



TRUTH OR TALE?

“Honesty is often very hard. The truth is often painful. But the freedom it can bring is worth the trying.”

-Fred Rogers

OVERVIEW

Students share real or made-up things about themselves and discuss the merits, challenges, and nuances of honesty.

LEVELS

- PreK/Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- At the beginning of the year when practicing classroom norms
- To help foster a positive classroom climate

TIME REQUIRED

- 15 minutes

LEVEL

- Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School

MATERIALS

- N/A

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Explore what honesty means
- Experience how honesty and untruthfulness feel in the body
- Discuss the nuances of honesty

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Honesty

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social Awareness and Relationship Skills
- Ethical Decision-Making and Social Responsibility

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open awareness
- Focused Attention
- Non-judgment

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to check in with your own beliefs and relationship with honesty.

- *How do I define honesty in my own life, and how might this influence the way I teach it to students?*
- *Why do I value honesty?*
- *Have I ever faced a situation where honesty was difficult? How did I navigate that situation, and what can I learn from it to help my students understand the complexities of honesty?*
- *How does it feel in my body when I'm honest and when I'm not?*
- *How do I model honesty? Am I transparent with my students about my own mistakes or misunderstandings?*
- *Do I always expect honesty from my students, or do I sometimes allow exceptions? What circumstances or reasons might influence when honesty is expected or when other considerations come into play (e.g., protecting someone's feelings, managing conflict)?*
- *What part of honesty can I best help my students with?*

INSTRUCTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Some [studies](#) show that only teaching about the negative consequences of lying may not be as effective as also teaching about the positive consequences of honesty. This practice focuses on a holistic view of honesty and lying.

DISCUSS: WHAT DOES HONESTY MEAN?

- *What does it mean to be honest? Can you describe a situation when being honest matters? Are there times when we might need to be dishonest?*
- *Today, we will explore honesty through a game!*

PLAY THE GAME: TRUTH OR TALE?

- In partners, each person will take a turn telling something true about themselves and something made up.
- Each partner will then guess which statement of their partner's was true and which was a (fictional) tale.
- Remind students to be respectful of what their partner tells them and to give their partner their full attention.
- If needed, model the game for students by going first. For younger students, keep the topic simple, such as food, pets, or hobbies. For example, "I like cucumbers" or "I know how to stand on my head." Older students can tell more complicated truths and tales.
- Give students a minute or two to think of a truth and a tale about themselves.
- Divide students into pairs and have them take turns sharing their truth and their tale. After one partner has shared, have the other partner guess which statement was true and which was false (or a tale). Then have the speaker reveal whether the listener guessed correctly.
- After each partner has taken their turn, bring the whole group together and invite a few students to share their truth and their tale, letting the class guess which was which.

REFLECT ON AND DISCUSS HONESTY

- *Was it hard to guess which was true and which was a tale? Why or why not?*
- *What clues can we look for to tell if someone is telling the truth or not?*
 - Optional extension: For older students, consider relating this discussion to social media and discuss how we know something is true or if it is misinformation.
- *How did it feel in your body to tell a truth versus a made-up tale? If we are about to do something we know we shouldn't do or that isn't honest, how do our bodies feel? [Possible answers: our stomachs get queasy, our chest or throat might get tight, our breathing might speed up, we might feel anxious, and our brains may use a lot of mental energy maintaining the lie.] Our bodies and sometimes our minds are really good at telling us when we're doing something wrong if we learn to listen to them.*
- *Can a lie ever be "harmless," or do you think all lies are a problem? Why or why not?*
- *Can you think of situations when small lies might be the kinder or better options? Is it still better to tell the truth in these situations?*

- Using an example of a truth or tale told by a student, ask: *Why might it be important for someone to be honest about this example? Is there ever a time when honesty might not be the kindest or best option with this example?* [You might choose another example for this second question.]
- *What makes telling the truth easier? What things make honesty difficult?* Use this opportunity to explore when it might be difficult to be honest (e.g., when you might hurt someone’s feelings or face consequences). Talk about how honesty isn’t always easy but is always important for building trust and integrity in relationships.
- *What good things happen when people are honest with us?*
 - Ideas: We trust each other, we learn something, we make friends.

CLOSURE

- Remind students that the activity was all about practicing honesty. Explain that being truthful helps build trust with others. Sometimes, it’s easy to tell small lies (just like in the game), but in the real world, those little lies can add up and cause problems. It’s easier to build strong relationships when everyone is open and honest, while also remembering to be gentle with others’ feelings.
- Invite students to reflect, either verbally or in writing, on how today’s activity made them think differently about honesty. Did something surprise them, or did it make them think about a situation they are facing that requires honesty? How might they explain to a younger student why it’s important to be honest?

EXTENSION

- Look for opportunities in your lessons to continue the discussion on honesty. Are there characters in a story who have to decide between honesty and lying, for example [George Washington and the Cherry Tree](#)? In math, discuss with students the consequences that might occur when someone who uses math in their work, e.g., an engineer or an accountant, is dishonest. In history, explore what might have happened if an historical figure had been honest instead of dishonest or vice versa.

SOURCE

Inspired by content in *The Truth About Lying* by Dr. Victoria Talwar
Written by Jenna Whitehead, Ph.D., Simon Fraser University

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Were there any barriers for students to participate? If you were to try this again, what might you modify for next time?
- Did you notice if any students were uncomfortable discussing honesty or lying?
- Did you notice cultural differences in students’ understandings and applications of honesty?
- Did you notice students having a more nuanced understanding of honesty through this practice?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Research has shown that [social norms](#), modeling truthfulness, and discussing the [merits of honesty](#) all influence students' tendency to be truthful. Having open discussions to understand honesty, its nuances, and how to balance it with tact and compassion can help create a classroom where honesty is the norm.

Studies have also found that teaching students about the [positive outcomes of honesty](#), in addition to alongside the negative consequences of lying, is more effective in promoting honesty than focusing only on the negative impacts of dishonesty.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Dishonesty is a natural part of [healthy development](#) in children, emerging alongside their growing ability to understand others' perspectives and regulate their emotions and behaviors. At the same time, honesty is a fundamental [human inclination](#)—we seek trustworthy relationships with others.

When we support young people in cultivating their honesty, they build a reputation of [trustworthiness](#), form stronger relationships, and experience greater [health](#) and [mental](#) well-being.

TERMS OF USE

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