

# DEVELOPING EVERYDAY HEROES

An Introduction to the Character  
Development Program





## WHAT MAKES A HERO?

Medal of Honor Recipients believe the values of courage, commitment, integrity, sacrifice, citizenship, and patriotism are the qualities of a hero, and they also recognize those qualities in every one of us.

The Medal of Honor Character Development Program uses stories of military and civilian heroes to help your students recognize these values in themselves.

The sample lessons on these pages are teacher written, classroom tested, and ready to use in conjunction with your existing middle and/or high school curriculum. Whether you're teaching language arts, social studies, science, or an elective class, there's a lesson here you can use. Adaptable for single class sessions and offering individual and group activities, these lessons align with academic standards and core learning requirements across the disciplines.

Conscientious objector Desmond Doss' story from World War II recounts how a man morally committed to peace saved dozens of lives while a battle raged around him. He served his country and respected his personal commitments with integrity and courage.

Middle School teacher Jencie Fagan prevented a school tragedy by intercepting a student with a gun. Her story is the basis for a lesson about physiological responses to fear and stress.

Leadership skills are important to all of us. Look at the lesson built on the experiences of Vietnam veterans Jay Vargas and Paul Bucha to help your students learn to become leaders who also serve.

And use the foundation lesson to feature one of the Medal of Honor identified values or one your school has designated, such as respect or responsibility. This exercise in discovering common understanding and moving from words to action works at every level and with every discipline. Pair it with a living history of an

Afghanistan War veteran like Sal Giunta to show your students that our country's greatest heroes are often just the kid working at the local sandwich shop — somebody just like them.

With the lessons here and the living histories you'll find at [themedalofhonor.com](http://themedalofhonor.com), your students will discover not just heroes but role models, people they will not only look up to but emulate. Our goal is to help all students recognize heroic values within themselves. The Medal of Honor and Citizen Hero stories will inspire them to turn those values into behaviors that improve school and community climate and culture across the country.

# WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Citizen Service Before Self Honoree Focus: Jencie Fagan, Middle School Teacher, Reno, Nevada

**Lesson Time:** One or two class sessions

**Suggested Applications:** Language Arts, History, Biology, STEM

**Objectives:**

Students will

- identify the values of a Medal of Honor Recipient and a Citizen Service Before Self Honoree.
- examine and analyze how a person faces danger.

**For the Teacher:**

Explained physiologically, the systems and functions of our body change during a threatening situation. The change relates to the part of our brain known as the hypothalamus that discharges chemical releases preparing the body for such reaction. This concept of survival technique applies during a dangerous situation when humans are prompted to prepare physically for any form of attack, like when walking down a dark and deserted area and another person unexpectedly appears. This response is designed to shield humans from unwanted hazards. This response is also true in situations where physical reaction is not always necessary, such as that of a stressful day in the office or heavy traffic situations. Such a response is not just a protection for physical attack, but also for emotional triggers.

**Introductory Activity:**

Discuss the events that propel people confronting dangerous situations. Talk about the fight or flight defense response that is the body's natural reaction and a form of defense strategy to a possible threat or danger. Students will describe in one or two paragraphs a situation where either they or someone else demonstrated courage in the face of danger.

**Small Group Activity:**

Students will compare their responses about courage and discuss the circumstances of the action. They will explain what the outcome of the situation was and its connection to the fight or flight response.

**Whole Group Activity:**

Students will view the vignette about Jencie Fagan, Citizen Service Before Self Honoree. The teacher and students will discuss her fight or flight response and her subsequent act of courage.

**Concluding Activity:**

Students will write a one-page summary about the vignette featuring Jencie Fagan and her act of courage. Students may reflect on how they would have reacted in a similar situation.

**Assessment:**

Responses, essay

**Resources:**

Video vignette: Jencie Fagan – <https://vimeo.com/68797393>  
<http://themedalofhonor.com/citizen-honors>  
[http://www.biology-online.org/dictionary/Cannons\\_theory](http://www.biology-online.org/dictionary/Cannons_theory)

# MEDAL OF HONOR CHARACTER VALUES

Medal of Honor Focus: Two good choices would be Salvatore Giunta or Clinton Romesha, U.S. Army, War on Terror (Afghanistan)

**Lesson Time:** Two or three class sessions

**Suggested Applications:** Language Arts

**Objective:**

Students will

- research, define and interpret vocabulary that relates to those values portrayed by Medal of Honor recipients.
- use these definitions and interpretations in an informational essay.

**Introductory Activity:**

The teacher will write the following vocabulary words that relate to the values portrayed by the Medal of Honor recipients on the board: courage, integrity, patriotism, citizenship, commitment, and sacrifice. Students will write a journal entry about what they feel these words have in common and why they would have been written on the board.

**Whole Group Activity:**

The teacher and students will discuss journal entry responses and the purpose of the words.

**Small Group/Individual Activity:**

Students will use dictionaries and a thesaurus to look up the definition, provide synonyms and antonyms, a sentence, and a picture for each of the six vocabulary words. Following individual dictionary work, students will be assigned to a group. Each group will receive one of the six vocabulary words. Groups will be asked to create a poster showing their character value word. Students will include a definition, synonyms and antonyms, a sentence, a picture, and a "real life" example (or an example from the vignette) of the word in the poster.



Definition:		Synonym:	
<b>Character Value (e.g., Courage)</b>			
Real Life Example:		Antonym:	

**Whole Group Activity:**

Individual groups will present the character value poster to the class. Class members will then compare and contrast the words and identify what they have in common. Discuss how they may be related to one another.

**Concluding Activity:**

The class will be asked to discuss the values and how the values relate to their lives. Individually, students will write about someone who displays one of the values and how he/she displays that value. Students will write about how they can incorporate these values into their daily life.

**Assessment:**

Discussion, poster, essay, presentations, and connections to real-life examples

**Resources:**

- Video Vignette: Salvatore Giunta – <https://vimeo.com/73383562>
- Video Vignette: Clinton Romesha – <https://vimeo.com/106822170>
- Medal of Honor: Portraits of Valor Beyond the Call of Duty*. NY: Artisan, 2006.
- Dictionaries
- Thesaurus
- Vocabulary Word Template

# UNDERSTANDING FEATURE WRITING

Medal of Honor Focus: Desmond T. Doss, U.S. Army Medical Detachment,  
World War II

**Lesson Time:** Two class sessions

**Suggested Applications:** History, Language Arts, World War II

**Objectives:**

Students will

- relate the actions of Desmond Doss that led to his recognition as a Medal of Honor Recipient.
- find examples of accurate characterization within the written account about Desmond Doss, as well as the Medal of Honor vignette.
- transfer the knowledge gained from their reading into a written feature about Desmond Doss.

**Introductory Activity:**

The teacher will ask students to think of a time when they had to show perseverance to face a challenge that they thought impossible. Examples could be provided, such as learning to play a musical instrument, honing their skills to compete on a sports team, or passing a difficult math class. Students will be asked to explain what motivated them to continue their efforts without giving up. After a pair/share activity, volunteers will discuss their examples with the class.

Students will read the profile and view the vignette of Desmond Doss. The teacher should explain how this individual showed the character trait of perseverance. The teacher will point out that character traits can be revealed through a person's physical appearance, through a person's speech and actions, and through the perception that others have of this person.

**Small Group/Individual Activity:**

Students will create a graphic organizer containing the character traits listed below. Ask students to cite evidence that Desmond Doss demonstrated these character traits.

Commitment	
Resourcefulness	
Sacrifice	
Perseverance	
Other (Student's choice)	

**Whole Group Activity:**

The teacher will provide large sheets of paper with the following headings: Commitment, Resourcefulness, Sacrifice, Perseverance, and Other. The group will contribute evidence from their graphic organizers that relates to each trait listed. The class will discuss what an accurate characterization of Desmond Doss should include.

**Concluding Activity:**

The teacher will show students examples of how a news story about an individual differs from a feature story. The profile based on Desmond Doss is a news story. Students will use notes from their graphic organizer for a feature story to be written in the next class.

**Assessment:**

- Participation in class discussions
- Completion of graphic organizer with relevant information
- Completion of writing feature story/article about Desmond Doss

**Extended Activities:**

- Write a poem about Desmond Doss
- Write a Readers Theater piece that could be performed about Desmond Doss

**Resources:**

Video Vignette: Desmond Doss – <https://vimeo.com/71972300>

*Medal of Honor: Portraits of Valor Beyond the Call of Duty*. NY: Artisan, 2006.



# THE “BURDEN” OF LEADERSHIP

Medal of Honor Recipient Focus: Paul Bucha, U.S. Army, Vietnam  
and Jay Vargas, U.S. Marine Corps, Vietnam

**Lesson Time:** One or two class sessions

**Suggested Applications:** History, Character Education, ASB, School leadership team

**Objectives:**

Students will be able to explain and identify character traits and leadership styles that are effective in leading groups and/or individuals in various situations and experiences in life.

**Individual/Intro Activity:**

Quick Write: Students will write down in 3-5 minutes on provided notecard who they look up to and think is a solid leader. This could be anyone they know personally or anywhere in life. Discuss with the person next to them or share a couple as a class.

**Small Group Activity:**

Teacher hands out copies of the Critical Thinking Questions and asks the students to read over the first section, questions 1-3, and be prepared to locate certain information as they watch the video on Paul Bucha (11:30 in length). Students take 5 minutes to answer questions 1-4 and teacher assists if students need help recalling or clarifying video segments or information. Students discuss in small groups what they wrote and why. Teacher calls on 2-3 to share for class. Teacher asks students to read over questions 4-6 and be prepared to locate or jot down certain information.

Watch the video on Jay Vargas (10:03 in length). Students take time to answer questions 5-7 and teacher assists if students need help recalling or clarifying video segments or information. Students discuss in small groups what they wrote and why. Teacher calls on 2-3 to share with the class.

**Whole Group Activity:**

Teacher and students move to the Personal Analysis Sheet. Teacher explains a Venn diagram and ensures that students understand the directions. Give time to complete. Allow them to work with partners, if desired. Teacher asks students to come forward and fill out a Venn drawn on the front board and discusses as students do so. Class can debate or clarify as needed.

**Concluding Activity:**

Students reflect on their own lives and answer the last question about leadership and what situations they may have been in, in their own lives, and what was good or bad about that experience.

**Assessment:**

- Participation in class discussions
- Completion of graphic organizer with relevant information
- Ticket-out-the-door paragraph on qualities students possess or how service leadership can create a better school or community environment
- For leadership students, use as part of leadership project at end of school year

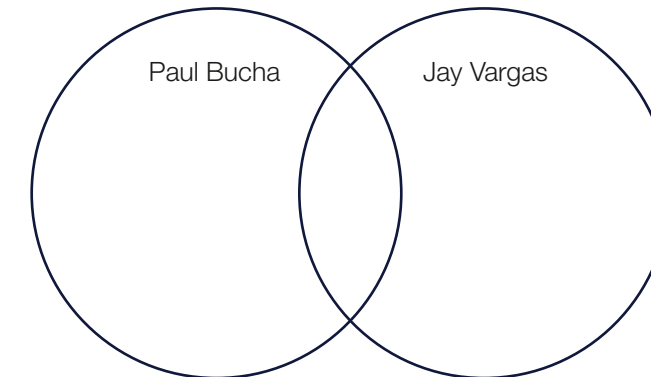
**Resources:**

Notecards  
Copies of activity sheets  
Video Vignette: Paul Bucha – <https://vimeo.com/71019460>  
Video Vignette: Jay Vargas – <https://vimeo.com/128250639>

Submitted by: Jason Robbins, Steele Canyon High School, Spring Valley, CA. Dec.7, 2015

## The “Burden” of Leadership Personal Analysis

**Directions:** On a separate sheet of paper, draw a Venn diagram. In each of the three areas, answer the questions below. Remember to be detailed and honest in your answers.



**Differences:**

- Write one character trait that each man displayed that may have been different from the other, basing it only on the action you saw in the video.
- Write two situations where one showed leadership different from the other.
- Write one lesson you learned from each of the recipients based on his actions.

**Similarities:**

- Write one or two of the character traits (listed at the bottom of the page) that both men demonstrated.
- Write two examples of common leadership styles of both men.
- Write two similarities about the type of conflict they were in.

On a separate page, describe a time in your life when you were either being led by someone or you were leading a group through a difficult challenge, task, crisis, event, or experience. Detail what went well or poorly and how your leadership or the leadership of another was excellent or lacking and why.

Sacrifice

Commitment

Citizenship

Integrity

Patriotism

Courage

# The "Burden" of Leadership

## Critical Thinking Questions

**Directions:** Watch the videos of Medal of Honor Recipients Paul Bucha and Jay Vargas. At the conclusion of each video, answer the questions below by section. Then, be prepared to share what you wrote with a group or class.

### Captain Paul Bucha (U.S. Army, Vietnam)

- "If you had your choice of company commanders you wouldn't pick me, but if I had my choice of soldiers I'd pick you." What do you think Bucha meant by that, and what did that show as a leader?

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- "As a young army officer you have the opportunity, the burden, and the privilege to look a young man in the eye and ask him to go do something, and they know what you're asking them means in all likelihood they are not coming back." Explain what Bucha meant by that and what you can learn about leadership from it.

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- What did Bucha ask his men to do so he could bring them all home?

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- How important is trust in any relationship? Think of family, leadership roles, teamwork and jobs.

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### Colonel Jay Vargas (U.S. Marines, Vietnam)

- Colonel Vargas at one point during the battle called artillery to fire on his own position, knowingly putting himself in the line of fire. As a leader, what did that show his men and what character traits does that exemplify in your mind?

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- Toward the end of the video, Vargas mentions his three Golden Rules. Finish each quote below, then slightly modify each to make it work for you today as if you were a leader in school, sports, family, church, or other assignments and activities. You may decide you do not need to change the quote at all to fit your life; if so, write "No Change."

"Always set \_\_\_\_\_"

Modify: \_\_\_\_\_

"Always take \_\_\_\_\_"

Modify: \_\_\_\_\_

"Never ask a Marine \_\_\_\_\_"

Modify: \_\_\_\_\_

- Which of these three seems the most difficult and why?

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Now that you've had a chance to try a few lessons, what's next?

Go to the Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation's website, [www.themedalofhonor.com](http://www.themedalofhonor.com), to sign up for our monthly newsletter and special announcements about events and program updates.

Also on the website, you'll find another 50+ lessons for secondary grades. While you're there, take a minute to look through our first installment of elementary lessons, and please tell your colleagues who teach K-6 about the resources available to them.

Would you like a teacher professional development workshop in your community, free of charge and offering 6 hours of training? Contact Noel Wall at [nwall@cmohfoundation.org](mailto:nwall@cmohfoundation.org) to schedule an event.

Need the curriculum on a thumb drive or DVDs to use in your classrooms? Order free copies via the website.

Special thanks to Jostens for getting this information to you: teachers, administrators, and parents. Together, let's create, encourage, and celebrate heroes every day!



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