

Abilities:

* To develop integrity and stand up firmly to negative peer pressure.

* To hold oneself and one's friends accountable in living up to ideals and promises.

Number of Chapters: 5 (22 to 26)

Chapter 22

Fashion Plate



General Information

Topic

The courage to be oneself, regardless of peer pressure.

Content

- ▶ Slavery to fashion.
- ▶ The rebel.

Objectives

Knowing

- ▶ To understand the value of individuality.

Accepting

- ▶ To value the group as a space for respecting and encouraging everyone's individuality.

Doing

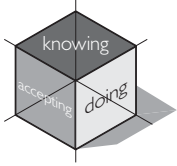
- ▶ To develop leadership skills.
- ▶ To choose to belong to groups which respect people's individuality.

Areas of Human Development to be Emphasised

- ▶ Individuality.
- ▶ Individuality and group dynamics.

Class Plan

1 Knowing



Motivation

This is the story which Charlie promised in the previous chapter to tell Alice—how he learned, with Alan as his role model, that conforming with peer pressure and the externals of fashion isn't always smart.

Story context:

A class outing raises a dilemma for Charlie: his shorts are too short for the current fashion. Can he relax and have fun, even though he doesn't look fashionable?

Introduction

Conformity to external standards, and being fashionable, are relative things; leaders view them in perspective.

Presentation

Key Ideas

- ▶ Fashion is too changeable for us to follow slavishly
- ▶ Leaders set their own trends

Topic Development

A. Slavery to fashion

This story is a flashback to a time when Charlie was more of a slave to peer pressure. In the previous chapter he refused marijuana and turned away from a harmful peer group by thinking of Alan's example. In this chapter and the next Alan's nonconformist philosophy of life influences Charlie to be less of an unquestioning conformist.

In the story Charlie is suffering because the lack of a few inches of material makes his shorts unfashionably short. Ask students if they can identify with Charlie's feelings:

Now he would be the only one with too-short-shorts. Maybe some of the class idiots would wear too-short-shorts, but nobody else. Charlie thought of being sick to get out of going on the field trip.

...The next day, Charlie met Ben on the way to school. Ben's shorts were the fashionable length. Charlie walked on, trying to keep his knees bent so that his hems would look lower.

Soon Ron joined them. He, too, had proper length shorts. Charlie was starting to bend his knees in earnest now. He was dying of embarrassment.

Charlie even considers skipping the class outing, just because his shorts were a couple of inches too short. While the children are playing happily in the playground, Charlie leans against a wall. *That brought the shorts down a few inches—he decided to stay there. He would sacrifice running and having fun if it meant he could look cool.*

Not only is Charlie a slave to a few inches of material, he wants his mother to dance to the tune of kids' fashion too, without any consideration for her schedule: *Why hadn't his mother taken him to get new shorts?...It was her fault that he looked like a fool.*

Ask the students if they have ever been so controlled by fashion. Tell them about a time when you or another adult found that the need to be fashionable overrode common sense. (The author remembers wearing jeans that were very damp around the waist because they had not had time to dry before a party. They were her 'coolest' jeans and she had to wear them. She was miserably cold and uncomfortable all evening.)

This should be a light-hearted discussion, giving students a chance to laugh at themselves and their slavery to fashion and to be more tolerant of themselves and one another. If they do not want to participate or give examples because they feel ashamed, give them more examples. Giving examples of things we do simply to look 'with it' in the eyes of others can be very amusing and should be ice-breaking. Fashionable shoes (high ones, pointed ones, blister-inducing ones) would be a good starting point.

Point out that while we all want to look good to show respect for ourselves, others, and society by conforming to proper standards of dress, fashion is a relative thing. Explain what 'relative' means, and how fashion is always changing. Explain that, in spite of constant changes in women's fashion, girls and women have always been admired by boys and men for their femininity, and always will be. Similarly, in spite of changes in men's fashion over the years, girls and women have always admired boys and men for their masculinity, and always will. That never changes.

Note too that Charlie realises that his friends—Ron and Ben—will probably not reject him merely because his shorts are not long enough:

As Charlie watched his friends having fun, he remembered all the good times they'd had together in the park. Ben and Ron had never seemed to notice what he was wearing—they'd always just accepted him. Charlie thought they probably would now.

In fact, Ben and Ron wanted him to play with them. They did not even notice that his shorts weren't long enough. And when Charlie says he doesn't feel like playing right now, Ben asks: "You sick?" Charlie's real friends don't notice or care what his shorts are like.

B. The rebel

Alan managed to 'buck the trend' without even thinking or caring about it. Because he is so free and sure of himself, the crowd follows him. He makes the rules, set the tone, and is the leader of the pack. In fact, the chapter's title, 'Fashion Plate' refers to Alan, for his lack of interest in conforming turned him into a trend-setter. When he arrives wearing short-shorts, soon all the boys want short-shorts:

Alan wasn't bothered. Alan was Alan, and anybody who didn't like it could just go away. He was a natural leader and he wasn't going to be fazed by anyone's opinion...

In fact, by the end of the outing, most of the other boys had rolled their shorts up—to get more sun, they said—but really it was to look more like Alan.

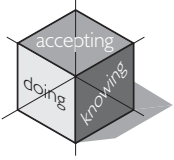
Even Charlie, who had suffered over having shorts that were too short, imitated Alan:

Charlie's mother asked him that evening, "Were your shorts all right?"

Charlie remembered all the time she had spent hemming them—and he rolled them back down. "Yeah," he said. "Sure. They were just right, Mum. Thanks."

This shows how fickle fashion is. Charlie and the other students are rather like sheep—they just follow the fad. Alan is more like the shepherd—although he is outnumbered, all the sheep do what he says. Ask students which they would rather be—sheep or a leader?

2 Accepting



Guided Work

Activity 1

Ask the students to look at Activity 22 in their student books (p.163) and answer the questions. Ask them to explain their answers.

Activity 22

The fashion industry makes money by playing upon people's desire to be accepted. If they say skirts are short this year, women run out to buy short skirts, even if long skirts were all the rage the year before. For men, it may be narrow ties or narrow lapels as opposed to the wider ones of the year before, and so on.

1. Do true friends judge each other by appearances?
2. Did Charlie's good friends, Ben and Ron, notice or care that his shorts were too short?
3. Charlie's mother worked hard to try to make his shorts right. Should she have gone out to the store late at night to buy him a more fashionable pair?
4. Alan doesn't follow the crowd—instead everyone ends up following Alan. What do they admire about him?

Activity 2

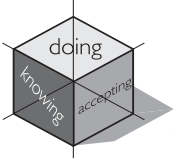
Bring in, or ask students to bring in, examples of fashions from past times (they could get these through library or internet-based research). They may find some of the fashions amusing, but the purpose is to gain perspective. One day children will look at pictures of today's fashions and find it absurd that people thought such things fashionable.

Activity 3

If possible, bring in plastic moulds for sweets or biscuits and enough clay for each student to model one item. The moulds should all be the same shape, and the clay the same colour. When everyone has finished, ask the students to hold up their 'sweets' or biscuits'. Say: "Wow, isn't that exciting! They're all alike. Wasn't that fun? Don't they look great?" Students will probably look blank. Explain to them that the clay is designed to conform, just like fashion.

Now let them remodel their clay any way they want. Offer them a selection of moulds (for those who do not want to model freestyle), and give those who want it more clay to work with. Ask them to show each other their finished creations. This should be much more exciting and fun. Emphasise that having everyone conform to exactly the same colour and mould isn't as exciting as creativity and diversity.

3 Doing



Evaluation

Emphasise that fashion and trends are relative and changeable. They should not control our lives. Encourage students to be leaders, not just followers, and to think independently.

Activity 1

Discuss with students their answers to Activity 22. Stress that true friendship cares about the inside, not the image or outside of a person. The fashion industry is restricted to outer appearance in order to sell—but external appearance is not our main dimension. Becoming slaves of fashion is like other slaveries: we then deny essential things—not caring about our parents' efforts to budget wisely, not valuing true friendships, but instead becoming envious of others' appearance and clothing.

There is a danger also of valuing people not for themselves but for their possessions and dress. Judging others by their clothes is easy to do, but is clearly not the intelligent way.

Activity 2

Explain to the students that as adults they will be amused by teenagers' dress and appearance, just as our parents and other adults are with us: every generation has different likes and there are always changes in fashion, clothes, make-up and even diets.

All these things are relative. One thing which never changes is our obligation to dress appropriately according to the occasion. This does not mean we must dress expensively, or just like everyone else.

Specific Resolutions

To be more tolerant of deviations from fashion and trends in ourselves and others.

Not to be afraid to be different if it means being more ourselves.

To pay more attention to the real values, virtues and talents of friends than to their exterior appearance or clothes.