.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson students will be able to:

1. Recognize that intentional actions have a deliberately creative power.
2. Identify intentional actions they can take to affirm their and others' human dignity.

MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- *Pay It Forward* worksheet (see Materials)
- Supplementary materials:
 - o *Kindness Boomerang – “One Day”* video
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwAYpLVyeFU>)

VOCABULARY

- **intentional action:** an action chosen knowingly
- **non-intentional action:** an action taken without any free choice

PROCEDURE

Step 1: Review the previous lessons. Ask:

- What are some things we can do, with our power to think, that animals or plants can't do?

Now, brainstorm: Think of some things every day about which we make choices that animals or plants don't. Make a list with the class on the board.

Step 2: Introduce the power to choose with a class brainstorm. List the following activities on the board in two columns:

blinking as a camera flash goes off
offending a friend with a silly joke
screaming at a sudden movement

biting your tongue instead of criticizing
offering to help a friend with a project
planning a surprise party for your mom

Guide students to identify a difference between the first three—non-chosen—and the last three—chosen—actions.

Ask:

- What is the difference between these two columns?

Then, as a class, brainstorm two additional choices for each of these two columns.

Explain: There are certain actions and certain consequences that we do not freely choose to make happen. We call these non-intentional actions. Then, there are those actions we do choose—actions that begin within us, with some kind of understanding of the consequences to them that may follow. We call those intentional actions.

Step 4: Teach the creative power of action: The most important thing to remember about our power to choose is that, when used with intention and purpose, it has amazing power to “create” in the world in accordance with what we envision as individual persons.

We can choose to make changes to our bodies, to our traits, to the way we spend our time; we can choose the way we relate to other people, and the way that we help or don’t help them; the way that we interact with the world around us. Each action that we take generates an effect in the world, and every action affects us because it contributes to developing our pattern of actions.

Tell the story of Trevor McKinney, a character from a novel titled *Pay It Forward* by Catherine Ryan Hyde, to illustrate the creative power of human actions.

Trevor McKinney is a seventh grader in Las Vegas. His social studies teacher gave the class an assignment: to put into action a plan that will make the world a better place.

Trevor comes up with a plan he calls “Pay It Forward”: whoever receives a favor has to do a favor for three other people rather than pay back the original one. These new favors have to be major favors that the person who receives them cannot have accomplished alone. Trevor puts this plan into action by using his power to think to identify needs among the people around him. First Trevor lets Jerry, a homeless man, live in his garage. Jerry later does car repairs for Trevor’s mother, then talks to a suicidal woman who is about to jump off the bridge.

The pay-it-forward project grows into a network of people doing good things for others, until, after a series of interactions among many, many people, a man even gives away his car to a journalist in Los Angeles who is in a car accident. In the end, Trevor defends his

friend Adam against bullies who have ganged up on him, and gets inadvertently stabbed in the abdomen by one of them. At the vigil held for Trevor's death, hundreds of recipients of pay-it-forward favors show up to pay their respects: an exponentially great effect, that started with one seventh grader!

Discussion questions:

- What specific actions did the people in the story take to pay it forward?
- How do these actions show respect for the people for whom they are committed?
- How does this story demonstrate the power excellent human choices?

If time permits, show the *Kindness Boomerang – “One Day”* video.

Step 5: Place students on the path of personal mission.

Ask students to complete the *Pay It Forward* worksheet. Students should then gather in pairs or groups of three, and share with each other their ideas for paying-it-forward, and their plans for respecting the dignity of others.

Step 6: Summarize: In the last lesson, we started to learn about the power to think, which is the first power that is unique to human persons. With our power to think, we know ideas, values, ourselves, and the world around us in great detail. Today we have looked at the second power in human persons that distinguishes us from all other living beings—the power to choose, with which we take actions in the world.

FOLLOW-UP & HOMEWORK

Ask students to put one of their pay-it-forward ideas into action over the next week, and then to look for and bring to class for the next lesson a news article about another's act of kindness or generosity.

These articles may contribute to the class' final **Human Dignity Curriculum (HDC)** newspaper project (see lesson 7).

SUPPLEMENTS

No supplements.



Human
Dignity
Curriculum

Name: _____
Date: _____

Pay It Forward

Directions: List an answer for each prompt below.

three people to whom I will pay it forward with an act of kindness:

1.

2.

3.

three acts of kindness I could do:

choose one person, and one act of kindness, and create a plan of action to pay it forward:

Grade 6, L2B - The Power to Choose



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