

Convictions

Grades 9-12

Segment Summary:

After learning that the stream behind her school was polluted, Ashley Swandby's strong convictions compelled her to take action by searching for the source of the pollution and motivating others to get involved in this and other environmental issues.

As part of a course on environmental issues, Ashley Swandby and her classmates joined a cleanup program and adopted the stream behind their high school. When the students tested the stream, they found that the water was polluted. Naturally curious and inquisitive, Ashley began to look for the source of the pollution. She tested the water upstream and downstream from her school. The more areas she tested, the more committed she became to preserving and protecting the stream from pollution and other negative human influences, such as run-off from construction sites. Ashley says it's not enough just to recognize that pollution is a problem. The real challenge is to motivate people to get involved and work toward a solution. She and her friends hold the conviction that everyone is responsible for defending the Earth's limited water supply. While Ashley believes that one person working alone can make a difference, she realizes that if everyone works together, the outcome could be one of global proportions.

Discussion Questions:

1. Classify Ashley's convictions.
2. If you were going to write a slogan to highlight Ashley's convictions about the environment, what would it be?
3. What do you think motivated Ashley to begin testing other areas of the stream for pollution?
4. Ashley's friend says he didn't realize how bad the pollution in the stream was until he saw it for himself. Have you ever developed a conviction about something to which you'd previously given little thought?
5. Do you believe we all have a responsibility to defend and preserve our environment? Where does that responsibility begin and end?
6. Societies and governments set standards for what is good, bad, clean and dirty. Are you satisfied with the environmental standards that the government sets or would you be willing to fight for stricter standards? Explain.
7. Think about the most important areas of your life. Do you set your own standards of behavior or adhere to standards other people set for you at school, at home, in your community, etc.?
8. Why is it so difficult to get people involved in causes?
9. What are ways in which the convictions we hold today could affect future generations?
10. Why do you think people are completely apathetic about some issues and completely committed to others?

Vocabulary Words and Definitions:

Apathetic (adj.)

Definition: not excited and not caring about something; not interested in anything and unwilling to make an effort to change and improve things

Context: The prom chairman accused the student body of being apathetic because no one would help raise money for the prom.

Assimilate (v.)

Definition: to absorb into the culture, customs, social behaviors and moral values of a population or group

Context: Without realizing it, Angus began to assimilate into his new school surroundings by dressing like his peers and using the same catch phrases as his classmates.

Conviction (n.)

Definition: a very strong belief or opinion

Context: Growing up poor in a small Illinois town, Abraham Lincoln held to the conviction that hard work pays off in the end.

Human rights (n.)

Definition: the basic rights that every person has to be treated in a fair, equal way without cruelty, especially by his or her government

Context: While most Americans believe freedom of speech is a basic human right, many citizens in communist countries may not have this freedom.

Ideology (n.)

Definition: a set of ideas and attitudes that strongly influence the ways in which people behave

Context: An ideology of racism led to the murder of millions of Jews during the Holocaust.

Morality (n.)

Definition: beliefs or ideas about what is right and wrong and how people should behave

Context: The first time my vegetarian boyfriend ate dinner with my family, he argued with Dad about the morality of eating meat.

Perception (n.)

Definition: the way in which a person understands or thinks of something and his or her beliefs about what it is like

Context: Even though she knows the facts of the case, she doesn't have a realistic perception of the situation.

Persuade (v.)

Definition: to make someone decide to do something, especially by giving him or her reasons why he or she should do it

Context: It was a difficult task for Travis' coach to persuade him to join the track team.

Ridicule (v.)

Definition: laughter or remarks that are not nice and are intended to make someone or something seem stupid

Context: Adolescents often ridicule others who dress and act differently.

Self-expression (n.)

Definition: the expression of a person's feelings, thoughts, ideas, etc., especially through activities such as painting, writing or acting

Context: School dress codes that require students to wear uniforms don't leave students much room for self-expression.

Spoof (n.)

Definition: a funny book, play, movie, etc., that copies a serious or important one and makes it seem silly

Context: Television comedy programs like *Saturday Night Live* often perform spoofs of soap operas and talk shows.

Stance (n.)

Definition: an opinion or point of view that is stated publicly

Context: During the assembly, our principal made his stance on drugs in school crystal clear when he said, "Zero tolerance!"

Source: *Longman Advanced American Dictionary*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited. 2000

Activity: Absurd Word Theater

Objectives:

Students will be able to

- Review vocabulary definitions
- Use vocabulary words in context
- Compose an original song, skit or poem

Materials:

- Pens, pencils
- Notebook paper
- Scissors
- ***Convictions Vocabulary Words and Definitions*** handout

Procedure:

In this activity, students will generate rhyming phrases and compose a song, skit or poem using the vocabulary words.

1. Tell students to review the list of vocabulary definitions on the ***Convictions Vocabulary Words and Definitions*** handout and to write each vocabulary word on a piece of notebook paper, leaving two lines between each of the words. Have students think of a word that rhymes with each vocabulary word and then record the rhyming word beside the vocabulary word.

Example: If the vocabulary word is conviction, a student might use prediction as the rhyming word.

2. Ask students to cut their word lists into strips so that each strip includes one vocabulary word, the rhyming word and the two lines beneath the rhyming phrase. Place all of the strips in a bag or box.
3. Divide the class into groups of three, and allow each group to pick a rhyming phrase from the box.
4. Assign each group to compose a song, skit or poem using the rhyming phrase as the title. Students must also incorporate at least six of the 12 vocabulary words into their creative writing assignments.
5. Allow each group to present its creative writing assignment to the class.

Note: You can keep the box of rhyming phrases in the classroom to serve as inspiration for future writing projects or presentations.