

# Integrity

This is the first week of our Integrity unit. Students will focus on integrity and how it connects to the familiar concept of honesty.

Begin the unit with the whole class lesson and then aim to complete at least two of the mini lessons with your students throughout the week. Each mini lesson is designed to present elements of the main lesson in new and engaging ways.

## Main Lesson

**Whole Class Lesson**  
30 minutes



### Shortcut or Loophole?

Students will explore the difference between helpful shortcuts and loopholes that compromise personal integrity through an examination of common scenarios. (See page 2 for lesson details.)

## Mini Lessons

**For Small Groups**  
15 minutes



### Find the Loophole

Divide the class into small groups of 6-8. Give each group one of the scenarios (see below) and have them do the following: 1) Identify the expectations of the teacher or parent. 2) Identify the loophole the student/child used to “avoid” actually going against the adult. 3) Discuss why this decision was wrong and how it shows a lack of integrity.

**For Partners**  
15 minutes



### Genre Integrity

As a pair, brainstorm 3+ literary genres. (Mystery, romance, historical fiction, etc). Rank them in order by their level of integrity and honesty. Explain your top choice and bottom choice to the class. How can your bottom choice become a genre with higher standards of integrity? (If needed, guide a short class discussion on common genres and the types of stories that tend to fall under these headings to help generate ideas).

**For Individuals**  
15 minutes



### Personal Reflection: My Own Loopholes

In your journal, examine your day-to-day choices and reflect on areas you frequently find yourself struggling with. What type of work do you find tedious or annoying? How can you approach these areas with a higher level of integrity while still working to find shortcuts that help you accomplish your goal or assignment more efficiently?

**Technology-Focused**  
15 minutes



### Balancing Accessibility Among Peers

Guide a discussion around the struggle to find a balance between the expectation of peers to be constantly accessible and the restrictions put in place by the adults in our lives (parents, teachers, etc.). Why are these rules and limitations necessary? How do they help you stay accountable? How can you avoid the temptation to compromise your integrity when you don't agree with these limitations?

# Shortcut or Loophole?

Students will explore the difference between helpful shortcuts and loopholes that compromise personal integrity through an examination of common scenarios.

**Lesson Timeframe**

30 minutes

**Required Materials**

- No materials are required for this lesson

**Standards Map**

This lesson aligns with CASEL Competencies, National Health Education Standards, International Society for Technology in Education Standards, when applicable, and Common Core State Standards. Please refer to the [Standards Map](#) for more information.

**Lesson Objective**

Students will:

- Explore the difference between helpful shortcuts and loopholes that compromise their integrity.
- Celebrate the courageous acts within their personal lives.

**Teacher Connection/Self-Care**

Welcome to the Integrity Unit! This can be a challenging unit because “integrity” feels like a big, complex concept to both kids and adults alike! However, in this unit, we define integrity as acting in a way you know to be right and kind in all situations. This actually makes the concept quite simple. As your students get older and have more responsibilities, they may find it hard to think about what is right and kind in every situation; neurologically, they aren’t always capable of making a good choice here. Their judgment is underdeveloped and often clouded by social pressures. You have a great opportunity to help them hone their integrity skills.

You can do this by honing your own integrity skills. When faced with a task, do you complete it fully or take a short-cut? If students push your buttons, do you respond with kindness or with curtness and sarcasm? Is there bureaucratic “red tape” in your job that frustrates you and makes you look for loopholes? If you feel your integrity slipping at certain points of the year, like end-of-term, state testing, holiday seasons, or mid-year, because you are busy or burnt-out, take some time for self-care and hit your integrity reset button. Talk with a colleague about your experiences or frustrations and brainstorm strategies to get back on track. You won’t be the only one with these feelings and working through them to maintain a high level of integrity in your work will be a great model for students.



## Share

4-6 minutes

In this unit, we will explore the concept of integrity and how it expands on our understanding of honesty. Specifically, this unit dives deeper into the connection between personal integrity and kindness and how leading a life of integrity can not only help us make better choices, but inspire others to do the same!

The concept of integrity overlaps heavily with the familiar concept of honesty. For this unit, the definition of integrity is acting in a way you know to be right and kind in all situations.

Let's discuss this further. How does integrity connect with honesty? (Invite student responses.)



## Inspire

3-5 minutes

At this point in your life, the time and influence you have from your peers and outside sources can, and frequently does, outweigh the amount of influence you receive from those you actually live with. There is a certain expectation that you “have everything figured out” when in reality even adults are constantly learning, growing, and moving forward along their journey towards a more kind and integral life.

The more freedom in our daily lives, the more difficult decisions must be made. We find ourselves alone in our decision-making at times, and rather than step back and consult someone older or wiser, we make these decisions quickly and with minimal thought to our integrity. In an effort to decrease time and effort spent in areas we deem unimportant, we often look for shortcuts or “loopholes” to make our lives easier. In our society today, these shortcuts are often lauded and praised. Sometimes shortcuts DO in fact cut time without compromising your integrity. However, when they skirt the truth, or circle around the actual truth, they become dangerous loopholes that slowly erode your integrity through frequent compromises in what is right and kind in every situation to bending that understanding as you try to “save time” or become more efficient.

Let's look at one example to illustrate this point:

Your parents have asked you to clean the kitchen after you get home from school today. This is not a new request and you definitely understand what is expected from you. However, you have also been invited to go out with some friends, which is something you really want to do. You cannot follow through completely on the chore without missing out on a good chunk of your time with your friends. You have a choice to make. Do you “cut corners” and search for the loophole in this chore? Your dad doesn't usually check to see if you swept AND mopped. Maybe you could leave out this step and save 15-20 minutes. Perhaps this step doesn't even seem important to you at all. You make a judgement call that your parents are obsessive about cleanliness and this additional step is just playing into their compulsions. You have successfully talked yourself into skipping this step by convincing yourself that you would be doing more harm than good if you followed through.

That night, your parents thank you for taking care of the kitchen. They reward you with a special dinner because they have noticed that you have really stepped up and done your chores completely, even when they are not there to supervise. How would you feel in this situation? (Invite student responses.) Can you relate to this scenario? If so, how did you handle it? (Invite student responses.)

It's easy to act and live honestly when you have limited freedom and power. However, as you increase your level of independence, the opportunities to compromise your integrity increase exponentially. The choice is yours. Do you continue to do what you know is right and kind in every situation, even when no one is looking?



## Empower

15 minutes

Explain that the class will now play a game to explore the importance of examining your decisions through the lens of both helpfulness AND integrity. Read each scenario below. As a class, decide if the choice presented is a valuable tool that justifies the use or compromises your integrity as a deceptive loophole. Brainstorm other solutions or shortcuts when the class decides that integrity has indeed been compromised.

Scenarios:

You are at a store with your friends. They are having a huge sale and everything is 75% off with an additional 20% off of sale items. Your mom is coming to pick you up in 20 minutes. You find 3 sale items you would like to purchase, but aren't sure if you have enough money to cover the cost plus tax. You decide to use your phone calculator to do the math quickly so you aren't late. Helpful shortcut or loophole that compromises integrity?

You have 25 math problems for homework tonight. It is 9:30 p.m. by the time you get around to starting on them. You finish the first 10 and then become extremely tired. You look over the directions and don't see any restrictions on the use of a calculator. You decide to use your calculator to help you get through the longer portions of each problem. Thanks to the calculator you are able to finish the remaining 15 problems in only 30 minutes.

Helpful shortcut or loophole that compromises integrity? (Note: If your class chooses helpful shortcut, change the thought process a bit by telling them that the teacher expects you to show all of your work in math. Then ask the question again!)

You wake up too late to catch the bus and realize that you need to walk to school this morning. Both of your parents have already left for work. You will never make it on time if you walk, so you decide to borrow your dad's bike. You call to ask permission, but he doesn't answer. You decide to borrow it anyway, assuming he would have given permission like he normally does. Helpful shortcut or loophole that compromises integrity? (Note: This scenario is intentionally ambiguous. It is presented as a conversation starter. Make sure to allow students to present their reasoning on both sides and encourage them to examine it from both perspectives.)



## Reflect

5-7 minutes

As a class, discuss the concept of integrity and how it often feels “flexible”. Explain that both honesty and integrity are actually very concrete; you are either telling the truth or not. The choice is yours. However, it is NOT always easy. Sometimes we cut corners, bend the truth, and look for loopholes because we fear looking bad, incompetent, or disobedient.

This week, make a commitment to examine your level of personal integrity. Are there areas in which you find yourself more prone to loopholes that compromise your integrity? This might be around a certain subject in school that you really don’t like, or a chore around the house you find boring. Try to make a change during one situation that reflects a higher level of integrity, even if it seems silly or unimportant to you. Discuss your choice with a trusted adult. How did you feel when you chose the honest choice, even when no one was watching you?

# Find The Loophole Scenarios

Instructions: Provide each small group with one of the following scenarios. Have them identify the expectations of the adult, the loophole used by the teen, and a solution that promotes personal integrity.

## Scenario #1

You are asked to watch your sister for the afternoon. You are in the middle of an intense group text and remind yourself that your sister is almost 10 years old. How much “supervision” does she really need? You ignore her for the rest of the afternoon until she starts making a mess in the kitchen. Your parents come home in the middle of the mess. You inform them that your sister made the mess and wasn’t listening to you.

## Scenario #2

A neighbor has hired you to mow their grass and rake the leaves weekly throughout the fall. The pay is a little low, but you really need the money for a new skateboard you have been saving for. You normally do this job on Saturday morning each week. However, this week is the big dance at school. You are super excited and definitely going. The last dance lasted until 11:00 p.m. and getting up early to rake leaves and mow a lawn was certainly not at the top of your list. You decide to call your neighbor and ask them if you can skip a week because “something” came up. You intentionally keep your excuse vague in hopes that they won’t ask you for any further details. They agree and you are off the hook.

## Scenario #3

You have a savings account that is designated for “major purchases”. Typically this has been where you have saved up for really large items, like a new bike, a new phone, etc. However, today you saw a new video game you just HAVE to have, and it is in the sale bin! There is a branch of your bank inside the mall. You call your dad to ask permission to pull out \$20 to buy the game. He doesn’t answer. It’s such a great deal so you decide to just pull out the money now and replace it later with more of your allowance.

## Scenario #4

You walk home from school every afternoon with your best friend. You always take the same route, which is a little long, but you don’t mind because the two of you spend that time talking and catching up after a long day at school. Your friend is sick today and you are walking home alone. You are really tired and don’t feel like walking the same usual route. There is a shortcut through several business lots. Your parents have asked you NOT to go through those lots as it is considered trespassing. You’ve heard this word before and it always seems so dramatic. You’re not stealing anything or vandalizing, just walking through. You decide your parents are too dramatic and old school and you take the shortcut anyways.