

Character Object Lessons

Moral Muscles



This object lesson should take only 2 or 3 minutes.
Suitable for all ages – adapt wording as necessary.

You will need:

- Muscles – your own or someone else's!
- Several pieces of sports equipment that make demands on muscles such as a barbell, ball bat, football, basketball, ice skates, skis, etc.
- A large apple or other fruit; a large candy bar, and a bottle of drinking water or soft drink.
- A chair on which you can sit.
- A picture of a skeleton or a 3D plastic skeleton. Life-size plastic skeletons are available in some schools. You may also find them at stores or online supply sites selling Halloween decorations. The skeleton or picture you use should be easily seen from anywhere in the room. You may print the picture on the last page of this lesson, but if your group is large, you will need to enlarge it.

What to do:

1. Read the whole lesson ahead of time and prepare your props.
2. Begin by flexing your arm muscles – or have a person with well-developed arm muscles stand at the front and flex them visibly.

Wait a moment for the group to quiet. If talking persists, ask quietly for silence.

3. [Point to the flexed muscles.](#)
4. **Ask:** “What are these?”

5. **Say:** “Right. They are muscles. Of course, we aren’t seeing the muscles themselves. They are inside the skin.”
6. *Continue the flexing.*
7. **Say:** We see that the muscle is acting. It’s doing something. It’s exercising.”
8. **Say:** “Muscles have names like biceps, triceps, quadriceps, and even gluteus maximus.”
9. *Sit down on a chair.*
10. **Say:** “If I sit very still and tell you that I have strong quadriceps, you have no reason to believe me. You can’t see my quadriceps. As long as I sit here, you can’t see my quadriceps working, so there’s no proof that they are strong.”
11. *Stand up and do a couple of squats.* (Practice before lesson time or have someone do them for you – with a barbell, if possible.)
12. **Say:** When you see someone do ten or twenty squats in a row, you know that they have strong quadriceps. You can see the work the quadriceps are doing.
13. *Show several pieces of sports equipment, one at a time.*
14. **Say:** (about the equipment you’re showing) “When you swing a bat, your muscles act. When you throw a ball, your muscles do something.”
15. *Show the food and drink, one item at a time.*
16. **Ask:** (as you show each piece) “Do you need muscles to use this? What muscles?” (as you show each piece)
17. *Walk a few feet back and forth. Smile broadly. Bow several times. Swing your arms. Nod your head.*
18. **Say:** (as you perform the above) “We use muscles for many things, don’t we? What would happen if I got into bed tonight and stayed there for the rest of my life – completely stopped using my leg muscles?”
19. **Say:** “**Muscles have to be exercised, don’t they?**”
“If we don’t use muscles, they never get strong. If we don’t use them for a long time, they get weaker and weaker until one day they can’t do anything at all.”
“But if we do use them, they get stronger and stronger. They can do more and more. Your muscles can do more now than they could when you were born. If you exercise them, they will get stronger and be able to do even more.”
20. **Say:** “**Character traits are moral muscles!**”
21. **Say:** Things like responsibility, courage, love, and honesty are like your muscles. You can’t see them, just by looking. You can look at the people sitting near you and you can’t see if they have honesty inside or not.”
22. **Ask:** “What has to happen before you know if they have honesty?”

23. **Say:** Right! They have to exercise it. Before others can tell that you have honesty, you have to exercise your honesty muscle. As you exercise your honesty muscle, it gets stronger and stronger. It becomes easier and easier for you to be honest.
24. **Say:** The same is true of respect. As you exercise respect, it gets stronger and stronger. People can see that you have respect because it is doing things.
25. **Say:** “Character traits are moral muscles, and they need to be exercised so that they don’t grow weaker and die. If we don’t exercise them faithfully and vigorously every day, we won’t have them.”
26. **Say:** “Now. Let’s think about one more thing.

Without moral muscles, you can’t have character.

27. **Show the skeleton as you ask:** “Can bones move without muscles?”
28. **Say:** “No, muscles makes bones move. Without muscles, we wouldn’t be able to open our mouths to talk, smile, or eat. Our hands couldn’t pick up a book or a sandwich. We couldn’t digest food. Our legs couldn’t walk or run. We couldn’t move anything on our insides or outsides.”
29. **Ask:** “What would happen to your bones if someone took away all of your muscles?”
30. **Say:** “That’s right! Your bones would fall into a pile on the floor! Your body depends on muscles to hold the body together.”
31. **Say:** “Your body of character depends on moral muscles – character traits – to hold it together. If you do not exercise character traits, your character will die.”
32. **Say:** “It’s good to exercise your body’s muscles every day and make them strong. But let’s remember that it’s much more important to exercise your moral muscle. It’s more important to exercise character traits such as honesty, respect, courage, and self-control – to build strong character.”

Christian workers may want to link this lesson to the following Bible verse:

“For bodily discipline (exercise) is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” I Timothy 4:8

