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For the Classroom

Civil Wars

Discussion Questions – Segment 2

1. Why do you think so many adults believe that teens today are more rude and disrespectful?
2. Experts say that incivility results from isolation -- people having a lack of connection and unaccountability to others. Do you ever feel isolated? Who are you accountable to?

Activity

George Washington's Rules of Civility

OBJECTIVE

- To read and interpret a portion of George Washington's "Rules of Civility"
- To describe the significance of these rules in Washington's time and discuss how they might be significant in today's world
- To write rules of etiquette similar to the "Rules of Civility" that might be appropriate for today

MATERIALS

Copies of 30 Rules of Civility Handout

PROCEDURE

1. Explain to the class that as a young boy, George Washington copied the "Rules of Civility" from a text by John T. Phillips. He used his best handwriting when he copied this set of 110 rules of etiquette and manners. From this list, he hoped to learn more about how to act like a proper eighteenth-century Virginia gentleman.
2. Hand out the first thirty of the "Rules of Civility." Go around the room and ask the students to read out loud one rule at a time.
3. As each rule is read, ask the students as a group to:
 - a. Explain and discuss what each rule means
 - b. Think about how the rules might have helped George Washington as he got older and held positions of importance and leadership
 - c. Decide whether each rule would be an appropriate rule to follow today
 - d. Describe a rule that would be important to use and remember today

4. Compile a list of “Rules of Civility” that combines the “best” of the original rules as well as the students’ ideas. Display them throughout the room. Alternatively, you can ask each student to create his or her own booklet of rules of etiquette and manners. If there is time, encourage the students to illustrate their booklets as well.

George Washington's First 30 Rules of Civility

1. Every action done in company ought to be with some sign of respect to those that are present.
2. When in company, put not your hands to any part of the body that is not usually discovered.
3. Show nothing to your friend that may affright him.
4. In the presence of others, sing not to yourself with a humming noise, nor drum with your fingers or feet.
5. If you cough, sneeze, sigh, or yawn, do it not loud, but privately. Speak not in your yawning, but put your handkerchief or hand before your face and turn aside.
6. Sleep not when others speak. Sit not when others stand. Speak not when you should hold your peace. Walk not when others stop.
7. Put not off your clothes in the presence of others, nor go out of your chamber half-dressed.
8. At play and at fire, it is good manners to give a place to the last comer, and affect not to speak louder than ordinary.
9. Spit not in the fire, nor stoop low before it. Neither put your hands into the flames to warm them, nor set your feet on the fire, especially if there be meat before it.
10. When you sit down, keep your feet firm on the ground and even, without putting one foot on the other or crossing them.
11. Shift not yourself in the sight of others, nor gnaw your nails.
12. Shake not the head, feet, or legs. Roll not the eyes, lift not one eyebrow higher than the other. Wry not the mouth, and bedew no man's face with your spittle by approaching too near when you speak.
13. Kill no vermin such as fleas, lice, ticks, etc., in the sight of others. If you see any filth or thick spittle, put your foot dexterously upon it. If it be upon the clothes of your companions, put it off privately, and if it be upon your own clothes return thanks to him who puts it off.
14. Turn not your back to others, especially in speaking. Jog not the table or desk on which another reads or writes. Lean not upon anyone.
15. Keep your nails clean and short, and your hands and teeth clean, yet without showing any concern for them.
16. Do not puff up the cheeks, loll not out the tongue. [Do not] rub the hands or beard, thrust out the lips or bite them, or keep the lips too open or too close.

17. Be no flatterer. Neither play with any that delight not to be played with.
18. Read no letters, books, or papers in company. When there is a necessity for doing so, you must ask leave. Come not near the books or writings of another, so as to read them, unless desired, nor give your opinion of them unasked. Look not when another is writing a letter.
19. Let your countenance be pleasant, but in serious matters somewhat grave.
20. The gestures of the body must be suited to the discourse you are upon.
21. Reproach none for the infirmities of nature, nor delight to put them that have infirmities in mind thereof.
22. Show not yourself glad at the misfortune of another, though he were your enemy.
23. When you see a crime punished, you may be inwardly pleased, but always show pity to the suffering offender.
24. Do not laugh too loud or too much at any public spectacle lest you cause yourself to be laughed at.
25. Superfluous compliments and all affectation of ceremony are to be avoided; yet where due they are not to be neglected.
26. In pulling off your hat to person of distinction, such as noblemen, justices, churchmen, etc., make a reverence, bowing more or less according to the custom of the better bred and quality of persons. Amongst equals, expect not always that they should begin with you first, but to pull off the hat when there is no need is affectation. In the manner of saluting and re-saluting in words, keep to the most usual custom.
27. 'Tis ill manners to bid one more eminent than yourself be covered, as well as not to do it to whom it's due. Likewise, he that makes too much haste to put on his hat does not well, yet he ought to put it on at the first, or at most the second time of being asked. Now, what is herein spoken, of qualification in behaviour in saluting, ought also to be observed in the taking of place, and sitting down for ceremonies which, without bounds, is troublesome.
28. If anyone comes to speak to you while you are sitting, stand up although he be your inferiour. And when you present seats, let it be to everyone according to his degree.
29. When you meet with one of greater quality than yourself, stop and retire, especially if it be at a door or any straight place, to give way for him to pass.
30. In walking, the highest place in most countries seems to be on the right of him whom you desire to honour. Therefore, place yourself on the left of him you desire to honour. If three walk together the middle is the most honourable. The wall is usually given to the most worthy if two walk together.

A complete listing of the "Rules of Civility" can be found at <http://www.virginia.edu/gwpapers/civility/transcript.html>.
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