Junior Achievement™ USA

Member of JA Worldwide

JA's Approach to Character Education

Character matters at Junior Achievement (JA) and has always been woven into JA Learning Experiences. Character helps students build the transferable skills they will carry into life, helping them adapt to new challenges, solve problems, and navigate postsecondary opportunities with confidence. Character prepares students for academic success, ethical leadership, and responsible citizenship. Use this guide to recognize character moments during JA lessons and reinforce them using questions, feedback, and reflection.

What is character and what is character education?

Character is a mixture of the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of a person as shown by their efforts to improve themselves, help others, and benefit their community.

Character education involves cultivating character explicitly and implicitly through educational activities that build young people's skills, abilities, and mindset.

What is JA's approach to character education?

JA focuses on developing character traits related to the Self, Others, and Community. JA has defined 19 traits as key to this development. The charts below give an overview of these traits.

The Character Model



Character Trait Definitions

COMMUNITY	**Contribution**	Being a responsible member of a community, accepting and fulfilling the duties
	Purpose	Determination or resolve, intentional, driven by something larger than yourself
	Respect	Regard for feelings, wishes, or rights of others, treating others with care & consideration

OTHERS	**Connectedness**	State of belonging to or having affinity with others; a sense of belonging
	Empathy	Relating to others with acceptance, understanding, and sensitivity to their experiences
	Fairness	Impartiality; treating people without favoritism or discrimination
	Generosity	Voluntary sharing of time, money, attention, or other resources
	Gratitude	Quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation and return kindnesses
	Kindness	Thoughtful, helpful
	Honesty	Free from deception
	Teamwork	Effective and efficient collaboration with others toward a common goal

SELF	**Adaptability**	Capable of adapting to new conditions or circumstances
	Confidence	Internal sense of overall self-worth & self-efficacy; believing in yourself and your abilities
	Courage	Strength in the face of something frightening; being willing to face adverse situations
	Hope	Feeling of expectation that something desired will happen; optimism for the future
	Initiative	Independently assessing and taking charge before being asked
	Responsibility	Accountability; recognition of and action in the face of duty
	Resilience	Ability to withstand or recover quickly from difficulties or setbacks
	Self-control	Ability to resist the urge to act on a drive or impulses, keeping emotions under control

The Caught-Taught-Sought Framework

JA's approach is anchored in the Caught-Taught-Sought model of character education developed by the University of Birmingham Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue.



The Jubilee Center's Framework

- Caught is the character students absorb from the culture around them. These are the examples they see modeled by adults and peers in their community. This includes how we speak to students, how we respond to mistakes, and how we handle disagreement in the classroom. Think of yourself as a culture creator as your behavior shapes the "caught" experience.

- Taught includes the intentional moments built into JA learning experiences through discussions, activities, and decision-making, where students practice applying character to real situations. This is where character is made explicit through thoughtful design.
- Sought is where students take the lead. They practice character through group work, challenges, competitions, and real classroom moments. They make choices, navigate relationships, and pursue their own personal growth in a supportive space. It's the self-directed, personal development piece that helps character stick.

How can you support character education when delivering a JA Learning Experience and interacting with students?

JA's learning experiences have been designed to include character in activities ("character taught") and opportunities for students to practice and explore ("character sought") embedded throughout them. Follow the learning experiences as designed to ensure your impact. Additional strategies for supporting character education:

1. **Reflect on Your Own Character Journey**
   Before leading a JA Learning Experience, take a few moments to think about the role that character has played in your own life. Reflection prepares you to authentically model the type of thinking we invite students to do and to identify moments for connection.
   - Which character traits have shaped your path personally and professionally?
   - What character traits do you value most in your professional role and personal life? How are they different? How do they overlap?
   - Which character traits would you like to explore or use more?

2. **Share Personal Stories That Include Character**
   Sharing stories that include a reflection on character provides students with authentic, inspiring examples of how character supports learning and making connections. When preparing your stories, think about concrete moments where character drove your actions or shaped a result. Connect these stories with the content and topics of the JA Learning Experience you are delivering.
   A strong story includes:
   - Context: What was happening? Who was involved?
   - The challenge or choice: What decision or dilemma did you face?
   - The character trait you activated (e.g., resilience in the face of setbacks, empathy in a relationship, adaptability in a new situation, or teamwork while solving problems).
   - The outcome: How did applying that trait lead to growth or change?
   - Your reflection: What did you learn? How do you still use this trait today?

3. **Name Character Traits When You See Them**

Students deepen their character literacy when educators and volunteers name traits explicitly. When students: collaborate, show curiosity or creativity, persevere through the activity, demonstrate fairness, etc., call this out. Pause and name the trait, the behavior, and the impact:

- I noticed you changed your budget after realizing you were over-spending in one category—that shows responsibility and self-control.
- Your group made a decision that felt fair to everyone—that shows fairness and respect.

4. **Ask Questions That Support Character Development**

High-quality questions activate students' thinking and help them internalize character traits. Use questions that invite reflection, perspective-taking, ethical reasoning, and connections to real life. Sample questions:

Self:

- "What personal strengths did you draw on today?"
- "How did you take initiative in the activity?"
- "How confident are you with your budget?"
- "How can you be adaptable with this plan?"

Others:

- "How did your team decide what was fair?"
- "Who helped your group succeed today and how did you support them?"
- "How did working with a team change your thinking or decision-making?"
- "How do you feel about decisions others made that are different from your own?

Community:

- "How might your choices affect others?"
- "Can you understand why others made different choices?"
- "How does your decision-making prepare you to support your community?"
- "What responsibilities do you have to your community in this scenario?"