

## **The Shoe Box**

(Defined by Character)

**Purpose:** To help students understand: 1) The meaning of the word character, 2) That character is a choice, 3) Choice of character defines who we are. 4) People often seek out counselors to help them make decisions consistent with their character choices.

**Materials:** One Shoe box, 3X5 note cards or paper strips for each student, and five symbolic character items for the shoe box (ex.: Hammer, Compass/ Flashlight, Sport Team Cap, WORD card, and Cross.)

**Student Materials:** pen/pencil.

**Time:** 20-25 minutes.

**Key Concepts:** Defining, choosing, and building character over the course of time, Character as a “buried treasure.” Literal versus Symbolic thinking as it implies to character.

**Introduce/reintroduce:** Self to students. If in middle school, introduce concept of cumulative grade point average and how important it is to earn points every trimester/semester/quarter. Use the analogy of how elementary school is like a moving sidewalk that moves you along to the next grade (whether you do much or not,) middle school is like climbing a tall ladder in that if you don’t climb, you don’t go anywhere, and high school is similar to rock climbing in that you often have to set your own course and work really hard to reach your goals.

### **Part 1:**

**Distribute:** One 3x5 card or similar size section of paper to each student. Make sure students have a pencil or pen to write with.

**Ask:** Raise your hand if you know what a time capsule is?

**Announce:** I’m going to ask each of you to write your name and number your paper from 1-5. In a few minutes you will be asked to write down five things/items that best reflect or tell the story of who you are. Five things that would tell someone 5, 10, 20, or 40 years in the future about who you are and what you’re all about.

**State:** It’s ok to look at your neighbor’s paper and copy his or her answers but Barbies, Video games, and Tacos may not be what you’re all about so probably don’t copy=)

**Announce:** You will have three minutes to write down your five answers. I will come by your desk twice. If you’re not ready with a completed list the first time I come by, don’t worry about it. I’ll come by a second time and you’ll just have to turn it in ready or not. It will be fine!

State: Ready.....Begin! (Wait about ten seconds and shout...Stop!)

Clarification/Announce: “All five things on your list need to fit inside the shoe box.”  
(hold up the box.)

Announce: Continue Writing! (After a moment or two.....)

State: Time’s Up (begin collecting papers, make two rounds to gather all papers.)

### **Part 2:**

Announce: “I’m holding in my hand the items you’ve chosen that best represent you...that reflect who you are...that people 5, 10, 20, and 40 years from now will one day discover and be able to say what you were all about.” I’m going to read some of those responses.

Read: One item off each list (look for the “fun” answers: tacos, donuts, deodorant, mp3 players, money, mirror, etc.)

State: Wow!!! Pretty Impressive! But, those answers don’t tell a lot about you as much as they tell about what you’re interested in right now.

Ask? But I wonder what you’ll be interested in 5, 10, 20, or even 40 years from now?  
(rhetorical question)

### **Part 3:**

Ask: Raise your hand if you can give me a definition for the word Character? (Qualities which reflect what a person is like, what’s important to that person, etc.)

Ask: Raise your hand if you know what the word “literal” means? (exactly and only what is being represented. ex. A math plus sign +)

Ask: Raise your hand if you know what the word “symbolic” means? (“more than” bigger, broader, and deeper than what is being represented. ex. Christian cross +)

State: Symbolic thinking is very different from literal thinking. When you’re trying to limit your character to the contents of a shoe box, you’ve got to think symbolically! Let me show you some things I’ve put in this shoebox that symbolically tell about other people’s character.

Show & Tell: Hammer.

State and Ask: Literally this is just a hammer. Symbolically what do you think it tells about this person’s character? (hard worker.)

Show & Tell: WORD Card (3x5 card with the letters “W O R D” on it.)

State & Ask: Literally this is just a word. Symbolically what do you think it tells about this person’s character? (Someone who wants to be known as keeping his/her word.)

Show & Tell: Compass/Flashlight

State and Ask: Literally this is just a compass/flashlight. Symbolically what do you think it tells about this person’s character? (Help people find their way, not get lost, stay on course, light the way.)

Show & Tell: Team Cap/Hat

State & Ask: Literally this is just a hat. Symbolically what do you think it tells about this person’s character? (Team/Family oriented, part of something bigger than self, relationships are important.)

Show & Tell: Christian Cross.

State & Ask: Literally this is just a Cross (plus sign.) Symbolically, what do you think it tells about this person’s character? (Christian beliefs.)

#### **Part 4:**

Explain: Character defines who we are and largely how we’re known and will be remembered 5, 10, 20, or 40 years from now. Our interests will come and go during that time; legos, video games, and Barbies today for other things tomorrow. Still, it’s our character that defines or tells the real story of what we’re about now and in our futures.

State: Character is a choice. We each get to choose our character. We each have the opportunity to work at developing our character and the sooner we do the stronger it becomes! Behavior reflects character. People will make judgments about your character based on your behavior including your family, friends, teachers, coaches, employers and even your own kids one day 10, 20 or 40 years from now!

Ask: For example, what kind of behaviors would you expect to see from someone who is working at developing honest and trustworthy character in the classroom, at home, or on the field (sport teams)? What are some things/situations a person would need to say “No” to if he or she was trying to strengthen his or her character? (ex.: copying off of a spelling test, keeping the change found in the house, and lying about fumbles or fouling someone.)

Encourage: Student’s to think about what character words they will want to be defined by 5, 10, 20, and 40 years from now. \*Suggest students make a list of 5 character traits and write out examples of behaviors that reflect each of their choices and to keep their list

visible in the front of their binders. Loyal, trustworthy, honest, kind, polite, respectful, and generous might be some of the words they will take as their own.

Remind: Students that people of all ages (middle school, high school, college, and older) often find Counselors to help them make decisions that are consistent with their character choices. That is, counselors help us to be the kind of people we want to be.

\*Consider: Adding ten minutes to the activity by distributing two sheets of paper at the onset of the activity instead of one. Use the second paper for student's to record their character words and symbolic items to be used in the time capsule. These second lists can then be gathered and read aloud.