

# Story Block: *Integrity*

*Exploring the art and  
science of Integrity*



*in partnership with*

**H O L S T E E**

# Integrity



Nested within each of us  
is a set of virtues.

Virtues that when  
thoughtfully practiced, can  
transform our relationship  
with the world around us.

Dig deep, pull back the  
layers, and discover what it  
means to be you.

HOLSTEE

# Integrity *noun*

in·teg·ri·ty | in-'te-grə-tē

A firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary © 2020

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In this guide, learn how to tap into the power of Integrity to improve your inner wellbeing as well as the world around you. Dig into poetry, philosophy, and activities rooted in the teachings and research of the VIA Institute on Character, Aristotle, and Alan Cohen — among others.

Uncover your personal character strengths and find the perfect balance that enables you to move with confidence and impact. Then learn three theories on how to think more critically about large-scale conundrums.

Enjoy discovering and exploring your personal code of virtues and ethics so you can take charge of how you grow and influence those around you. Let's get started!



# Two Kinds of Intelligence

There are two kinds of intelligence: one acquired, as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts from books and from what the teacher says, collecting information from the traditional sciences as well as from the new sciences.

With such intelligence you rise in the world. You get ranked ahead or behind others in regard to your competence in retaining information. You stroll with this intelligence in and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more marks on your preserving tablets.

There is another kind of tablet, one already completed and preserved inside you. A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness in the center of the chest. This other intelligence does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid, and it doesn't move from outside to inside through conduits of plumbing-learning.

This second knowing is a fountainhead from within you, moving out.

# Warm-Up

We're kicking things off with a big question:

**What does it mean to be a good person?**  
**List the *qualities* that come to mind.**

A large grid of small dots for writing answers.



“Can you remember who you were, before  
the world told you who you should be?”

CHARLES BUKOWSKI



# Character Strengths

In the early 2000s, [Dr. Chris Peterson](#), [Dr. Martin Seligman](#), and a team of 55 social scientists set out to discover what virtues the world's religions, philosophies, and psychologies all have in common.

Now considered “the backbone of Positive Psychology,” this research team developed the [VIA Classification of Character Strengths](#), comprised of 24 character strengths nested within six universal virtues. Their research found each person tends to have at least five signature strengths.

## Wisdom

Love of Learning  
Creativity  
Curiosity  
Judgment  
Perspective

## Transcendence

Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence  
Gratitude  
Hope  
Humor  
Spirituality

## Temperance

Forgiveness  
Self-Regulation  
Humility  
Prudence

## Courage

Bravery  
Perseverance  
Honesty  
Zest

## Humanity

Love  
Kindness  
Social Intelligence

## Justice

Teamwork  
Fairness  
Leadership

## What are your five signature character strengths?

Visit [viacharacter.org](http://viacharacter.org) to take the free character strengths survey.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

## Describe a moment that allowed you to flex your character strengths:

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## How can you use your character strengths more often in your life?

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“Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more so we may fear less.”

MARIE CURIE



# The Golden Mean

*Virtue is the golden mean  
between two extremes.*

ARISTOTLE

According to [Aristotle](#), the father of western philosophy, identifying our virtues is important but the real impact comes from being able to put our virtues into action — in the right way, at the right time, and with the right intention. He called the ability to do this the **Golden Mean**.

**Golden Mean:** Our moral behavior between two extremes — with excess at one extreme, and deficiency at the other end.

Let's take the character strength **bravery**, for example. Too little bravery can translate to **cowardice** while in excess it can become **rashness**. However, when we apply just the right amount of this virtue, the Golden Mean, we achieve **true bravery**.

Cowardice - Bravery + Rashness

Write down the character strengths you identified in the previous exercise in the middle column below. **Now, consider what happens when your actions are deficient of this virtue. Jot your answer down to the left. What about when they are practiced in excess? Put this to the right of your character strength.**

| Deficiency      |   | Golden Mean |   | Excess    |
|-----------------|---|-------------|---|-----------|
| Cowardice       | - | Bravery     | + | Rashness  |
| Moroseness      | - | Humor       | + | Absurdity |
| Quarrelsomeness | - | Teamwork    | + | Flattery  |
|                 | - |             | + |           |
|                 | - |             | + |           |
|                 | - |             | + |           |
|                 | - |             | + |           |
|                 | - |             | + |           |



“Integrity means that the life you are living in the outer world is an expression of your inner truth.”

ALAN COHEN





# Weekly Challenge

Practice being aware of how your actions reflect what you **believe**.

The VIA Institute on Character identifies **honesty** as a key character strength because it allows us to experience a sense of “authentic wholeness.” But we all let things slide from time to time, maybe to protect someone’s feelings, guard ourselves from criticism, or make getting through life a little easier. **These aren’t necessarily harmful lies, but they’re also not entirely harmless — they add a layer of inauthenticity to our daily interactions.**

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*Why do we say we’re fine when we’re actually having a tough day? Why might we make up an excuse to cancel plans with friends instead of just telling them we’re not feeling up for it? What is the underlying feeling or motivation?*

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This month, try to notice how honest you are, how you might mislead or put up a facade in certain moments, and how genuine you are (or aren’t) in your interactions. **Come back to this page every week and reflect on how you are doing.**

W E E K 01

W E E K 02

W E E K 03

W E E K 04



“There can be no happiness if the things we believe in are different from the things we do.”

FREYA STARK



# Applied Ethics

For thousands of years, humans have tried to figure out how we should live our lives. This is the essential question of **Ethics**. For this exercise, we're going to focus on **applied ethics**.

**Applied ethics** deals with the difficult moral questions and issues we face as a society and in our lives. It seeks to answer the following questions:

What **obligations** do we have to each other?

Is this specific action **morally permissible**?

Under what **conditions** are certain actions permissible?

Take a moment to reflect on a few **big issues** that as a society we generally have a difficult time agreeing upon.

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_

Next, we'll break down **three different theories** we can use to understand them.



## Utilitarianism

The morality of actions depends on their “utility” or the happiness they produce; a consequentialist theory wherein **good actions maximize good outcomes for the most people**.

### Limitations:

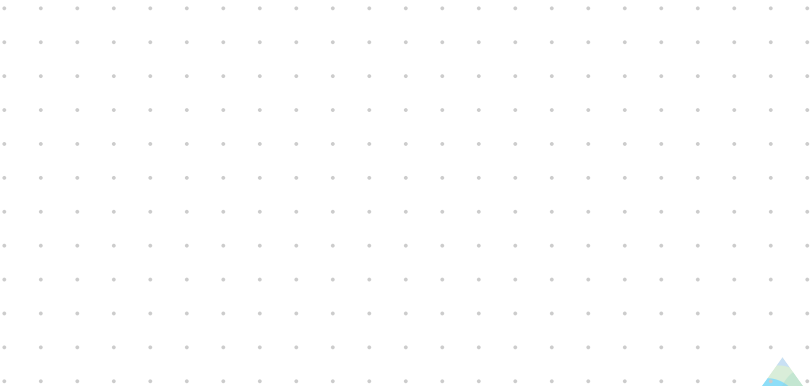
By what metric do we evaluate outcomes?  
Whose good should we aim to maximize? How do we calculate the goodness of an unknown outcome?

### Further Reading:

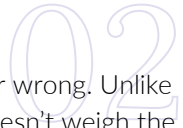
|                  |            |
|------------------|------------|
| Jeremy Bentham   | Aristippus |
| John Stuart Mill | Epicurus   |
|                  | David Hume |

**Key Question: Does the outcome of this decision maximize good (and minimize harm) for the most people?**

### Notes:



# Deontology



The morality of actions depends on intrinsic right or wrong. Unlike consequence-based theories, in deontology one doesn't weigh the costs and benefits, they **make decisions according to set rules** or a **code of conduct** (usually shared by a society, religion, profession, or cultural values). It's concerned with duty and obligation.

### Limitations:

How do we learn what is intrinsically right or wrong? What do we do when our duties are in conflict with someone else's? How do we actually deal with any suffering that results?

### Further Reading:

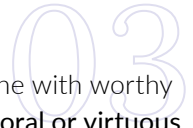
Immanuel Kant  
Saint Augustine

**Key Question: Is this action right according to my personal code, regardless of the outcome it produces?**

### Notes:

Grid of dots for notes.

# Virtue Ethics



The morality of actions depends whether we act in line with worthy virtues. A virtue ethicist will **identify virtues that a moral or virtuous person embodies**, and this way of being guides them to consistently make "virtuous" choices.

### Limitations:

How do we agree on what virtues are essential for a virtuous person to embody? Considering big issues, since most of us aren't directly making policy decisions, how can we be sure to elect virtuous people to make the right decisions for us?

### Further Reading:

Socrates  
David Hume  
G. E. M. Anscombe  
Philippa Foot  
Martha Nussbaum

**Key Question: Am I being a virtuous person?**

### Notes:

Grid of dots for notes.



“The soul is dyed the color of its thoughts.  
Think only on those things that are in  
line with your principles and can bear  
the light of day. The content of your  
character is your choice.”

HERACLITUS



# Reflect & Discuss

Use these questions for self-reflection or to spark meaningful conversations.

## ICEBREAKERS

*How did you learn right from wrong?*

*Is anything too serious to be joked about?*

*Do intentions matter more or less than actions?*

*Do you believe more in justice or forgiveness?*

## DEEPER QUESTIONS

*Do you have any regrets?*

*When was the last time you changed your mind about a firmly held belief?*

*When have you had to stand up for someone or something?*

*When was the last time you felt morally compromised? What did you do?*



“It’s your life, but only if you make it so.  
The standards by which you live must be  
your own standards, your own values, your  
own convictions in regard to what is right  
and wrong, what is true and false, what is  
important and what is trivial.

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

