

CHARACTER *defining character*

What's CHARACTER all about?

"Character is power." – BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are small matters compared to what lies within us." – RALPH WALDO EMERSON

As you wind your way through this world, you inevitably come to a fork in the road: You can either be noted *for* your character – or be known *as* a character, to paraphrase a high school principal's advice to his graduating class.

Your character determines whether your friends, classmates and family members see you as a leader, respecter, assaulter, defender, ultimately, whether your interactions with you help them become better people.

But what values and personal attributes comprise character? To name just a few, character is defined by:

C **CARING** Caring and concern for others are at the root of the Golden Rule – "Treat others as you want them to treat you."

H **HONESTY** Be honest with yourself and with others in every interaction. Honesty and integrity are the core values that make respect, courage and trustworthiness possible.

A **ACTIONS** Your actions – not your intentions or words – are what define your character. Often, these become tests of courage, such as taking a stand against injustice, prejudice, cruelty and other inhumane behaviors.

R **RESPONSIBILITY** Your sense of responsibility is what compels you to do the right thing, follow through on your promises and be accountable for your actions. Personal rights are only possible if they're accompanied by responsibility.

A **ACCEPTANCE** Character demands that we accept others' differences and appreciate how diversity strengthens our society.

C **CITIZENSHIP** People of strong moral character don't sit on the sidelines. Contribute your "fair share" – participate fully as a concerned student, volunteer and voter.

T **TRUSTWORTHINESS** Trust can't be granted; it can only be earned. Deliver on your promises. Act honestly at every turn.

E **EMPATHY** When you empathize with others, you go beyond kindness and caring; you truly begin to see the world from someone else's perspective.

R **RESPECT** Respect for yourself and for others is an integral component of character. Without respect, caring and empathy are empty expressions. Respect is what enables us to accept and appreciate others' differences.