

Character Does Matter

Supplemental Children's Reading List

Updated November 2025

This resource is for all trained CDM Mentors and educators who are interested in supplementing CDM with additional reading for students. A few notes as you use this list for CDM:

- Most books listed in this resource are appropriate for the K-5 audience.
- This is not an exhaustive list of children's books. With your help, we will continue to add to this list.
- Many of the titles in this resource include themes that align with the 24 character strengths we use at TMF. Feel free to use the selected books at your discretion.
- Each character strength has multiple definitions and can be interpreted differently by each individual.
- Most elementary school students love picture books and look forward to the expressions adults use during read-alouds. Have fun while reading to children, and try a few different character voices!
- Engage in meaningful conversation with students. It is always a great idea to read the book ahead of time and find good places to pause so the students can reflect. Always come prepared with a few questions that will promote comprehension and discussion. For example:
 - Why do you think he acted that way towards his friend? Would you have done the same?
 - What do you think is going to happen next?
 - How did it make you feel when she said that?
- You can also incorporate quick comprehension check-ins, such as:
 - Give me two thumbs up if you think she showed kindness to her classmate.
 - Put your hand on your head if you would have acted differently than the main character.
- *Things My Brother Used to Say* is a story told from Gold Star sister Ryan Manion's point of view about five important lessons she learned from her brother, Travis. Each lesson inspires students to live with character.
 - While this book is intended for students in grades K through 6, we encourage educators and mentors to read it ahead of time to ensure that the content is appropriate for the intended audience.
 - This story can be read in one sitting or one chapter at a time. In full, the story should take about 15-20 minutes to read, depending on youth engagement and discussion.
 - There is a Reading Companion Guide located on the Spartan Development Center for CDM mentors that will help engage youth further with the lessons in *Things My Brother Used to Say*.

If you have a book suggestion to add to this, please submit them via the form below. This resource will be updated annually and uploaded to the Spartan Development Center for you to use as an additional CDM tool when working with youth.

Suggested Children's Books for CDM



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Strength	Definition
Appreciation of Beauty	Drawing inspiration from beauty and excellence
Bravery	Standing firm in a personal value, despite opposition
Creativity	Imagining new and unique ways of thinking or doing things
Curiosity	Being open to experience and knowledge
Fairness	Promoting justice and equality
Forgiveness	Being accepting of people's faults or mistakes
Gratitude	Being thankful for good things in life
Honesty	Being genuine and taking responsibility for one's actions
Hope	Expecting the best and working toward it
Humility	Being modest about one's own accomplishments
Humor	Enjoying making others smile or laugh
Judgment	Examining all sides of an issue before making a decision
Kindness	Taking care of others; being caring, generous, and considerate
Leadership	Motivating a group of people to achieve a goal
Love	Valuing individual relationships with others
Love of Learning	Always adding to one's knowledge and skills
Perseverance	Finishing what you start, despite obstacles and setbacks
Perspective	Having a thoughtful point of view that others seek out
Prudence	Considering outcomes and risks carefully before acting or speaking
Self Regulation	Being mindful of and responsible for one's own emotions and actions
Social Intelligence	Understanding what makes other people tick
Spirituality	Believing in one's purpose in life and place in the universe
Teamwork	Cooperating with others toward a common goal
Zest	Approaching life as an adventure with great enthusiasm



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CHARACTER STRENGTH	TITLE	AUTHOR	SUGGESTED GRADE LEVELS
Appreciation of Beauty & Excellence	<i>Fireflies!</i>	Julie Brinckloe	K-3
	<i>The Great Kapok Tree</i>	Lynne Cherry	K-3
	<i>Last Stop on Market Street</i>	Matt De La Pena	K-3
	<i>Crown: An Ode to a Fresh Cut</i>	Derrick Barnes	Pre K-2
Bravery	<i>Mikey and the Dragons</i>	Jocko Willink	1-3
	<i>Nightmare Detective</i>	Monk Inyang	4-9
	<i>Garvey's Choice</i>	Nikki Grimes	2-6
	<i>As Brave as You</i>	Jason Reynolds	4-8
Creativity	<i>A House for Hermit Crab</i>	Eric Carle	Pre K-1
	<i>Ish</i>	Peter Reynolds	1-3
	<i>Weslandia</i>	Paul Weischman	2-5
	<i>The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind</i>	William Kamkwamba	5-6
Curiosity	<i>Windows</i>	Ruby Bridges	5-7
	<i>Harold and the Purple Crayon</i>	Janet Stevens	K-4
	<i>The Curious Why</i>	Angela DiTerlizzi	K-3
	<i>Ask Me</i>	Bernard Waber	K-3



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Fairness	<i>Through My Eyes</i>	Ruby Bridges	5-7
	<i>Tops and Bottoms</i>	Janet Stevens	K-4
	<i>New Shoes</i>	Susan Lynn Meyer	1-4
	<i>It's Not Fair!</i>	Amy Krouse Rosenthal	Pre K-2
Forgiveness	<i>Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse</i>	Kevin Henkes	K-2
	<i>The Giving Tree</i>	Shel Silverstein	K-4
	<i>No David!</i>	David Shannon	K-3
	<i>The Sour Grape</i>	Jory John	K-2
Gratitude	<i>Just So Thankful</i>	Mercer Mayer	K-3
	<i>Gracias • Thanks</i>	Pat Mora	K-4
	<i>It Could Always be Worse</i>	Margot Zemach	K-2
	<i>Happy!</i>	Pharrell Williams	Pre K-1
	<i>Thank You, Omu!</i>	Oge Mora	K-3
Honesty	<i>Tell the Truth, B.B. Wolf</i>	Judy Sierra	K-3
	<i>Ricky Sticky Fingers</i>	Julia Cook	Pre K-2
	<i>Ruthie and the (Not So)</i>	Laura Rankin	Pre K-3
	<i>Teen Tiny Lie</i>		



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Hope	<i>Henry's Freedom Box</i>	Ellen Levine	2-5
	<i>Seeds of Change</i>	Jen Cullerton Johnson	1-4
	<i>A Flicker of Hope</i>	Julia Cook	K-3
	<i>Malala's Magic Pencil</i>	Malala Yousafzai	3-5
Humility	<i>Last Stop on Market Street</i>	Matt de la Peña	K-3
	<i>Humble Pie</i>	Jennifer Donnelly	K-4
	<i>The Tower: A Story of Humility</i>	Richard Paul Evans	1-4
Humor	<i>Goodnight Already!</i>	Jory John	Pre K-3
	<i>Dear Mrs. Larue: Letters From Obedience School</i>	Mark Teague	Pre K-3
	<i>Caps for Sale: A Tale of a Peddler, Some Monkeys and Their Monkey Business</i>	Esphyr Slobodkina	K-4
Judgment	<i>Stand Tall, Molly Lou Melon</i>	Patty Lovell	K-2
	<i>What Should Danny Do?</i>	Adir Levy	K-2



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Kindness	<i>The Rainbow Fish</i>	Marcus Pfister	K-5
	<i>The Invisible Boy</i>	Trudy Ludwig	1-4
	<i>New Kid</i>	Jerry Craft	5-8
	<i>The Buddy Bench</i>	Patty Brozo	K-5
Leadership	<i>Swimmy</i>	Leo Lionni	Pre K-2
	<i>The Day the Crayons Quit</i>	Drew Daywalt	Pre K-2
	<i>I'm a Leader Now</i>	Wayne Watson	Pre K-2
Love	<i>What Sisters Do Best/ What Brothers Do Best</i>	Laura Numeroff	Pre K-2
	<i>Love You Forever</i>	Robert Munsch	Pre K-2
	<i>I Love You More Than</i>	Taye Diggs	Pre K-3
	<i>The Circles All Around Us</i>	Brad Montague	K-4
Love of Learning	<i>A Walk in the Words</i>	Hudson Talbott	K-3
	<i>Dog Loves Books</i>	Louise Yates	Pre K-2
	<i>Your Fantastic Elastic Brain: A Growth Mindset Book for Kids to Stretch and Shape Their Brains</i>	JoAnn Deak Ph.D.	K-3



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Perseverance	<i>A Chair for My Mother</i>	Vera. B Williams	1-5
	<i>Raising Dragons</i>	Jerdine Nolen	K-3
	<i>The Magical Yet</i>	Angela DiTerlizzi	Pre K-2
	<i>Nubs, The True Story of a Mutt, a Marine & a Miracle</i>	Major Brian Dennis	K-5
Perspective	<i>The Pain and the Great One</i>	Judy Blume	Pre K-3
	<i>The Day the Crayons Quit</i>	Drew Daywalt	Pre K-2
	<i>Alice in Wonderland</i>	Lewis Carroll	5-8
	<i>Chrysanthemum</i>	Kevin Henkes	Pre K-4
Prudence	<i>Prudence Wants A Pet</i>	Cathleen Daly	Pre K-2
	<i>My Mouth is a Volcano</i>	Julia Cook	Pre K-2
	<i>Sorry!</i>	Trudy Ludwig	1-4
Self Regulation	<i>My Many Colored Days</i>	Dr. Seuss	Pre K-2
	<i>Clark the Shark</i>	Bruce Hale	Pre K-2
	<i>The Most Magnificent Thing</i>	Ashley Spires	Pre K-2



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Social Intelligence	<i>The Invisible Boy</i>	Trudy Ludwig	1-4
	<i>The Not So Friendly Friend</i>	Christina Furnival	Pre K-3
	<i>Three Cheers for Tacky</i>	Helen Lester	Pre K-4
Spirituality	<i>Steps and Stones: An Anh's Anger Story</i>	Gail Silver	Pre K-3
	<i>One Good Deed</i>	Terri Fields	Pre K-3
	<i>Phantom Tollbooth</i>	Norton Juster	5-8
Teamwork	<i>Thank You, Mr. Falker</i>	Patricia Polacco	3-5
	<i>The Parker Inheritance</i>	Varian Johnson	4-8
	<i>When Pencil Met Eraser</i>	Karen Kilpatrick & Luis O. Ramos Jr.	Pre K-2
	<i>Stone Soup</i>	Jon J. Muth	1-4
Zest	<i>Fireflies!</i>	Julie Brickloe	K-3
	<i>Struttin' With Some Barbecue</i>	Patricia Hruby Powe	3-7



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