



THE SCIENCE OF CHARACTER

DISCUSSION GUIDE AGES 19-99+

If you haven't watched the 8 minute film *The Science of Character*, you can [watch it here](#). Then dive in:

*Please feel free to tailor the language as appropriate for each age group.

1. Take a look at the periodic table of character strengths at the end of this document. What are your five strongest character strengths?
2. Notice where your strengths lie. Are they all in one particular area (in, say, the Wisdom or Courage column) or are they spread out? What do you make of that?
3. How can you use your character strengths to improve your life?
4. How can you use them to improve your community?
5. Now expand the list of your character strengths to twelve and make a pie chart out of them. Which character strength is your biggest slice? Which is the smallest?
6. The film explores two ideas around character development: First, you should focus on the strengths you have, and second, develop the strengths you'd like. With that in mind, look back at the table of character strengths. What are three character strengths you'd like to develop?
7. What are some steps you can take to develop those three character strengths?
8. What character strengths are most valued on your campus or your job? Are these similar to the character strengths valued by your family, or very different?

9. Classical philosophers like Plato and Aristotle take a more essentialist view of character: you are who you are. The more recent view argues that you are what you do. Which definition of character do you agree with?
10. A philosophical follow-up: Do you think there is such a thing as “good” people? Do “good” people occasionally do “bad” things?
11. What character strengths are most important in a digital age? How do we demonstrate and develop character strengths online?
12. Given that the Internet allows a lot of anonymity, and permits people to try on different personas, what happens to our character when we’re online? Do our character strengths remain constant?
13. The film discusses the ways you can develop your character strengths in your day-to-day life. Can you think of some ways you can develop your character strengths in your online life?
14. The film describes a fixed mindset (when you think you can’t change who you are) and a growth mindset (when you believe you can change and improve things about yourself). Is there an area in your life that you have a fixed mindset about, like “I’m not athletic,” or “I’m not creative”? Can you think of a way you can use your character strengths to improve in that area?
15. The film suggests we can affect other people’s character strengths, too. Do you agree? Can character be contagious? Can it go viral?
16. Think about a time when you failed. What happened? How did you feel about it at the time, and how do you feel about it now?
17. As the film mentions, failure can be a good thing—we learn by failing. Think of an activity you might fail at the first time but want to try anyway: snowboarding, public speaking, a dance class. What would it be? What could you learn by failing?
18. If our character strengths and our abilities aren’t fixed, that means we could, potentially, achieve just about anything. Think really, really big: If you could achieve *anything*, what would you do?
19. The film ends by asking you to complete this sentence: I want to be _____ . What do you want to be? What character strengths will help you achieve that, and how will you use them?

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FOLLOW UP DISCUSSION GUIDE AGES 19-99+: CHECK-IN

A little while ago, you watched *The Science of Character*. Let's check back in and see what's changed for you since then.

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1. Have your views on the meaning and importance of character changed at all?
2. *The Science of Character* talks about the character strength movement and its focus on the things that are going well. What's gone well for you recently?
3. The film argues that failure isn't always a bad thing; it can help us learn and improve. Think of something that didn't go how you hoped it would in the past few months. Can you think of a way that might turn into a good thing?
4. Take a look at the "Periodic Table of Character Strengths" below. In the past month, has your own personal periodic table of character strengths changed? Have any character strengths gotten stronger or weaker?
5. Are there any character strengths that you're starting to value more? Less?
6. Pick a character strength from the Periodic Table that you want to work on. What can you do in the next month to make it stronger?

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FOLLOW UP DISCUSSION GUIDE AGES 19-99+: CHECK-OUT

The journey continues, but let's stop to assess the progress you've made so far. How has your character developed this year?

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1. What did you do in the past year that you're most proud of?
2. What character strengths did you use to accomplish this?
3. Did you see any evidence of the growth mindset -- for example, did you need to develop new strengths and skills to achieve it?
4. How have your thoughts about the importance of character evolved?
5. Now let's think of the larger culture. This past year, was there a dominant character strength in society at large -- a strength, like fairness or leadership, that got more attention than usual?
6. What character strengths do you think will be increasingly important to society at large in the coming year?
7. Are there any strengths we're valuing less?
8. What's your biggest personal goal for next year?
9. What character strengths will help you achieve it?