

**Virtue Education and Early Childhood Learners**

By

Victoria Rivera

A Master's Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Science in Education - Montessori

*Kateri Carver, PhD*

---

Kateri Carver, Ph.D.

6/10/24

---

Date

University of Wisconsin-River Falls  
2024

**Abstract:**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of specific instruction of virtue on early childhood learners. An adapted virtue curriculum focusing on the cardinal virtues was used in conjunction with teachings on kindness to build an awareness in vocabulary and example of the cardinal virtues. Parent surveys were sent out via email twice per week and instruction was given three times per week. Older students were given the opportunity to record what they learned in packets of papers stapled together and termed virtue journals. Prior to the initial week of virtue education, participants were introduced to the Kindness Jar which recorded instances of kindness witnessed in the classroom and shared by the participants in a group setting. The most significant findings indicated saint stories as being most influential on the participants who were early childhood learners in a Catholic Montessori school in the Midwest region of the United States. The most relevant data was collected from the virtue journal drawings of the five- and six-year-olds and written responses from parent surveys. These both indicated a strong recall of saint stories which were at times associated with the virtue studied that particular week. Further research on the effect of exclusively using saint stories to teach virtue would be another area of interest, which could add to the current body of research.

***Keywords:*** *virtue, virtue education, cardinal virtues, early childhood education, Montessori*

## Table of Contents

<i>Literature Review</i> .....	4
<i>Theoretical Framework - Montessori Philosophy and Pedagogy</i> .....	14
<i>Definitions of Relevant Terms</i> .....	19
<i>Research Design</i> .....	20
<i>Methodology</i> .....	21
<i>Results and Discussion</i> .....	28
<i>Limitations</i> .....	35
<i>Further Steps</i> .....	37
<i>References</i> .....	39
<i>Appendices</i> .....	42
<b>Appendix A: IRB Approval Document</b> .....	42
<b>Appendix B: Informed Consent for Child</b> .....	43
<b>Appendix C: Adult Informed Consent Form</b> .....	46
<b>Appendix D: Instrument 1 - Kindness Jar</b> .....	48
<b>Appendix E: Instrument 2 - Initial Parent Surveys</b> .....	49
<b>Appendix F: Instrument 3 – Virtue Journal</b> .....	51
<b>Appendix G: Instrument 4 – Parent Observation Survey</b> .....	56
<b>Appendix H: Instrument 5 – Teacher Observations</b> .....	58
<b>Appendix I: Tool 1 – Kindness Jar</b> .....	59
<b>Appendix J: Tool 2 -Adapted Virtues in Practice Curriculum</b> .....	60
<b>Appendix K: Narrative Data from Parent Surveys</b> .....	65
<b>Appendix L: Data from Instrument 5-Teacher Observations</b> .....	76
<b>Appendix M: Response Data from Parent Surveys</b> .....	77
<b>Appendix N: Scanned Virtue Journals and Saint References</b> .....	78

## Literature Review

### Moral development in the early years

Over 100 years ago, leaders in education “held that schools must be places where students directly experience the skills and dispositions that they need to be productive adult citizens” (Elias & Yuan, 2020). Therefore, over a century ago, schooling was described as a place for more than simply academics. School was a place where the child is given the opportunities to develop into an adult, specifically, a productive and responsible person. Recently, the above phrase has been slightly amended to having school be a place where children can gain “the essential attributes that need to be cultivated in students to help prepare them for a ‘flourishing’ life in today’s society” (Elias & Yuan, 2020, p. 19). Also, over a century ago, Dr. Montessori developed her own method of education focusing on the stages of early childhood (three to six years old), and stated, “Start at the point from which everything is constructed” in reference to understanding the development of the child into a man (2012, p. 5). In other words, building a flourishing adult according to Montessori begins with the very young child because this is where construction starts.

If education is not limited to the core academic subjects but is also focused on the development of the person, then there must be another area or areas in which the student must be instructed. This educational gap leads to the argument for virtue education as a means for the moral development of children. Theoretically, if the child is taught the concept of virtue from a young age and given examples of virtues in action, then virtue will incarnate through the child’s behavior and form the person they strive to become. This literature review aims to show the importance of moral development, give a brief history of character education, and define virtue, as it will be used throughout the rest of this paper.

### **Moral Development and Its Importance**

Moral development is a complex topic because of the multifaceted nature of morality. An individual's morality may be examined developmentally, psychologically, philosophically, epistemologically, etc. (Killen & Smetana, 2013). There must first be the baseline assumption that every human being has a set of morals by which they live. These morals are evidenced by an individual's core judgements on welfare, justice and rights that are considered necessary (Killen, 2013, p. 3). Since humans show to uphold a set of morals, there have been many theories postulated on how to influence the development of these morals. One line of thought provided by Turiel in Killen's *Handbook of Moral Development* proposed morals develop through the child's reciprocal relationships between adults and other children (Killen & Smetana, 2013, p. 3). Another explanation of moral development concerns the external circumstances and interactions with other cultures that tend to happen throughout daily life. These experiences lead an individual to an awareness of inequalities and injustices (2013). The judgements of these inequalities and injustices are defined as morals. To better understand the person's development, it is necessary to go back, as do most theorists, to when the person is in the beginning stages of development: early childhood.

Hibana researched the connection between moral values and religious development. Hibana's work reinforced the importance of early childhood education and its influence on childhood moral development (2021). This study notes how the process of development flows as outlined below:

- first, inculcating attitudes and behavior; second, to be an
- independent person who is physically and psychologically mature;
- third, cultivating good character; fourth, able to distinguish good

and bad behavior; fifth, the creation of a learning process for the attainment of shared goals; and sixth, instilling a habit of discipline. (p. 7104)

Hibana explains that process happens throughout early childhood and can extend into adolescence. Later Hibana went on further to describe the influential factors of childhood moral development. Of the three major influences, school was listed as one of these because of the character building and social development that takes place in this setting (2021).

Christien and Narvaez, researchers interested in the moral development of children, demonstrate significant connection between moral development and brain development in their findings. According to Trevathan, as cited by Christien and Navaraez (2012), 90% of the brain has been completely developed by five years of age. Therefore, to morally develop an individual, it will be beneficial for interventions to take place prior to the child turning five years old (Christien & Navaraez, 2012). Killen's analysis of moral formation aligns with Hibana's in describing moral formation beginning prior to the child's intellect and will being activated in making moral decisions (Killen, 2013). There is little debate on whether people develop morals. Rather, the debate is the means of this development. A historical perspective of morality and character education can give some insight to the thought behind character education as a means for moral development.

### **History of Character Education**

The development of moral character was postulated to lead to moral behavior, and eventually, a moral society (Wang & Hackett, 2015). The movement toward character education can be predicated on this assumption. This understanding of moral progression can be traced as far back as Plato and Aristotle, who taught that education's purpose was to train good and

virtuous citizens (Edmonson, 2009; Wang & Hackett, 2015). Almost 1,500 years later, Thomas Aquinas provided further thoughts on man's meaning and happiness as the goal of human life. This ideal of meaning, coming from the pursuit of happiness, later influenced Aquinas' development of cardinal virtues: Justice, Temperance, Prudence, and Fortitude ((Thomas Aquinas (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy), 2022). Reason, intellect, and will were common terms in historical debates on morality. Character education as it is known in today's terms grew out of this propensity to developing personhood in parallel to academic training. It should be noted, however, the educated individual of the past was essentially defined as virtuous. Whereas, presently, there is a distinction between an individual having "book smarts" versus "street smarts" (Edmonson, 2009). In the past, a truly educated person was "both wise and complete" (2009, p. 3).

In *Character Education: An Historical Overview*, John Locke, an influential 17<sup>th</sup>-century English philosopher, is referred to as holding virtue to be primary to education and learning as secondary (2009). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, "common" schools were founded in America to educate the youth of the country on the "moral sensibilities and good habit [that] need to sustain not only their own lives but also a healthy democracy" (2009, p.4). Public education in the 1800s, as described by Edmonson, relied upon a biblical foundation to inform their method of character education. Education at this time was seen as being not only good for the individual but for society. Even with the addition of faith, this was still consistent with the connection between virtue or character education being good for self and society which goes as far back as Plato.

However, mid-way through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the focus shifted towards academics, which was characterized by knowledge of the facts, above teaching morals. This shift in focus led to the decline of moral education as the new philosophies being proposed caused a wave of relativism

to wash over society (Edmonson, 2009). For example, logical positivism led to a belief in only facts (what could be proven true), while values were cast aside as subjective feelings (Edmundson, 2009). Therefore, what was deemed good was no longer considered universal across cultures and religions as it once was. Kohlberg, a popular American psychologist in the mid-1900s, added to the confusion as he proposed the pursuit of the good was an overly simplistic model for moral development. In his model, he supported logical positivism through the example of the pre-conventional child who understood right and wrong by the reactions of punishment or reward by the authority figures (teachers or parents) in various situations but asserted the child had no consideration for the reasons behind the reward or punishment (Libretexts, 2022; Edmonson, 2009; Killen, 2013). The privatization of values followed, and consequently, moral education was eschewed from public education. Morality became privatized in the sense that it was only in reference to the individual. The government and public would no longer impose a standard set of morals because leading psychologists of the time had proven this to be contrary to human nature. As Kohlberg's developmental theory influenced this movement away from a standard set of values, adolescents were encouraged to discover for themselves what is just and moral according to nature, rather than being informed by elders or teachers (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977).

### **Character Education in the Present**

There is a current resurgence of virtue education in the educational field because of a return toward focusing on man achieving his true purpose instead of the propagation of a new democracy by instilling moral sensibilities. This has been at least in part championed by the Positive Psychology movement. The term Positive Psychology was first used by Maslow, the psychologist who developed the hierarchy of needs, in 1954 (Nash, 2023). Then, in 1998, it was



brought to the forefront of the field by Martin Seligman when he became the president of the American Psychological Association. Positive Psychology emphasized studying humans in relation to their strengths and optimum well-being instead of their weaknesses and sicknesses (Ackerman, 2023). Alongside the popularity of positive psychology, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) began to gain ground in the field of education. SEL programs advertise their greatest strength as helping children to acquire self-awareness of emotions and then to develop compassion for others (Social and emotional learning: A short history, 2011). On the surface, this sounds similar to the origins of virtue education which focused on the betterment of self and society. However, it shall be further discussed below how SEL is quite different and potentially in direct opposition to virtue education. The SEL movement grew to become such a force by the early 21<sup>st</sup> century that some states in the U.S. have SEL competencies included as part of their academic standards (Social and emotional learning: A short history, 2011).

Fowers et al. presented a thorough evaluation in favor of the STRIVE-4 model, which is a scalar model that claims to quantify virtue. According to Fowers et al., there was extensive research on Positive Psychology in relation to virtues, but some limitations arose about the extent to which Positive Psychology should be equated to virtue education. Positive Psychology lacks a thorough understanding of the depth to which virtues must be taught and especially practiced. As a result, Positive Psychology has led to vice through individualism and ethnocentrism instead of virtue (Fowers, 2020). This follows the issue with the privatization of values mentioned above. Since SEL is based on a subjective version of what is considered an individual's happiness, it cannot fall under the category of virtue education because it is not oriented toward an objective good for the individual *and* the group. For example: The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines SEL as

the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (*Fundamentals of SEL - CASEL, 2023*)

This definition is lacking in specificity and orientation to the good. By avoiding the word good and using words such as “healthy identities”, “supportive relationships”, and “caring decisions”, CASEL allows for subjectivity and personal interpretation to be the motive force. Although there are seemingly many similarities between SEL and virtue education, the stark difference is how “good” is essential to virtue and its inclusion of being oriented not only to self, but also to others. In contrast, SEL is ambiguous in its definition and focuses on the subjective such as identities and emotions. Therefore, if virtue must be oriented towards the individual as well as the collective whole, SEL, and other curricula, though they have fallen under the character education umbrella, cannot be considered equal to virtue education because of the lack of objectivity.

Horowski conducted research on the relationship between virtue and education in public and Christian settings. Through background research, he concluded that direct instruction of virtue has at least a small contribution to the development of virtue in children (2020). Although he acknowledges immediately afterward, didactics alone will not suffice in developing virtue in practice. Horowski’s description of the ideal setting for moral education is a community. In fact, he essentially describes a classroom community as he writes,

The privileged place for moral virtues’ development is a community in which an agent is able to interact with others in achieving a common good, and where a

particular person is entrusted with responsibility for the realisation of specific tasks. (2020, p. 452)

When considering Horowski's ideal characteristics of an environment ripe for moral development, the classroom is a suitable example, especially a typical preschool classroom with its emphasis on community. In a classroom, students are interacting with others, potentially for the first time, outside of their family unit. The student must learn to work alongside others who look different, act differently, and potentially live according to a different set of values from them (Horowski, 2020). Then, the analogy to a classroom could be further applied that students are entrusted with responsibilities to care for that space: lead a line, turn in homework, complete assignments independently, etc. In the quote above there is no mention of direct instruction, but rather, *an environment* as being conducive to the development of virtue.

Fowers' (2021) conclusions are slightly contrasted with Horowski's conclusions because he argues that even short-term behavior modification interventions related to virtue encouraged virtue development. However, Fowers acknowledges that these short-term endeavors do not provide enough for true moral development to take place (p. 140). However, Shankland (2009), who conducted a study on coping strategies of students from different school environments (Montessori, Steiner, and New School), noted how the teacher's direction and promotion of problem-solving skills had the potential to further the development of the child's control of behavior. Coping was defined as having a cognitive and behavioral component, according to Shankland et al. (2009). This effect of influence by the teacher on the students can further be applied to virtue since virtue has been defined as repeated behaviors oriented towards choosing the good.

What has also been found to be effective in cultivating virtue in students is the values of the school and its staff. As character education returns to educational environments, schools are developing value statements with the intent of those statements guiding school culture (Edmonson, 2009; Meidl & Meidl, 2013). In a study comparing Catholic, Quaker (an offshoot of Christianity that believes in Jesus but does not have any religious hierarchy or authority), and public schools, there was no specific curriculum taught to students in the Catholic and Quaker schools. Yet the observations of both environments, in conjunction with staff interviews, reflected an implicit instilling of positive character and values as evidenced by parents' and teachers' descriptions of students as being kind and respectful. Part of this was attributed to the staff united by upholding similar values. In the public school, attempts were made at explicit character development, but the comments made about the interventions indicated the staff themselves, hardly believed in the mode of implementation. One teacher interview explained,

I think it is harder in a big school. If the teachers don't buy into some of the simple things, hallway rules . . . . . One teacher might enforce it; that teacher is a you-know-what and another teacher doesn't do anything about it. Everybody has to do it. (Meidl & Meidl, 2013)

This teacher succinctly pinpointed the commonality that linked the two private schools and yet was missing at the public school: a staff that upholds the same values. This unity of values can be equated to the above discussion of a pursuit for a common good or objectivity. Therefore, while cohesion and consistency of values among staff characterized the harmony of the two private schools, lack of adherence to and inconsistency of values among staff led to chaos and dissatisfaction in the public-school setting.

### **Defining Virtue**

For this study, virtue is the mechanism of interest concerning moral development. Moral development cannot be ignored because it has to do with the responsibility that comes with being human and the consequences of a person's actions which affect themselves and others. Turiel, as quoted in Killen (2013), argues that all human beings are of equal dignity and worth regardless of their societal status. Turiel cites Nussbaum as proposing that each person should be treated as an end, rather than a means to an end. In light of this, the consequences of one's actions must consider the other, regardless of who the other is. If the action is oriented towards the choosing of the good of the individual and the whole, then the act has the potential to be virtuous. Therefore, practicing virtue directly contributes to moral development.

The ideal of pursuing virtue goes back to Thomas Aquinas and even further to Aristotle, who taught that an act was deemed as good or bad depending on how it either encouraged or deterred a person from their proper human end (Floyd, n.d). The proper end was rooted in the person's dignity and how that person's fulfillment is accomplished through the pursuit of the good, which leads to happiness (Aquinas, n.d). Virtue has been discussed by educators, philosophers, and theologians for ages. Every religion has some form of virtue or ideals in character that it upholds as being essential to one's purpose (Kristjansson, 2013). However, within this commonality, there remains much confusion and intermixing of terms regarding morals, virtues, and character. According to Kristjansson, virtues are described broadly as favorable human characteristics, while others describe virtue as the highest of good character traits (2013). The motivation for decisions is hoped to be derived from the pursuit of good (Horowski, 2020). Additionally, moral development, plays a role in the eventual decision to act from the intellect and will (2020). In following Aquinas' understanding, virtue relates to performing acts in accord with human nature. These acts are submitted first to reason and

rationally oriented towards happiness in which is encompassed an objective good that is not only for the individual but for the collective whole (Floyd, n.d.). Virtues are the skills constitutive to living out man's true meaning which is the pursuit of happiness. Happiness and virtue are connected by necessity according to Aquinas' perspective (Kristjansson, 2013). For the purposes of this research, virtues will be linked to kindness initially since the subjects are early childhood learners. Children in an early childhood setting are familiar with kindness through the models of their teachers and parents. An act is often called kind when it is made in consideration of another individual, sometimes at the expense of the person committing the kindness.

### **Theoretical Framework - Montessori Philosophy and Pedagogy**

Dr. Maria Montessori was an Italian physician turned educational philosopher who lived from 1870-1952. She developed a method of education which provided for human flourishing. The work of the child creating themselves began in earnest once the child became a "conscious worker" (Montessori, 1988). In her book, *The Absorbent Mind*, Dr. Montessori describes the conscious worker as a young child who has developed a conscious awareness or will to act. There is a "constructive perfectionment" that is taking place in the child between the ages of three to six. This was evidenced by the child's change in activity around three years of age and that activity continuing until around six years old (1988). This foundational step in development subsequently forms into the capacity to reason.

### **Character Development**

Although a plethora of research and philosophical discussions on character development exists, most of this body of knowledge focuses on the character's development during adulthood. Montessori references character development, or virtue, as being essential to education (1988). She continues by offering an insight on the difficulty of defining and the universal applicability

of the concept of character. “There is no ultimate concept [of character] acceptable to all. Yet, intuitively, everyone knows the importance of that sum total of qualities that goes universally under the same name (1988, p. 175). This supports Montessori’s own conscious implementation of character development through indirect means as she created her ideal method. She further calls attention to the unexplored gap of character education between birth and adulthood.

Montessori formed her educational philosophy through hours of observation and experimentation of didactic methods on early childhood children (ages three to six). Therefore, she reasoned that visible behavior expressed the development of character in the child since it can be observed.

Montessori further explains this assertion through the example of intelligence of movement. The body that moves without purpose or causes destruction is not intelligent in the sense that it is not controlled by the mind (Montessori, 1988). When there is a disconnect between the intellect and body, movement will appear chaotic, unplanned, and lacking an end. However, the controlled and coordinated movements of the body manifest the child’s connection between brain and body. It further reveals an integration of his capabilities.

The focus of character development must find its beginnings in the young child. Montessori bases this assertion on the Planes of Development she defined to explain the progression of the child’s overall development. During the First Plane which lasts from birth until six years old, the child transitions from an unconscious individual to a conscious worker. This new milestone in development demonstrates “the construction of the human individual” (Standing, 1998, p. 112) The Second Plane continues from six to 12 years old and is characterized by stability and community. As the child grows in confidence and strength, they also desire to collaborate with peers in their work and play. Throughout the Third Plane, termed

a “period of transformation”, the child is actualizing into adulthood. He acquires the skills necessary to function in adult society, while also coming to discover his place in society.

Of particular interest for framing this research study is the first Plane of Development because of how the child forms himself into a human individual. This is the period of preparation for morals to fully develop and be acted upon which will follow in the Second Plane. Montessori names moral development as one of the chief characteristics of the child between six and twelve years old. Montessori’s method of education was conscious to provide the optimal environment which would allow for the flourishing of moral development. The child’s psyche necessitates a certain amount and type of stimuli in the environment, otherwise the psyche develops with distortion (Montessori, 2012). Montessori elaborates with analogy to a child who has rickets as the beginning of the man who in later years grows to be physically contorted (2012). She applies the analogy to the psychological development of the man. Similar to the child who suffers from rickets has experienced physical malnourishment which leads to physical deformity in adulthood, the child who lacks nourishment for the psyche, develops a deformed morality. This adds greater weight to the period from the ages of two to three years. It is at this time the child is forming the core of his personality. The beginnings of his character develop here which will fully form once he is an adult.

### **Freedom and Limits**

A defining principle of Montessori philosophy is the tension between freedom and responsibility. Once the child transitions into a conscious worker, freedom becomes on the one hand, dangerous and, on the other, packed with potential. The expansiveness of freedom necessitates moderation because of its potential for great harm as well as good. Standing remarks, “It [activity] will function as the instrument of a free moral agent—an immortal soul if



you like—a person so free that his own eternal destiny is placed within his own hands.”

(Standing, 1998, p. 208). This strong belief in the freedom of the child corresponds to the philosophy of virtue being an intentional choice. Without freedom, a child’s choice lacks the necessary characteristics to fall into the category of virtue.

### **Will**

The will is conceived in the conscious worker, which is typically observed around age three (Montessori, 1988). Montessori comments on the observable signs of this transformation, “as soon as he makes an action deliberately, of his own accord, this force [the will] has begun to enter into his consciousness” (Montessori, 1988, p. 230). This marks a new stage in the child growing into who they will become as an adult. The child is no longer directed by an external force but his own internal “ego which guides and directs.” (Standing, 2012, p. 112). These newfound faculties build on the first three years of life, characterized by intense periods of observation and receptivity, though they appear largely passive. The conscious worker wills, thinks, and remembers.

When the will first emerges, it is still quite incomplete. Once the child has shown the beginnings of the emergence of the will, the Montessori guide takes notice and intentionally focuses on the development of this newfound power within the child. According to classroom lectures by Dr. Carver, a director of Montessori teacher education programs, the will is a mental faculty which means it is a natural phenomenon when it appears but also a skill which requires a motive to be developed. It is a cognitive power, essential for life that requires practice. For example, an individual with mental illness can experience a loss of the will to live. The will is a human characteristic not seen in animals. We also understand will as a verb. It involves making choices and willing oneself into action. The will is dynamic and can be strengthened through

activity and exercise. This also connotes the need for the will to be reasonably challenged (Carver, 2022). Montessori's method of education focused on creating an environment which provides the challenges and opportunities for the development of the will. This method developed into allowing freedom of movement and choice in the classroom in the early childhood classroom, lovingly referred to as the Children's House by Dr. Montessori.

### **Discipline**

Students portray discipline in the Children's House by the very manner of their movements. They are given freedom of choice and movement in the environment. Instead of loud shouting and running around, measured activity such as children quietly walking about and manipulating their chosen work is often observed (Montessori, 1972). In *The Absorbent Mind*, Montessori (1988) explains, "discipline is born when the child concentrates his attention on some object that attracts him and provides him not only with a useful exercise but with a control of error. . . . These little conquerors of themselves and of the world about them are real supermen, who show us the divine worth of man's soul." She has a clear understanding of how the child will develop with discipline. The teacher must concentrate on ensuring the child's needs are met by the child himself. This combination of needs and the child's ability to meet them provide fertile ground for further developments in discipline. There is a cyclical nature to a child identifying their need and setting about to fulfill it. This is the hallmark of the Montessori classroom. These displays of discipline are the steppingstones that will lead to future decision making that go beyond the child's desire for only caring for self. If the child can identify their own needs and act to fulfill them, then the next logical step will be for the child to eventually look outside of themselves, at the needs of the community, and act on the impetus to provide for the needs of their society. Finally, the development of self-discipline is the condition for the

formation of habits. As acknowledged from Aristotle forward, virtues are habits. Therefore, the reason for the specific instruction of virtues is related to the environment being a natural preparation for virtue.

### **Definitions of Relevant Terms**

#### **Terms within the paper**

**Good:** This is in reference to the interconnectedness between the transcendentals of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty which are foundational for human flourishing according to Aquinas and Aristotle. Whenever good is referred to it is with the assumption that it has stood up to the test of being both true and beautiful. It is also assumed all people have a conscience or moral compass.

**Happiness:** understood in terms of completion, perfection, or well-being; according to Aquinas, it will never be complete in this life since final happiness consists in beatitude or supernatural union with God ((Thomas Aquinas (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy), 2022)

#### **Terms within my study (some slightly adapted from virtues in practice curriculum)**

**Virtue:** “A good choice for me and for you that I make again and again and again.”

**Justice:** “Being fair and giving each his due.” It is to note that “Being fair” was the definition given in the original curriculum. I added, “and giving each his due.”

**Temperance:** “Enjoying things in a proper, balanced way”

**Fortitude:** “Being brave and strong in the face of trials”

**Prudence:** “Making good decisions in specific circumstances”

## Research Design

### Setting and Purpose

The purpose of this research arose from its setting, with its specific mission and my observational experiences with the children. This study was conducted at an early childhood Montessori classroom at a Catholic School in the Midwest. The school's mission statement includes "the goal to prepare students to live out the Gospel message, achieve academic excellence, and joyfully lead by faith, virtue and reason". According to this statement, faith, virtue, and reason are the foundations which the school believes will allow children to live, achieve, and lead. At this school, faith is taught for two hours, once a week, in small groups of 10-12 children who go to "the Atrium" which is a specially designed classroom where they are taught the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS). CGS is religious education founded on the Montessori method of education. The Atrium is the specially curated environment for the instruction of CGS. It is filled with didactic materials which children manipulate as they learn about parables from the Bible, the life of Jesus, Catholic liturgy, and the core of Catholic theology in a concrete experiential way. Children are given time and space for contemplation and individual work, which is similar in method to their experience in the classroom. At our school, the Montessori method is followed from the age of toddlers (~18 months) through eighth grade. Each classroom is modified to the size and needs of the students within it. The older students are grouped into multi-age classrooms following the ages of development as described above. The classroom is the main setting for the child to develop reason as stated in the mission statement. Thus, following the mission, faith and reason are taught in specific places and at specific times at this school. Virtue, however, remains rather untouched in this educational setting, or at least the direct instruction of virtue. This apparent gap in living out the school's mission, in combination

with the gap in available virtue education research on the early childhood population, inspired the purpose of this research which is to specifically instruct young children in virtue and observe the effects of this instruction. In the review of literature, we looked at Hibana's work on the influence of school as a source of moral development which is of particular interest because this will be the context of this investigation into moral development through direct instruction on virtue.

The participants in the study included 23 students in a Montessori classroom. All students were included in the general instructional time on the cardinal virtues. A smaller segment of students, only the five- and six-year-old children, completed the virtue journals.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do children define and identify virtue when specifically instructed on the cardinal virtues?
2. Sub Question: What is retained by early childhood learners who receive virtue education?
3. Sub Question: What will drawings in virtue journals indicate about the child's understanding of virtue?
4. Sub Question: Can children operationalize a virtue?

### **Methodology**

This descriptive research study sought to examine the practice of cardinal virtues in a Montessori classroom setting through multiple weekly lessons on virtues. This employs largely qualitative research methods which included the intervention of an adapted virtues curriculum for the specific instruction of virtues in an early childhood classroom. The data collected was mostly qualitative, with some quantitative data also included.

The virtue framework used in this study was influenced by Thomas Aquinas, and practices from the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, developed by Dr. Sofia Cavalletti, were implemented in the design of this study. Aquinas selected four virtues from a longer list described in one of his theological writings. He classified these four virtues: Justice, Temperance, Fortitude, and Prudence as “cardinal”, a word meaning ‘hinge’ since he claimed the success of one’s life hinged on their mastery (Floyd, n.d.). These four virtues were the most logical to teach since, according to Aquinas, all other virtues build off these four cardinal virtues. During the instructional time children were given the definition of virtue as “making a good choice for me and for you, which I make again and again and again.” This was based on Aquinas’s definition of virtue being an intentional, rational choice towards the good and perfected with practice (Thomas Aquinas, n.d.).

Sofia Cavalletti’s development of CGS influenced the design and instruments used in the study. Dr. Cavalletti was a theologian with a doctorate in Hebrew and Semitic languages which contributed to her reputation as a biblical scholar. Gianna Gobbi, a Montessori trained guide, came alongside Dr. Cavalletti and together they developed the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. As stated above, CGS is the method of education in the faith used by my school. CGS began as a Catholic Montessori-based faith formation program in the mid 1950s. Since then, CGS has been adopted by other faiths and adapted to their beliefs. “Godly Play” is one such example of an adaptation.

Together, Gobbi and Dr. Cavalletti used their expertise to develop CGS into a new method of faith formation. As they observed, practiced, and documented the CGS method over the course of a quarter of a century, one specific method gave direct insights into the child’s understanding in their faith formation - their hand drawings. Progressions in faith can be difficult

to objectify in such a way as to present “outcomes” since faith is of a less tangible nature and characterized more by internal development. Yet, through their diligence and dedication, Cavalletti and Gobbi collected the children’s hand drawn, colored images produced on blank paper. Based on the experience of these founders of CGS, these drawings furnished tangible qualitative evidence. From a DVD documentary comes the publication *The Development of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd: Inside the Atria in Rome* which explains the history and shows the original sites with Cavalletti and Gobbi. Included in this publication are numerous hand drawings from children between ages three to twelve.

In one example, Cavalletti describes the deep level of comprehension by the child of the liturgical and biblical references:

Now, let’s observe the above drawing, and we will say once again that it was really worth the twenty-year wait. This is the drawing of N., a seven-year-old boy. . . . but started attending at the age of three. One day, without anyone mentioning the material we were discussing here [the Eucharistic Presence of the Good Shepherd], he drew the elements of the parable and the Eucharist on two parallel lines, writing: “This” (the parable) “is equal to this” (the liturgical celebration).” Facts like these seem a challenge to “the wise and intelligent” . . .

(p. 7)

In another description of a child’s drawing, Cavalletti wrote, “I invite you to take a long look at the above drawing, and to let you yourselves be drawn into the outburst of joy that emanates from it” (p. 5). As the curriculum of CGS was developed, these drawings became the greatest source of qualitative evidence of the child’s faith formation.

Since the children are accustomed to drawing in the CGS Atrium as well as in their classroom, I chose to offer the same method to collect data on their internalization and understanding of virtues. Many researchers use hand drawings as data as evidence. Brailas commented on the significance of including this evidence saying, “Participant-produced [drawings] provide access to non-verbal meanings and facilitate participants’ sharing of thoughts, feelings and experiences which are not easily communicated otherwise” (p. 4447). This was true for the two CGS foundresses as well, and they documented the experience in their work with children. I chose to provide children with a blank journal which functioned as both a data collection instrument and as a tool for their drawing during my intervention of teaching virtues.

The following is the sequence of my intervention, the tools and the instruments employed.

**Table 1**

*Overview of Virtue Study*

<b>Week:</b>	<b>Virtue</b>	<b>Tools</b>	<b>Instruments: Kindness Jar (Appendix D) Initial Parent Survey (Appendix E) Virtue Journal (Appendix F) Parent Observation Survey (Appendix G)</b>
Week 1	Kindness Jar	Kindness Jar	Kindness Jar (daily) Initial Parent Surveys (1x/week)
Week 2	Justice	Adapted Virtue Curriculum	Kindness Jar (daily) Virtue Journal (2x/week) Online Parent Surveys (2x/week)
Week 3	Justice	Adapted Virtue Curriculum	Kindness Jar (daily) Virtue Journal (5/6 yo; 1x/week) Online Parent Surveys (2x/week)
Week 4	Temperance	Adapted Virtue Curriculum	Kindness Jar (daily) Virtue Journal (1x/week) Online Parent Surveys (2x/week)
Week 5	Fortitude	Adapted Virtue Curriculum	Kindness Jar (daily) Virtue Journal (1x/week) Online Parent Surveys (2x/week)
Week 6	Prudence	Adapted Virtue Curriculum	Kindness Jar (daily) Virtue Journal (1x/week) Online Parent Surveys (2x/week)



### **Virtue Instruction and Instruments**

In the initial week, children were introduced to the Kindness Jar through a book called “How Full Is Your Bucket? For Kids” by Tom Rath. In the following weeks, one virtue per week was introduced in the following order: Justice, Temperance, Fortitude, and Prudence. The order of presentation follows the order of the original curriculum which was adapted to meet the timeline of this study. The original curriculum titled *Virtues in Practice* was created by the Dominican Sisters of Saint Cecilia. It was intended for Catholic schools to use the activities and lessons over the course of three years, with each month focusing on a different virtue which corresponded to a particular saint. In the *Virtues in Practice* curriculum design, each virtue could have been extended for an entire month. However, due to time constraints and limited lessons and activities provided in the original curriculum, my adapted curriculum condensed the time given to each virtue from one month to one week. This adapted curriculum can be viewed in further detail in Appendix J. Each virtue was presented in isolation to allow for deeper learning and prevent confusion since the name of each virtue was a new vocabulary word for the children to learn. The core components for each virtue according to the *Virtues in Practice* curriculum included a definition, a saint, and a group activity which took the form of a game or drawing prompt. Therefore, these parts were retained, but condensed into in a shorter timeline in the adapted curriculum.

In this classroom, this virtue instruction time took place at the end of the morning before heading to recess. All the children were called to gather on a large rug for what we called community time, where the teacher typically shares lessons in a large group setting. The virtue lessons specifically took anywhere from five to ten minutes. First there would be a review of what is virtue (a good choice for me and for you that I make again and again and again) with

words and hand motions. Then the specific virtue with its definition would be introduced. If it was the proper day, I would share the saint story by reading the short two to three sentences included in the description. Depending on the saint, if I knew more, I would add in a couple of details that I knew about the saint to the story already provided. After sharing about the saint or reviewing the saint story, I would ask questions to check for comprehension. Then that would be the conclusion of the virtue time. Next, I would move on to asking if anyone had an act of kindness or example of virtues shown.

While the *Virtues in Practice* curriculum provided a framework for my intervention, I was curious about the transference from school to home given my plan of virtue instruction. My research design included regular parent surveys throughout the study which were used to collect data related to behavior outside of the school setting. There were two types of parent surveys: an initial survey and all subsequent surveys. The first survey of the week was sent after the first or second lesson. The second survey was sent at the end of the week, after all lessons had been presented to the children. The purpose of sending two surveys was to track the progression of learning or understanding virtue in the short term, throughout the week. The surveys were designed as an instrument to answer the subsidiary question of “does virtue education in school carry over to other environments?”

Appendix E shows the initial survey questions sent out during Week 1: Kindness Jar introductory lessons which was comprised of four questions, two short answer questions and two yes/no questions. For the remaining five weeks of the study, parents received surveys twice per week via email which included a link to a Google form for them to fill out. These surveys included five questions: two yes/no, two short answer questions, and one rating scale from low to high (Appendix G). Most of the participants are home with their parents when not in school.

Therefore, parents potentially have the greatest insight into the behavior and development of their child. The surveys allowed for more individualized results on whether a child could define virtue which was part of the main research question. This was gauged quantitatively with a rated response option to answer the question how well the parent thought their child understood the virtue from that week.

The next design component was the Kindness Jar. At least daily and sometimes twice per day, children were given the opportunity to verbally share acts of kindness or virtue demonstrated by themselves or others. This became the Kindness Jar which is described in Appendix D. For every act of kindness or virtue reported, a marble was added to the Kindness Jar. This measured if the children could identify virtue being put into practice. Although, it was labelled the “Kindness Jar”, it was later explained to the children that virtues could be included in this category. The Kindness Jar was introduced because the social norm of “kindness” would correspond to the colloquial language the child would be familiar with hearing in the classroom and at home. The concept of kindness acted as a gentle introduction into virtue which was later defined as “making a good choice for me and for you and making it again and again and again.”

Teacher observations were documented minimally once a week at the end of the day by me in an open-ended format of a two-column chart. One column was titled “observation” and the other was titled “interpretations” (Appendix H). An observational instrument was included based on both the research study’s setting and theoretical framework being Montessori where observation is central to philosophy and pedagogy (Core components, n.d.). The Montessori teacher is trained to make objective observations which inform the teacher of the child’s current stage of development. In this study, the observations aided in supplying additional information on how children were able to self-identify virtues during natural interactions with peers. The co-

teacher and assistant were also welcomed to share any instances of virtue with the primary observer who also documented their narratives.

Finally, the research design included the blank journals that functioned as both an instrument and an intervention tool. Student virtue journals (Appendix F) were created in a Word Document and included space for drawing and lines for writing a description. There were three pages or entries per week and each page included the question, “What is...” and the name of the virtue for that week. The journal consisted of white papers stapled together. Each child wrote their name on the front page of their journal and stored the journal in their individual work bin which remained at school throughout the duration of the study. Each day the children wrote in their journals, they were given time and space to draw whatever they chose and then the child would meet with the teacher to discuss what they drew. This instrument was included because of Dr. Cavalletti who believed children could express through drawing what they failed to explain through conversation (Cavalletti, 1983). The virtue journals also follow the theoretical framework of Montessori which honors the developmental period of the child by adjusting the materials and instruments to build on the child’s strengths and sensitivities.

### **Results and Discussion**

There are three main areas which will be covered in this results section. The first significant result concerns the frequency of the participants’ mention of the saints as evidenced by the survey and virtue journal data. The second point of interest in results relates to the mention of virtues in the survey data. The final significant finding to be shared focuses on the activity completed during the week of Temperance evidenced the observational data recorded by Instrument 5.

As mentioned in the methods section above, parent observational surveys were sent out twice per week after Week 1. The initial question intentionally prompted parents to ask their child about their day at school and was followed by multiple yes/no questions about their child's behavior. Then, there was a section to allow for a free response where the parent could transcribe their recollection from that conversation. At the end of the survey, parents were asked to rate their child's understanding of the virtue on a low to high scale. Finally, the survey concluded with asking the parents if they talk about virtue with their child and if yes, then how. The most pertinent information was in the two free response sections. Throughout this section, the terms participants, students, and children will be used interchangeably.

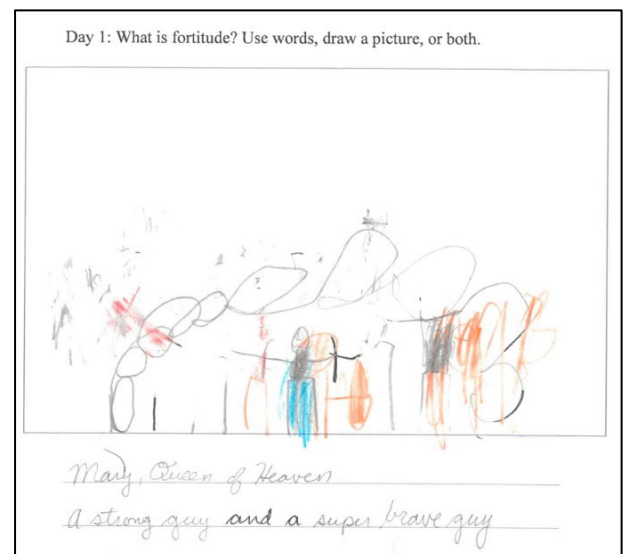
There was a 78% response rate from the initial week. By the final week the response rate dropped to 56%. Over the course of the six-week study, there was a 66% retention rate of responders from the initial survey to the final (Appendix M). Even with this decline in survey return, there was a consistent pattern that emerged, nonetheless. A repeated reference mentioned in the free response portion of the surveys was the saint stories. Each week, except for the first and the last, there was mention of the saint or the saint's story in the free response section of the survey. For example, participants shared with their parents, "did you know there was a saint (Teresa of Avila) that never talked to God and only talked to her friends?", "Anthony and someone took his book", "We talked about the saint who saw Mary (St. Bernadette)". Next, the virtue journals were investigated to find evidence relating to saints. When analyzed, 43% of the total number of entries included some detail about a saint or saint story, and every child who participated in the virtue journals had at least one entry related to the saints throughout the six weeks of the study (Appendix M).

## **Saints**

The recurrence of saints being referred to or described was the most surprising and consistent finding across both the parent surveys and the virtue journals. In the surveys, parents shared stories their children related about the saint associated with the virtue for the week. For example, a parent shared this narrative about Student A, “When I asked specifically about St. Anthony, he said that St. Anthony gives back to people what belongs to them or what they lost.” This short sentence describes first, how Student A remembered the story of St. Anthony’s book getting stolen by a thief and then second, made a connection to a virtue. Student A made the further connection, consciously or subconsciously, to Justice when he further described that objects belong to the owner. Student A clearly recounted St. Anthony as a victim of injustice, thereby demonstrating his understanding of the converse, Justice. During our study of Justice in Week 1, the definition for Justice was “giving each person his due”. Student A’s description of people having returned “what belongs to them” showed his understanding of Justice as it related to the story of St. Anthony.

Another example of the recurring theme of children remembering the saints, the parent of Student B commented in one of her short answer narratives for the week of Fortitude, “He also tells me stories of saints but can’t remember their names.” By the fourth week this parent has picked up on the pattern that the child always had a story about a saint to share and made mention of this. Student C shared that he learned about Fortitude, but he did not quite understand what the word meant. He moved on to talk about a saint, whose name he forgot, who showed

**Figure 1**

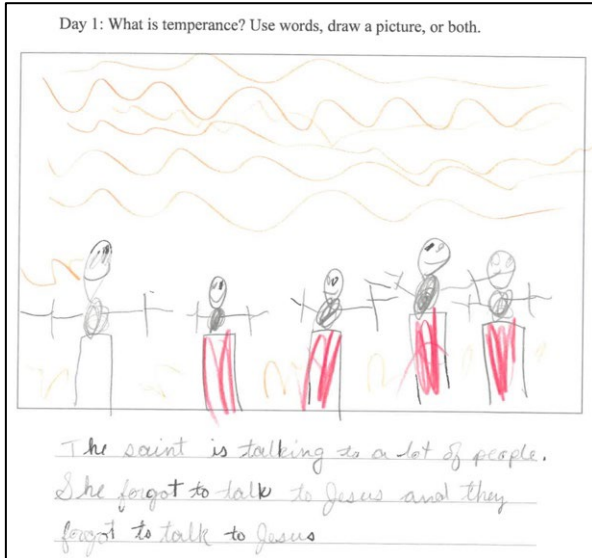


“Mary, Queen of Heaven. A strong guy and a super brave guy”

Fortitude. Later in that same week he went on to share with his parent, “We talked about the saint [Bernadette] who saw Mary. People thought she didn’t see Mary and she needed Fortitude.” Here, Student C demonstrated how he gained an understanding of both the virtue and its connection to a saint.

In addition to the surveys, the student virtue journals showed a recurring theme of the children’s attachment to the saints and their stories. When the journal entries were analyzed, almost half of the total responses included the saint for the week or corresponded to another person that would be considered a saint. There was even one student who incorporated the saint for the week into each journal entry she recorded. The hand drawn journal entries were a more direct connection to the child’s understanding of virtues because the images were created and described by the children themselves.

**Figure 2**

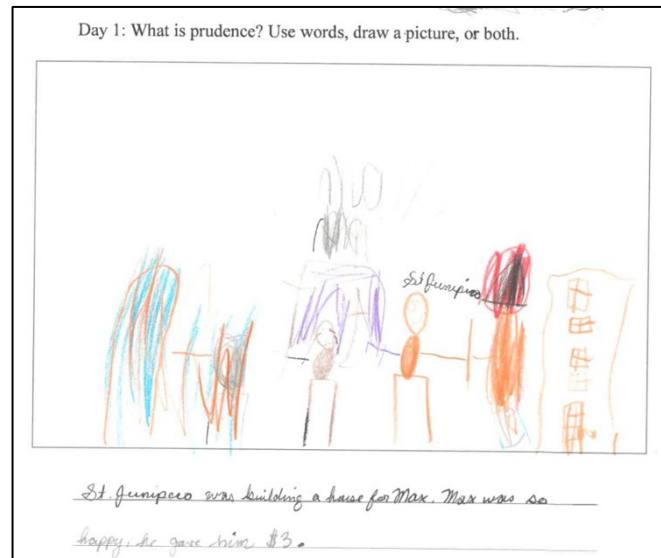


*"The saint is talking to a lot of people. She forgot to talk to Jesus and they forgot to talk to Jesus."*

### Virtue

To answer the primary research question of how children define and identify virtue, the occurrence of the word virtue or any of the cardinal virtues was investigated. The general

**Figure 3**



*"St. Junipero was building a house for Max. Max was so happy he gave him \$3."*

definition of virtue presented to the participants was “good choice for me and you which I make again and again and again”. In relation to the general definition category there was a case of Student D who had no concept of virtue initially. In the first week of the virtues study, a parent of Student D replied to a free response question, “We asked what’s a virtue. She stated she never heard that word.” Throughout the succeeding weeks there was little to no mention in the parent survey of the definition of virtue until the final week. By the final week of the virtues study, the parent reported “Asked her what a virtue was. She responded with ‘a good choice made over and over again.’” This was almost verbatim to the definition given to the participants. The part of the definition that she neglected to recite was the “good choice” being “for me and for you”. However, it seems to point to the evidence of the effectiveness of the research protocol which allowed for enough time and repetition for a child to gain mastery of the definition of virtue.

In relation to the specific cardinal virtues, each week parents of participants reported their children telling them about the virtue for that week. Student F’s parent reported, “He said they learned about Temperance, and it means balance in all things. But he did say he doesn’t know what that means.” Student F showed in his ability to recall the virtue, and define it, but his understanding in what it means is clearly still developing as he was quick to admit. Student G’s parent shared this short narrative, “She willingly shared with me (on her own) that Miss Victoria taught about the virtue of being brave and how we can take deep breathes [sic] to be brave when we are scared. A couple hours later she came back to me and was so proud ‘oh mom it was Fortitude, that was the virtue about being brave’”. This was an example of a child remembering completely on her own and desiring to share the virtue with her mother. Incredibly, she returned to her mother later in the day and was able to recall the vocabulary associated to the definition which she gave earlier. Even though there was time between the participant defining the virtue



she learned and then later explaining it, there was still a continuity in her language. This capacity gives evidence of her own internalization of the word Fortitude and its meaning. All of the above are evidences of how early childhood learners retain the new vocabulary associated with virtue and how they grappled with defining it.

### **Temperance Activity**

The final significant finding involved an activity related to Temperance. The activity used food as an opportunity for the participants to demonstrate Temperance. This activity was introduced during the daily community time when all the children come together and sit down at a large rug in a semi-circle formation, facing the teacher. I chose to pass around a bowl of popcorn. This food was chosen because I knew from past experience that every child liked to eat popcorn. The children were told that the goal is for everyone to have some popcorn. The dish started on one side of the circle and was passed around to all the students. Most students took modest handfuls, a couple of students took two large handfuls, and a couple of students took none as noted in Appendix L. After the bowl had been passed around, I asked children to identify if they took a lot or a little. This summation was based on the participant's subjective opinion. Then, I asked if anyone wanted to share why they took the quantity they did. Student A responded, "I didn't take any because I did not feel very hungry." If Temperance is "enjoying things in the proper balanced way", then Student A showed a great awareness of his own needs. The proper and balanced reason for eating is because an individual recognizes their hunger. If an individual is not hungry, it is reasonable that he would not eat. This participant was aware that he did not feel hungry and the way he demonstrated proper balance was to decline the offer of food. Student E sat directly in the middle of the order in which the bowl was pass around. Student E shared she only chose to take "some" because she wanted to make sure everyone had enough.

This was another demonstrative example of Temperance. She made a choice for herself which was to take a certain amount. However, she also took into consideration the other people around her. Student E was acting virtuously according to the general definition of the word which includes the phrase “making a good choice for me and for you”. Student E chose for herself and for the good of the other participants. She knew she would be satisfied with less if it also meant others had the opportunity to take the amount of popcorn they would need. The two participants who took large handfuls shared that they felt very hungry which was why they took so much. This could also be considered Temperance if they genuinely were hungry and that was as much as was needed and knew there would be enough for others. However, the prompt given at the beginning of the activity was to ensure everyone would get some quantity. It would not be reasonable or virtuous to take a large handful because although it would be good for that individual to have what he thought he needed, he at the same time would be inconsiderate of the others in his community.

It cannot be completely confirmed that the reason for the children’s decisions were exclusively due to the intervention of specific virtue instruction. However, it does seem reasonable to consider the lessons might have had an impact. It is also important to consider the environment being Montessori in nature. As mentioned previously, although Montessori did not include a specific virtue component in her educational philosophy, there are copious opportunities for practice and growth in virtue built within the framework of Montessori. The fact that the participants had spent a minimum of six months immersed in a Montessori environment, could have also influenced these results.

### **Conclusion**

While the topic of virtue is ancient, it is making a resurgence in the education field today. This study attempted to answer the questions of “How do children define and identify virtue when specifically instructed on the cardinal virtues?” and “What is retained by early childhood learners who receive virtue education?”. Children were able to define virtue based on a memorized definition which was repeated three times per week for five weeks. Some children were able to recall specific virtues but struggled often to recall the virtue of the week. This was evidenced anecdotally in the short response questions from parent surveys. In reference to what is retained, the topic most retained by students was the stories of saints. Secondary and related to the saints, participants could recall virtues in association with saints. Children were eager to share the story of the holy person they learned about during their virtue lesson time and the data reflected recurrences of mention of saints in parent surveys and the five- and six-year-olds virtue journals.

### **Limitations**

Initially, I considered doing one lesson a day for five days. However, looking at the school calendar it was obvious that for most weeks, school would not be in session for all five days. Once I realized there would be shorter school weeks (four school days instead of five school days) throughout the study, the frequency of lessons was adjusted to three times per week. This seemed reasonable for repetition and to allow for enough of the adapted virtue to curriculum to be taught. Although ideally, the children would have received a daily lesson in virtues.

Another limitation was the fact that the initial week of the virtue curriculum had to be repeated. Only two of the three lessons were completed due to special activities taking place in

the school that week. The virtue of Justice was discussed for two weeks instead of one due to this necessary adjustment.

The virtue journals were intended to be completed during the afternoon “Kindergarten time” of each day there was a lesson. The question related to the virtue of the week was read to all the students, and they were asked to find an individual workspace to complete the journal entry. Afterward, they were instructed to find me and explain what they drew. Then I would write down the narration of the individual child’s drawing. Due to the changing schedule in the afternoon and frustration on the part of the children, it was quickly made apparent the daily journal entries would not be feasible given the constraints of needing to fit in other learning during that time. After the first week, only one virtue journal entry per week was recorded by the participants. This led to a limitation in data procured. The method of virtue journals was limited to drawing with colored pencils or grey pencil. This could have been a limitation for some children who could have been more open to expressing themselves through clay, watercolor, or some other medium of art.

The parent survey was only sent out once in the final week instead of twice. It was a short week which made it difficult to get all the lessons in. Additionally, it was the week of parent-teacher conferences and with the change in schedule I forgot to send out a mid-week survey.

In reflecting on the data available, the yes/no questions included in the survey were not as informative as I had initially predicted. Overall, the most helpful data came from the free responses. In the area of data, the Kindness Jar was also not conducive to relevant data collection. It likely facilitated more consistent conversation around virtues, but simply keeping a tally of how many marbles were in the jar was not effective. The participants often confused kindness with virtue. The participants shared many instances of kind acts such as giving a friend

a hug. However, these acts would not necessarily qualify as being an example of the virtue being studied that week.

The virtue curriculum did not have an experiment or operationalized activity for every virtue. Therefore, I followed whatever activity went with the virtue. Sometimes this was coloring. Sometimes it was a specific activity. One time it was playing a game. In not wanting to overcomplicate the process of adapting the curriculum, I maintained whatever was included for further learning which did not always operationalize the virtue. There was a lack of an instrument to specifically check comprehension for each of the four virtues. Rather, this was openly inferred from parent surveys and virtue journals.

### **Further Steps**

For further steps, more research needs to be conducted on early childhood students and learning virtues. It would also be interesting to see what else might be gleaned from additional drawings created by children. Additionally, it would have been more in following with the Montessori philosophy to allow children other artistic mediums to work with: clay, sand, fingerpainting, watercolor, collage, etc. The study could also be expanded to include more than just the cardinal virtues. Since the stories of saints seemed especially interesting to children and an aide to remembering the virtues, it would be interesting to study the effectiveness of a curriculum that exclusively used stories of saints or “heroes” to teach virtue. Lastly, completing a study across multiple ages could be beneficial in discovering more concretely how children are internalizing the concept of virtue as they get older. It could have also been interesting to see the results of having an activity that operationalized the virtue for every virtue, not just temperance. This would allow for a more thorough picture of the children’s general understanding of virtues and abstract concepts. For my own teaching practice, I learned how a definition can become rote

memorization and lack any meaning for some children. Hence, the importance of other modes of instruction and expression such activities and a variety of art mediums.

The inspiration of this study stemmed from addressing the mission of the school: “to prepare students to live out the Gospel message, achieve academic excellence, and joyfully lead by faith, virtue and reason”. Faith and reason were sufficiently addressed by the structure and environment of the school. Virtue seemed to be unaddressed in any direct means. This apparent lack was the inception of the purpose of this research study on the specific instruction of cardinal virtues in an early childhood environment. In addition to observing the effects of virtue instruction on students in school, there was interest in how virtue is applied to other areas of the participants’ lives. Since the definition of virtue included a habitual action, it was reasonable to wonder how virtue might be observed by the participants’ parents. Overall, this study was an attempt at adding to the body of knowledge on virtue education, specifically with the cardinal virtues and specifically with early childhood learners.

### References

- Ackerman, C. E. (2023, October 16). *What is positive psychology and why is it important?* PositivePsychology.com. <https://positivepsychology.com/what-is-positive-psychology-definition/#definition-positive-psychology>
- Althof, W., & Berkowitz, M.(2006). Moral education and character education: their relationship and roles in citizenship education. *Journal of Moral Education*. 35(4), 495-518.
- Brailas, A. (2020). Using drawings in qualitative interviews: An introduction to the practice. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(12), 4447-4460
- Cavalletti, S. (1983). *The religious potential of the child*.
- Cavalletti, S. (2014). *\*\*\*The development of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd: inside the Atria in Rome*. Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Publications.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347963553\\_Using\\_Drawings\\_in\\_Qualitative\\_Interviews\\_An\\_Introduction\\_to\\_the\\_Practice](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/347963553_Using_Drawings_in_Qualitative_Interviews_An_Introduction_to_the_Practice)
- Core components of authentic Montessori education. (n.d.). <https://amshq.org/About-Montessori/What-Is-Montessori/Core-Components-of-Montessori>
- Edmonson, S., Tatman, R., & Slate, J. R. (2009). Character education: An historical overview. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 4(1).  
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1068485.pdf>
- Elias, M., & Yuan, M., (2020) Creating coherent conceptualization and communication among character education kinfolk: Averting a “Tower of Babel”. *Journal of Chracter Education*. 16(2). 19-26
- Floyd, S. (n.d.). Thomas Aquinas: Moral philosophy. *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.  
<https://iep.utm.edu/thomasaquinas-moral-philosophy/>

Fowers, B. J., Carroll, J. S., Leonhardt, N. D., & Cokelet, B. (2020). The emerging science of virtue. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 16*(1), 118–147.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691620924473>

*Fundamentals of SEL - CASEL*. (2023, October 9). CASEL. <https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/>

Hibana. (2021). The relationship of religious development, moral values and early childhood independence: Voices from Yogyakarta, Indonesia. *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education (TURCOMAT), 12*(11), 7104–7111

<https://turcomat.org/index.php/turkbilmater/article/view/7237>

Horowski, J. (2020). Christian religious education and the development of moral virtues: a neo-Thomistic approach. *British Journal of Religious Education, 42*(4), 447–458.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2020.1752618>

Killen, M., & Smetana, J.G. (Eds.). (2013). *Handbook of moral development* (2nd ed.).

Psychology Press. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203581957>

Kristjansson, K. (2013). Ten myths about character, virtue and virtue education-Plus three well-founded misgivings. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 61*(3), 269–287.

Libretexts. (2022, September 6). *6.3: Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development*. Social Sci

LibreTexts. [https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Courses/Lumen\\_Learning/Book%3A\\_Child\\_Development\\_\(Lumen\)/06%3A\\_Module\\_4-](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Courses/Lumen_Learning/Book%3A_Child_Development_(Lumen)/06%3A_Module_4-)

Meidl, C., & Meidl, T. D. (2013). Character education in three schools: Catholic, Quaker and public. *Education 3-13, 41*(2), 178–187. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2011.566885>

Montessori, M. (1988). *The absorbent mind*. ABC-CLIO.



Montessori, M. (2012). *The 1946 London Lectures* (Vol. 17). Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company.

Mortari, L., & Ubbiali, M. (2017). The “MelArete” Project: Educating children to the ethics of virtue and of care. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 6(3), 269–278.

Nash, J., PhD. (2023, October 13). *The 5 founding fathers and a history of positive psychology*. PositivePsychology.com. <https://positivepsychology.com/founding-fathers/>

Shankland, R., França, L. R., Génolini, C., Guelfi, J., & Ionescu, Ş. (2009). Preliminary study on the role of alternative educational pathways in promoting the use of problem-focused coping strategies. *European Journal of Psychology of Education*, 24(4), 499–512.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/bf03178764>

*Social and emotional learning: A short history*. (2011, October 7). Edutopia.

<https://www.edutopia.org/social-emotional-learning-history>

*Thomas Aquinas* (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). (2022, December 7).

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aquinas/>

Wang, G., & Hackett, R. D. (2015). Conceptualization and measurement of virtuous leadership: Doing well by doing good. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 137(2), 321–345.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2560-1>

## Appendices

### Appendix A: IRB Approval Document

Date: 2-8-2024

IRB #: IRB-FY2023-178

Title: Rivera\_Cardinal Virtues Education and Early Childhood Learners

Creation Date: 12-14-2023

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Kateri Carver

Review Board: UW Institutional Review Board

Sponsor:

### Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	<b>Exempt</b>
-----------------	---------	-------------	--------	----------	---------------

### Key Study Contacts

Member	Kateri Carver	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	kateri.carver@uwrf.edu
--------	---------------	------	------------------------	---------	------------------------

Member	Victoria Rivera	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	victoria.rivera@my.uwrf.edu
--------	-----------------	------	-----------------	---------	-----------------------------

**Appendix B: Informed Consent for Child****Informed Consent for Research Participation-Child**IRB # FY2023-178IRB Approval Date 1/4/2024**Study Title: Cardinal Virtues Education and Early Childhood Learners**

Researcher Names	Department	Contact Information
1. Victoria Rivera 2. Dr. Kateri Carver, PI	Teacher Education Program	1. Victoria Rivera, Victoria.rivera@my.uwrf.edu 2. Kateri Carver, Kateri.Carver@uwrf.edu

We are asking you consent for your child to participate in our research study. Participation is voluntary and your child may stop at any time. If you or your child choose not to participate or stop participating, there will be no negative consequences to you. Participating or not participating will not change any services you and your child receive from [REDACTED]

**Overview of the Research**

<b>Purpose of the Study</b>	To observe the effect of teaching virtue in an early childhood classroom
<b>What the child will be asked to do</b>	Participate in large group verbal instruction, notify a teacher when acts of virtue have been identified in the classroom
<b>Amount of time it will take the child to participate</b>	10-15 minutes daily, 3 days/week, over the course of 5-6 weeks
<b>Risks to you if your child if you choose for them to participate</b>	Minimal-slight anxiety speaking in front of peers or coming to a teacher to identify an act of virtue
<b>What we will do to reduce the risks</b>	Allow children the opportunity to share with the class or teacher when they are ready without putting added pressure on them
<b>Benefits to your child or others if you choose to participate</b>	Increasing the body of knowledge in virtue education, growing understanding and practicing virtue
<b>Compensation offered to you for participating</b>	None

**Confidentiality and Data Protection**

<b>Who will see my answers/information?</b>	The researcher, Victoria Rivera and PI, Kateri Carver
<b>Where will my answers/information be stored?</b>	Raw data will be stored on a password protected computer and using a password protected data collection system. Pseudonym key

	will kept locked in a cabinet at [REDACTED]. Virtue journals will be locked in a file cabinet in the classroom.
<b>How will my answers /information be protected?</b>	During the reporting process pseudonyms will be used for all identifying information. The connection sheet between pseudonyms and identifying information will be kept in a locked cabinet at [REDACTED].

**Protection of Human Research Subjects**

<b>If I have questions about this research I should contact:</b>	Victoria Rivera <a href="mailto:Victoria.rivera@my.uwrf.edu">Victoria.rivera@my.uwrf.edu</a> Dr. Kateri Carver <a href="mailto:Kateri.carver@uwrf.edu">Kateri.carver@uwrf.edu</a>
<b>If I have questions or want to complain about my rights or how I was treated as a research participant I should contact:</b>	Institutional Review Board Chair University of Wisconsin River Falls 410 S. Third St. River Falls, WI 54022 715-425-0629 <a href="mailto:irb@uwrf.edu">irb@uwrf.edu</a>

**Signatures:**

I agree for my child to participate in this study and understand I may withdraw my child at any time and/or skip, refuse, or refrain to answer journal prompts or discussions.

---

Printed Full Name of Participant (child)

Date

If participant is a minor or requires a Legally Authorized Representative:

---

Printed Name of Parent, Guardian or Legally Authorized Representative

---

Signature of Parent, Guardian or Legally Authorized Representative

Date

I do NOT agree for my child to participate in this study

---

Printed Full Name of Participant (child)

Date

---

Printed Name of Parent, Guardian or Legally Authorized Representative

---

Signature of Parent, Guardian, or Legally Authorized Representative

Date

## Appendix C: Adult Informed Consent Form



GLOBAL. INNOVATIVE. EXCELLENT.

## Informed Consent for Research Participation-Parent

IRB # FY2023-178IRB Approval Date 1/4/2024

## Study Title: Cardinal Virtues Education and Early Childhood Learners

Researcher Names	Department	Contact Information
1. Victoria Rivera 2. Dr. Kateri Carver, PI	Teacher Education Program	3. Victoria Rivera, Victoria.rivera@my.uwrf.edu 4. Kateri Carver, Kateri.Carver@uwrf.edu

We are asking you to participate in our research study. Participation is voluntary and you may stop at any time, including skipping any questions you do not want to answer for any reason. If you choose not to participate or stop participating, or skip any questions, there will be no negative consequences to you. Participating will not change anything about your relationship with the researchers or our Departments. Participating or not participating will not change any services you receive from ( ).

Overview of the Research

<b>Purpose of the Study</b>	To observe the effect of teaching virtue in an early childhood classroom
<b>What you will be asked to do</b>	Answer questions in a survey about your child's behavior at home and conversations concerning learning virtues at home
<b>Amount of time it will take you to participate</b>	5-10 minutes, 2 days/week
<b>Risks to you if you choose to participate</b>	The risks are minimal and could include slight increases in anxiety while answering questions of a more personal nature concerning your child.
<b>What we will do to reduce the risks</b>	Identifying information will be kept confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for children.
<b>Benefits to you or others if you choose to participate</b>	Increasing the body of knowledge in virtue education
<b>Compensation offered to you for participating</b>	None

Confidentiality and Data Protection

<b>Who will see my answers/information?</b>	The researcher, Victoria Rivera and PI, Kateri Carver
<b>Where will my answers/information be stored?</b>	Answers to surveys will be stored on a password protected computer and using a password protected data collection system. Pseudonym key will kept locked in a cabinet at ( ).

<b>How will my answers /information be protected?</b>	During the reporting process pseudonyms will be used for all identifying information. The coding document between pseudonyms and identifying information will be kept in a locked cabinet at [REDACTED]

**Protection of Human Research Subjects**

<b>If I have questions about this research I should contact:</b>	Victoria Rivera <a href="mailto:Victoria.rivera@my.uwrf.edu">Victoria.rivera@my.uwrf.edu</a> Dr. Kateri Carver <a href="mailto:Kateri.carver@uwrf.edu">Kateri.carver@uwrf.edu</a>
<b>If I have questions or want to complain about my rights or how I was treated as a research participant I should contact:</b>	Institutional Review Board Chair University of Wisconsin River Falls 410 S. Third St. River Falls, WI 54022 715-425-0629 <a href="mailto:irb@uwrf.edu">irb@uwrf.edu</a>

**Signatures:**

(Please sign to agree or not agree.)

I agree to participate in this study and understand I may quit at any time and/or skip or refuse to answer any questions.

---

Printed Name of Participant

---

Signature of Participant Date

I do NOT agree to participate in this study

---

Printed Name of Participant

---

Signature of Participant Date

**Appendix D: Instrument 1 - Kindness Jar**

**Researcher:** Victoria Rivera

**IRB#:** FY2023-178

**Title of Protocol:** Cardinal Virtues and Early Childhood Learners

**Instrument Title:** Instrument 1-Kindness Jar

Week	Number of beads in jar	Notes, Comments, or Observations
Week 1: Introduction		
Week 2: Justice		
Week 3: Temperance		
Week 4: Fortitude		
Week 5: Prudence		



**Appendix E: Instrument 2 - Initial Parent Surveys****Researcher:** Victoria Rivera**IRB#:** FY2023-178**Title of Protocol:** Cardinal Virtues Education and Early Childhood Learners**Instrument Title:** Initial Parent Survey

## Presence of Virtue in the Home

Below are a series of questions asking about your observations of your child outside of school. Please answer questions honestly and to the best of your memory. Questions with a red \* are required. You may also choose prefer not to answer. This survey should take 5-10 minutes to complete.

\* Indicates required question

---

1. Your name (parent) \*

---

2. Did you ask your child what they learned at school today?

*Check all that apply.*

- Yes  
 No  
 Prefer not to answer

3. If yes, what was their response?

---

---

---

---

---

## 4. Have you noticed your child... \*

Mark only one oval per row.

	yes	no	Prefer not to answer
<b>Being polite</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Being helpful</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Make positive choices</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 5. Have you talked about virtues at home with your child? If yes, how? If no, leave blank.

---

---

---

---

---

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

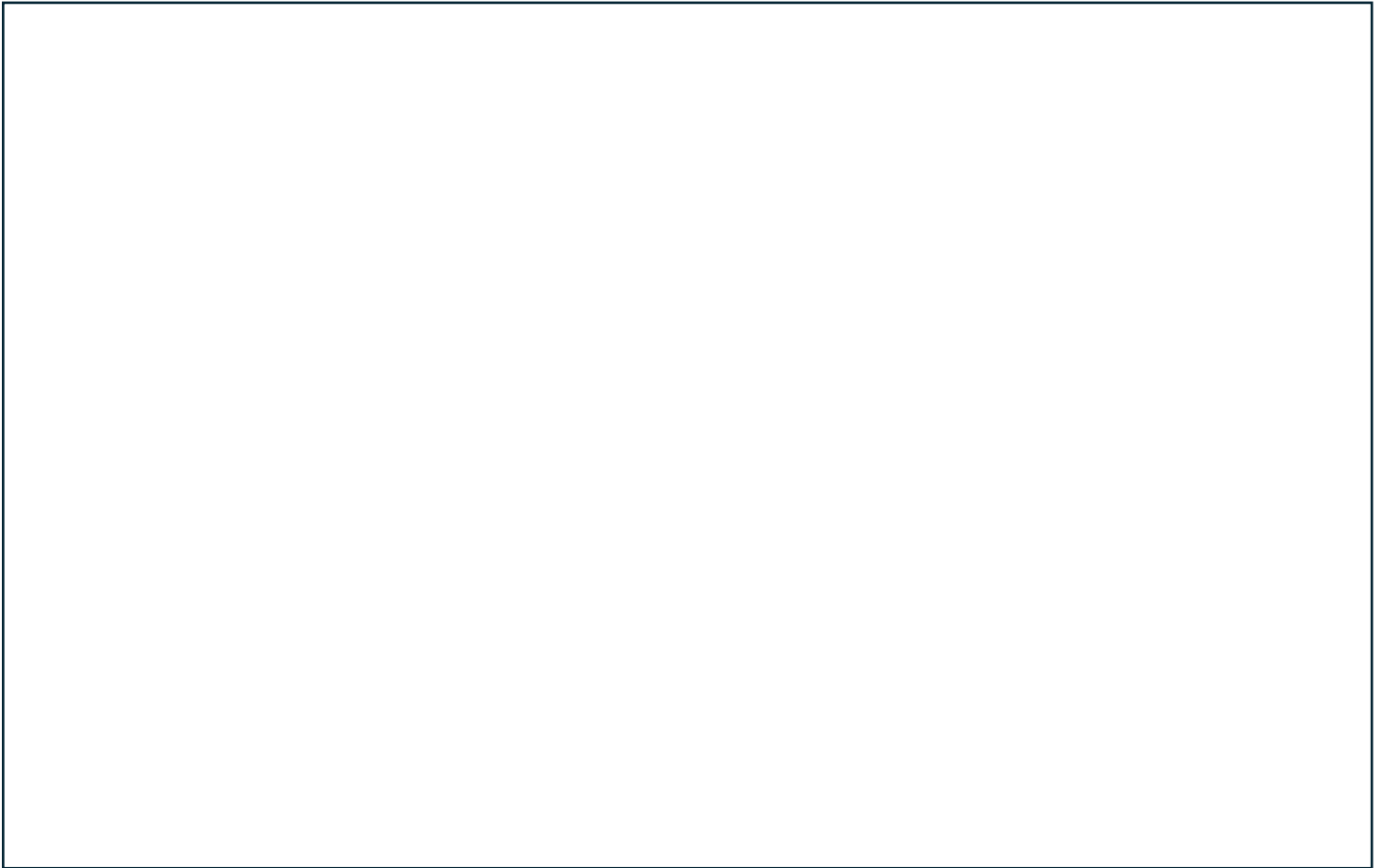
Google Forms

**Appendix F: Instrument 3 – Virtue Journal****Researcher:** Victoria Rivera**IRB#:** FY2023-178**Title of Protocol:** Cardinal Virtues Education and Early Childhood Learners**Instrument Title:** Virtues Journal

Children are given a space to draw a picture or write words to describe the virtue of interest.

1. Introduce the Virtues Journal as a daily activity.
2. Show the space where children can draw a picture as well as write words.
3. Tell the children it is their choice for what they would like to record each day (picture, words, or both).
4. After reading the question, if asked for help the teacher can refer back to words or ideas used in curriculum to help provide ideas for the child.
5. An adult may help a child with writing words or giving labels to a picture drawn by the child.

Day 1: What is justice? Use words, draw a picture, or both.



---

---

---

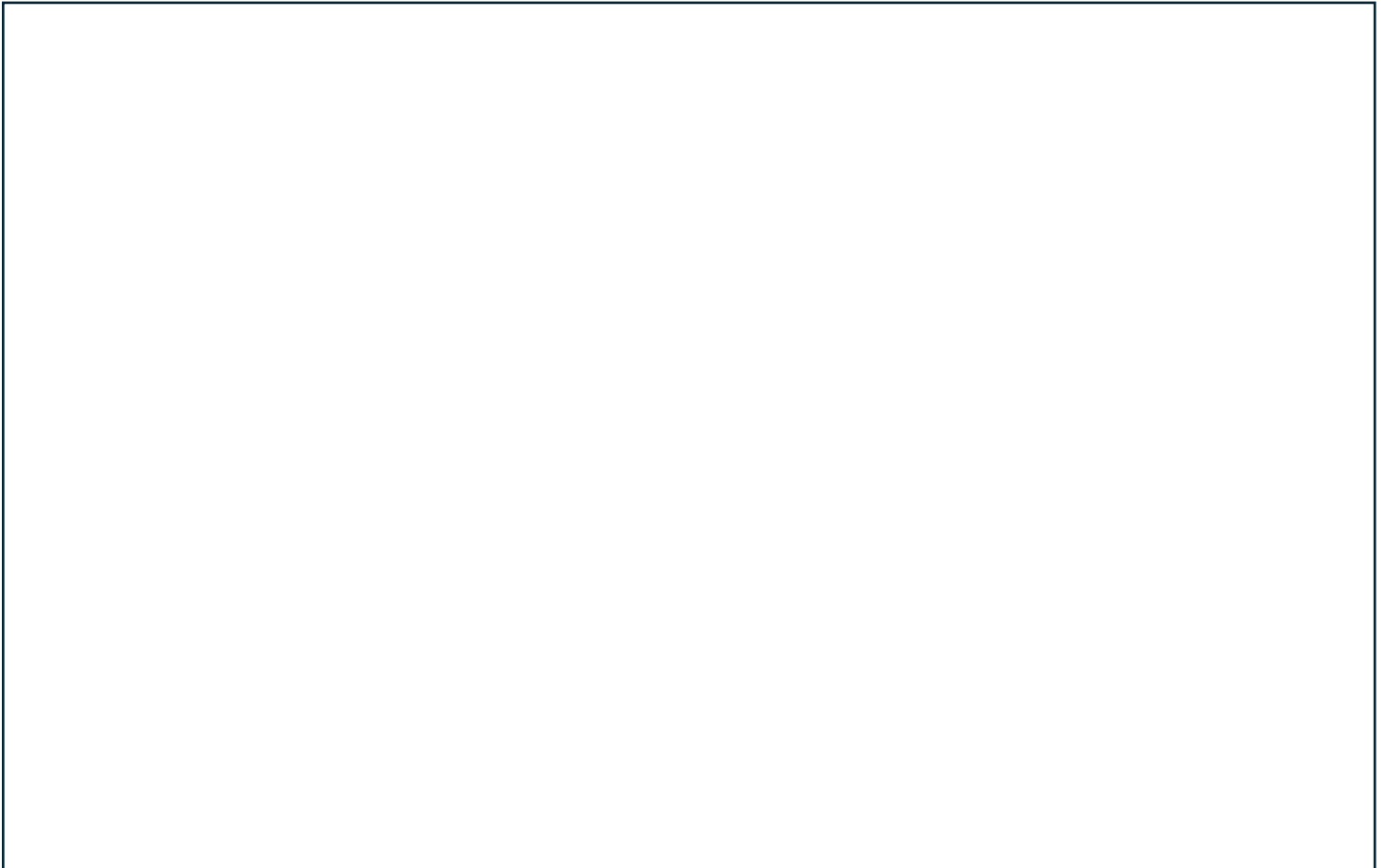
---

---

---

---

Day 1: What is Temperance? Use words, draw a picture, or both.



---

---

---

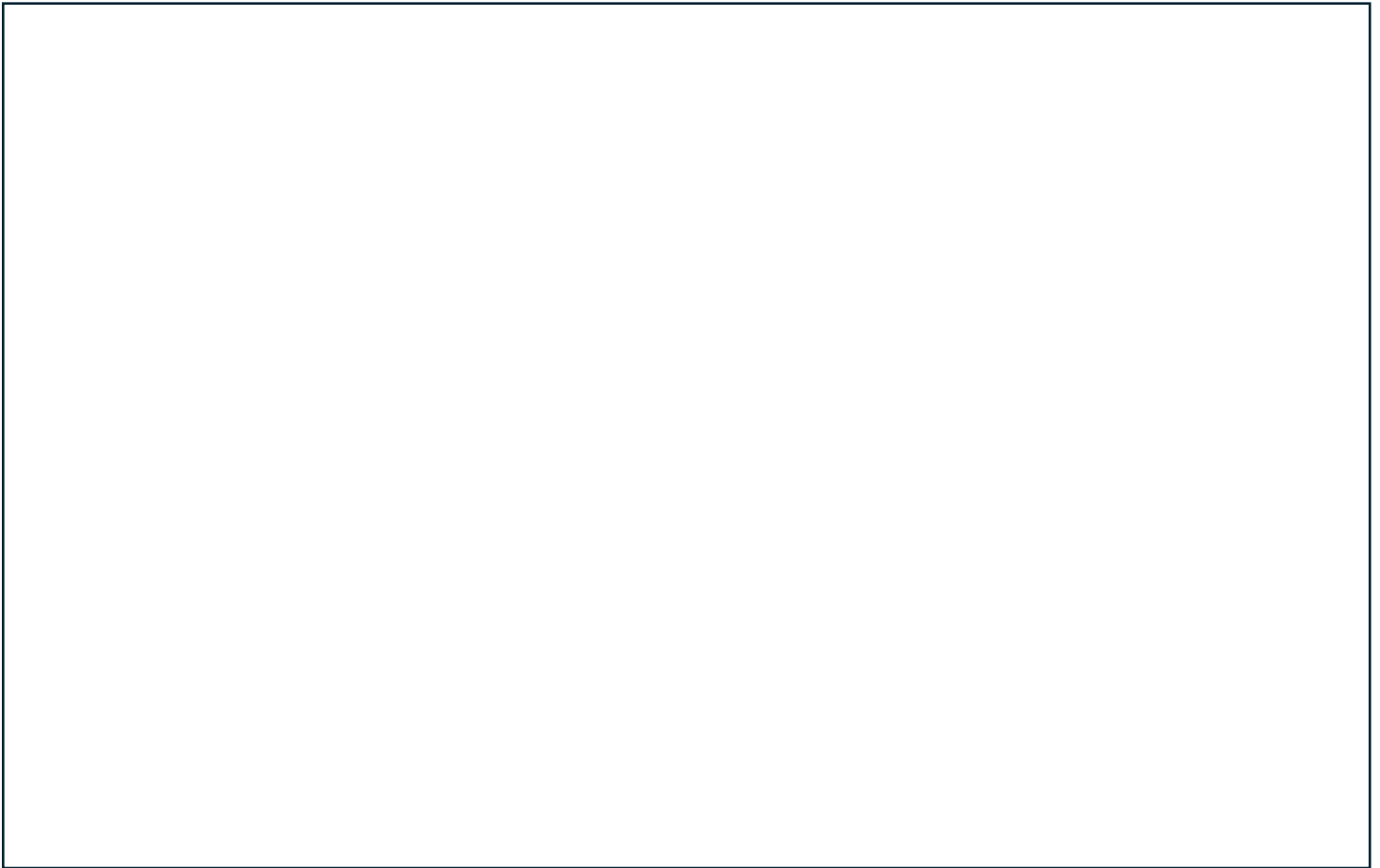
---

---

---

---

Day 1: What is fortitude? Use words, draw a picture, or both.



---

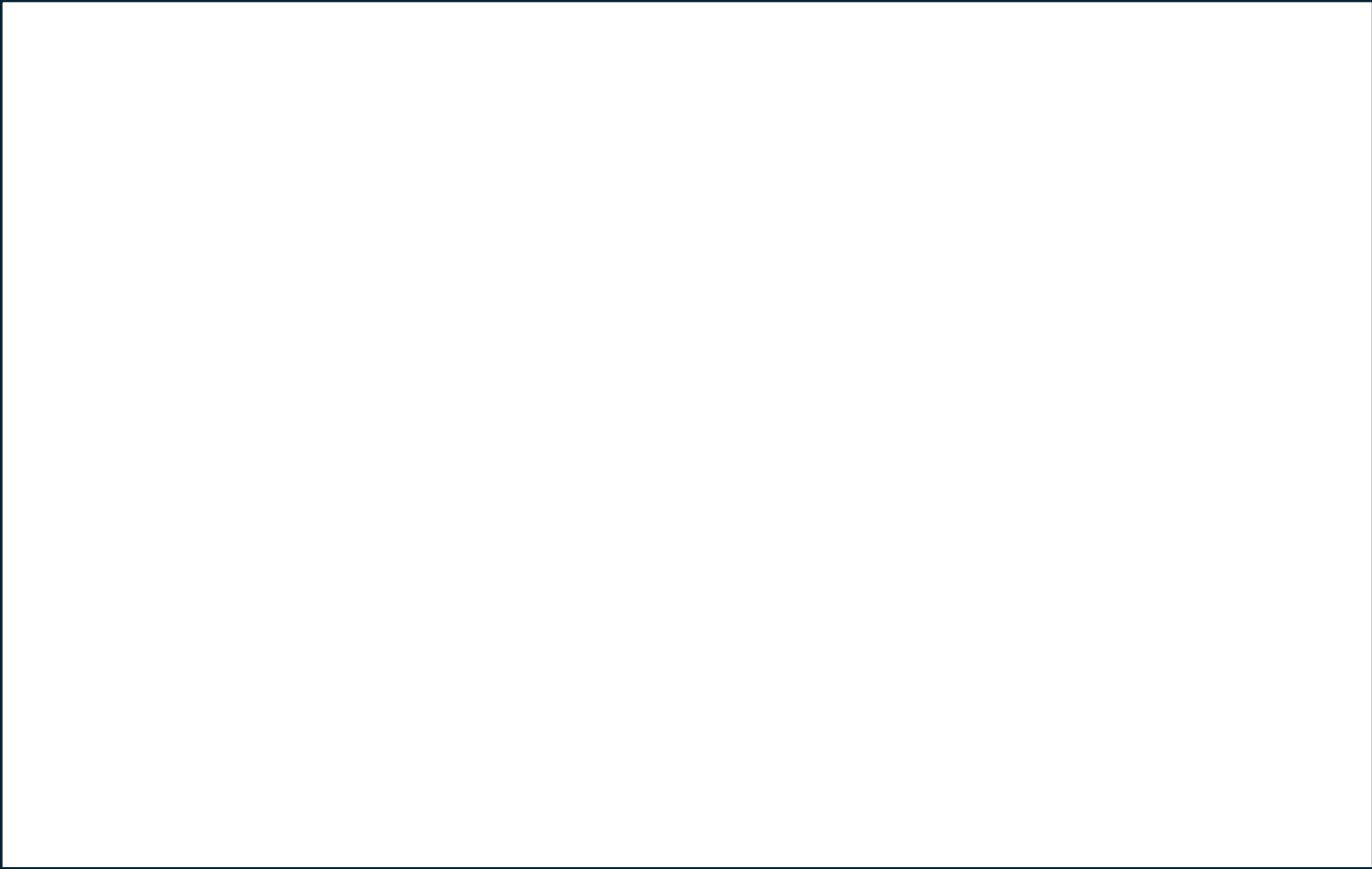
---

---

---

---

Day 1: What is Prudence? Use words, draw a picture, or both.



---

---

---

---

---

**Appendix G: Instrument 4 – Parent Observation Survey**

**Researcher:** Victoria Rivera

**IRB#:** FY2023-178

**Title of Protocol:** Cardinal Virtues Education and Early Childhood Learners

**Instrument Title:** Parent Observation Surveys

## Observation of Virtues

Below are a series of questions asking about your observations of your child outside of school. Please answer questions honestly and to the best of your memory. Questions with a red \* are required. You may also choose prefer not to answer. This survey should take 5-10 minutes to complete.

*\* Indicates required question*

---

1. Child's Last Name \*

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Did you ask your child what they learned at school today?

*Check all that apply.*

- Yes  
 No  
 Prefer not to answer

3. If yes, what was their response?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



4. Have you noticed your child... \*

*Mark only one oval per row.*

	yes	no	Prefer not to answer
<b>Being polite</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Being helpful</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<b>Make positive choices</b>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. Have you talked about virtues at home with your child? If yes, how? If no, leave blank.

---



---



---



---



---

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

**Appendix H: Instrument 5 – Teacher Observations**

**Researcher:** Victoria Rivera

**IRB#:** FY2023-178

**Title of Protocol:** Cardinal Virtues and Early Childhood Learners

**Instrument Title:** Instrument 2 – Teacher Observation

Observation	Interpretation

**Appendix I: Tool 1 – Kindness Jar****Researcher:** Victoria Rivera**IRB#:** FY2023-178**Title of Protocol:** Cardinal Virtues and Early Childhood Learners**Tool Title:** Tool 1-Kindness Jar

Materials:

Glass mason jar

Glass beads or fake gemstones

Instructions:

1. During a class group time, present the jar and glass beads or gemstones to the children.
2. Explain we are looking to see if we can find people showing virtue in our classroom.
3. Ask children for their own definitions and examples of kindness.
4. Give your own simplified definition of kindness: putting someone before yourself by helping them.
5. Provide an example of someone you saw who showed kindness that day and add the first bead to the jar.
6. Invite children to pay attention and notice when someone else is being kind.
7. Throughout the week time will be given during class group time to share acts of kindness witnessed by students.
8. At the end of the week, count how many beads or gems the jar has accumulated and record
9. After the first week, introduce concept of virtues and connect virtues to be acts of positive behavior that build up the classroom community. It could look like kindness or it could be more hidden. Give examples of saints.



**Appendix J: Tool 2 -Adapted Virtues in Practice Curriculum****Researcher:** Victoria Rivera**IRB#:** FY2023-178**Title of Protocol:** Cardinal Virtues Education and Early Childhood Learners**Tool Title:** Adapted Virtues in Practice Curriculum**Virtue 1: Justice****Justice:** being fair and giving each his due**Saint:** Anthony of Padua**Day 1****Read definition of Justice:** being fair**Read saint bio** from “Virtues in Practice”

Saint Anthony was a priest who loved Jesus and the poor very much. When someone took a book that did not belong to him, Saint Anthony prayed, and the thief brought it back. Today, people ask Saint Anthony to pray and help them find things that are lost!

Read definition of Justice again

**Prayer:** Saint Anthony, help us to be fair, to take turns and to share. And help us find things that are lost. Amen. Saint Anthony...Pray for us.**Day 2****Read definition of Justice:** being fair**Discussion Question:** What should you do if you see someone take something that belonged to someone else?**Virtue Activity**

1. Take a blank piece of paper and make two columns. At the top of the first column write “Take turns”. At the top of second column write “Sharing”
2. Ask children if they can think of any times they solved a problem by taking turns or sharing.
3. At the end of the day or next day check in and ask if anyone has a story of showing justice by taking turns or sharing

**Prayer:** Mother Mary, help us to be fair so that we can make your Son, Jesus happy. (pray 3 Hail Mary’s)**Day 3****Review Justice definition:** Being fair**Saint Activity:**

1. Ask for 3 volunteer seekers.
2. Tell the seekers to choose a simple item from their cubbies/desks, and hand it in to the teacher.
3. Ask the seekers to leave the room for a moment. (Someone might want to go with them, to make sure they don’t peek!)
4. Without any noise, have students show the teacher their ideas about where to hide the item in the classroom.

5. Let the seekers in the room. Tell the seekers that if they get tired of looking for their hidden item they can say, “St. Anthony, help me!” and the teacher will give them a clue  
**Prayer:** Saint Anthony, help us to be fair, to take turns and to share. And help us find things that are lost. Amen. Saint Anthony...Pray for us.

---

### **Virtue 2: Temperance**

**Temperance:** Enjoying things in a proper, balanced way

**Saint:** Teresa of Avila (Spain)

#### **Day 1**

**Read definition of Temperance:** Enjoying things in a proper, balanced way

**Read saint bio** from “Virtues in Practice”

Saint Teresa of Avila was very popular. But sometimes she talked so much to people that she forgot to pray to God. When she became a nun, Saint Teresa helped the other nuns to be quiet and listen to God at prayer times, and to dance and sing when it was time to play!

Read definition of Temperance again

**Prayer:** Dear Saint Teresa, please help me to always use good things with thankfulness and self-control. Teach me how to take and use only what I need, not all I want. I want to be temperate for love of Jesus! Amen. Saint Teresa...pray for us.

#### **Day 2**

**Read definition of Temperance:** Enjoying things in a proper, balanced way

**Discussion Question:** What does it mean to have “too much of a good thing”?

#### **Virtue Activity:**

We use the virtue of Temperance to fight temptations and to use well the good things God gave us like food, fames, and toys. Watching too much TV or playing video games too much is not temperate. What are other activities you can do besides watching more TV or playing video games?

**Prayer:** Mother Mary, in your family with Jesus and Joseph there was time for prayer, and time for play. You had what you needed, and shared what you didn’t need with others. Help me to know what is good for me. (pray 3 Hail Mary’s)

#### **Day 3**

**Read definition of Temperance:** Enjoying things in a proper, balanced way

**Saint Activity:**

1. Tell story: Once when Saint Teresa was helping a certain convent, the first thing she did was get the sisters more food to eat. Because they were very poor, the sisters did not have enough to be healthy and could not focus on praying.
2. As a class, share some fruit for a snack. (Small fruit like grapes or berries will work best.)

3. Let each student take as much as he or she should eat, and discuss your choices. Did you want even more? Why did you not take all you wanted? When we have all we need, how can we share with others so that God's gifts aren't wasted?

Discuss that sometimes being temperate also means we take less of what we want (like cookies) to have more of what we need (like fruit and vegetables).

Review definition of Temperance

**Prayer:** Dear Saint Teresa, please help me to always use good things with thankfulness and self-control. Teach me how to take and use only what I need, not all I want. I want to be temperate for love of Jesus! Amen. Saint Teresa...pray for us.

### **Virtue 3: Fortitude**

Fortitude: being brave and strong in the face of trials

Saint: Bernadette

#### **Day 1**

**Read definition of Fortitude:** being brave and strong in the face of trials

**Read saint bio** from "Virtues in Practice"

The Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to Saint Bernadette but no one believed her. Many people made fun of Bernadette and said they would get her in trouble, but she was strong and did not let them scare her away from the truth. Today, millions of people visit Lourdes every year and many miracles of healing happen there.

Read definition of Fortitude again

**Prayer:** Saint Bernadette, please help me to be brave like you. Help me to love Our Lady as much as you do. Help me to stay close to her and to be strong in Jesus. Amen. Saint Bernadette, pray for us.

#### **Day 2**

**Read definition of Fortitude:** being brave and strong in the face of trials

**Discussion Question:** Why was Saint Bernadette able to be brave?

#### **Virtue Activity:**

What are some things that make you scared? As a class, discuss ways to be brave. Role play a few.

One way to be brave is to stand up for others. If we see someone getting hurt, charity says we should help. Sometimes this takes being brave.

Role play a game at recess with one student getting picked on or being left out. Try saying these three things to be brave and help.

1. "Why are you doing that?"
2. "Do not worry, I you can play with me"
3. "Let's play something different"

**Prayer:** Mother Mary, even when there were dangerous soldiers around, you followed Jesus to the cross. Help me to be strong and brave enough to do what is right. (pray 3 Hail Mary's)

**Day 3**

**Read definition of Fortitude:** being brave and strong in the face of trials

**Saint Activity:**

Saint Bernadette saw Mary inside a little cave called a “grotto” in Lourdes, France. Many people tried to keep her away, but she was strong and kept going back. Draw a picture of St. Bernadette in a cave.

---

**Virtue 4: Prudence**

**Prudence:** making good decisions in specific circumstances

**Saint:** Junipero Serra

**Day 1**

**Read definition of Prudence:** making good decisions in specific circumstances

**Read saint bio** from “Virtues in Practice”

Junipero Serra was a Franciscan priest. He wanted to be kind to the Native Americans. He travelled all along California to build towns called missions where the people could work together in peace and learn about God.

Read definition of Prudence again

**Prayer:** Saint Junipero Serra, you loved the Native Americans and were wise about how to help them. Help us to know what is best in each situation. Amen. Saint Junipero Serra, pray for us.

**Day 2**

**Read definition of Prudence:** making good decisions in specific circumstances

**Discussion Question:** Find California on a map. Why did Saint Junipero Serra start missions there?

**Virtue Activity:**

The virtue of Prudence helps us to choose the best way to solve problems. Practice using I-messages to talk about these problems.

1. Another student call you a mean name.
2. Someone keeps taking your ball at recess
3. Someone laughed at your drawing.

I-messages:

“I felt \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_; please \_\_\_\_\_.”

Example:

“I felt sad when you took my crayon; please do not touch my work.”

**Prayer:** Mother Mary, at Cana you knew what the people needed and asked Jesus to help them. You know what I need too! Ask Jesus to grant me what I need to be more like Him. (Pray 3 Hail Marys)

**Day 3**

Read definition of Prudence: making good decisions in specific circumstances

**Saint Activity:**

Draw a picture of a mission.

**Prayer:**

Saint Junipero Serra, you loved the Native Americans and were wise about how to help them. Help us to know what is best in each situation. Amen. Saint Junipero Serra, pray for us.



**Appendix K: Narrative Data from Parent Surveys**

VIRTUE	Short answer question 1	Short answer question 2
JUSTICE	Did you ask your child what they learned at school today? If yes, what was their response?	Have you reinforced talking about the virtues at home with your child? If yes, how?
1/31/2024 18:02:46	Student H	Not this week
1/31/2024 18:07:48	Student I	Didn't really respond with any detail
1/31/2024 18:36:01	Student J	I had him Monday and Tuesday. He was very excited to share about things he was working on and interactions with his friends.
1/31/2024 18:37:33	Student K	I don't know, coloring, cars, painting
1/31/2024 18:52:00	Student F	He enjoyed the play. And apparently there was a very funny version of Old Macdonald
1/31/2024 18:52:25	Student D	No
1/31/2024 19:06:15	Student K	Tractors don't go on the road. Justice is like being kind like Jesus.
1/31/2024 19:07:34	Student G	Once I was aware/taking notice of it and mentioned her being kind she shared about doing an act of kindness like in school and so we have talked about it from that lens of what does an act of kindness look like and how can we find acts of kindness to do etc and have tried to use the term virtue to describe that acting kind/acts of kindness is a virtue
1/31/2024 20:47:41	Student L	I didn't have time
2/1/2024 0:40:39	Student M	Gluings :)
2/1/2024 7:24:00	Student O	Math

2/1/2024 9:48:05	Student E	She said nothing even after some prompting	Sometimes, we don't talk about it specifically but talk about the idea when a situation comes up.
2/1/2024 11:10:49	Student A	He talked a lot about the play. When I asked about circle time, he told me how he learned about sometimes he might have chocolate milk and not want to share, but if he has enough for everyone, he should give each person some.	Student A has been talking a lot about kindness and we've been talking about ways to be kind. He was very eager to help other students he saw having a rough time at drop off and wanted to get out of the car faster so he could go help them. I am hearing him talk more about other students and caring for them instead of just observing them.
2/1/2024 14:21:49	Student P	He talked about songs and friends	I asked him about virtues but he was distracted by something else
2/3/2024 17:03:27	Student F	Student F said justice is about being fair. He also seemed oddly pleased that he and a few other boys got to take marbles out of the jar because they were not being fair, if I understood correctly.	Student F and Artie compromised on who got to sit in front in the bathtub by taking a turn each day. Although it was Artie's idea rather than Student F's. Student F did agree to it even if he did need some reminders the second day.
2/3/2024 17:34:00	Student D	Painting	We asked what's a virtue. She stated she never heard that word
2/3/2024 18:07:14	Student M		yes
2/3/2024 18:25:47	Student P	Big red apple song	I have asked what he is learning about virtues
2/3/2024 18:35:50	Student E	"I don't want to tell you" after another ask she wanted to teach me what she learned about letters	Not really this week besides kindness and being truthful
2/3/2024 18:40:42	Student I		
2/3/2024 19:34:32	Student G	A new letter, a work with shapes	I did ask if they were learning about virtues and if she knew what a virtue was/what that means - she said I'm not sure I think it's if someone takes a work away from someone else we tell the police to come help (I laughed at this a bit : )

2/3/2024 19:59:17	Student D	painting and what she had for snack	
2/4/2024 5:50:32	Student J	Talked about the play, church and ice cream	Yes Monday/Tuesday when I was with him, part of our routine. Difference between right/wrong, and consequences.
2/4/2024 6:38:28	Student A	He was mostly exciting that there was ice cream served on Friday.	I have brought up being just when I tell him stories.
2/4/2024 9:21:29	Student Q	Just reviewed day	We have had to talk a lot about honesty in light of some sneaking behavior
2/4/2024 13:48:12	Student K	I don't know	I have asked about them
2/4/2024 16:12:10	Student R	Not clear	We have talked and try to act in accordance with them, as part of my Family values.
2/4/2024 17:02:20	Student S	God	When asked what's a virtue, Raya's answer was God
2/5/2024 15:18:09	Student C	Virtues	We have asked him about what he is learning in particular in his Kindergarten specific works. He described the virtue of Justice but could not remember the word but when we said it he got really excited about it.
2/5/2024 18:46:02	Student H	"hice muchas cosas"	Yes, about being honest
2/5/2024 18:47:55	Student H	"hoy hice muchas cosas" no especificó aunque se le preguntó	We were talking about obedience. He did not mention justice.
2/5/2024 20:55:29	Student B	Student B told me that justice means fairness and kindness.	We discuss what he's doing at school. This week he had less to say about justice. I suppose it's a difficult concept. Student B also is having some behavioral difficulty with truth-telling and (mild) impulse control. He may be putting together the fact that his consequences mean justice? Maybe he is experiencing a bit of a guilty conscience?
JUSTICE TAKE 2			

2/8/2024 18:43:32	Student K	Being fair	Yes. Talking about how sharing or splitting is kind. Talking about bad ppl and then getting in trouble and how the police can catch them and give them the proper punishment.
2/8/2024 19:20:25	Student Q	Peace and “went to the atrium”	Weve been talking a lot about patience
2/8/2024 19:37:30	Student S	Class and kindness	Not this week
2/8/2024 19:42:54	Student O	Math	Yes- family virtue choices
2/8/2024 19:45:53	Student G	“We did alleluia pictures in the atrium”	We just bought a book on virtues and have just started to go thru it
2/8/2024 20:03:53	Student C	There is an opportunity to place marbles in a bowl if the child does something nice.	Yes, just because I knew we are studying then at school.
2/8/2024 20:38:04	Student D	Anthony and someone took his book	Yes, asked what Anthony did when someone took his book. She just repeated that someone took Anthony's book. Continues to look at me confused like I didn't understand what she said the 1st time
2/8/2024 20:40:45	Student P	Nothing	Yes, I keep asking what he is learning about justice
2/8/2024 20:59:23	Student I	Working with friends and I slept and peed my pants	Not this week
2/9/2024 8:36:56	Student J	Little bit of detail about works or interactions	Give put ups when he demonstrates the virtue, lead by example including narration
2/9/2024 13:15:48	Student E	A lot of things. Learning what is fair and unfair and justice. If you take a book away from someone who was looking at it that is not fair.	After asking about what virtue she was learning we talked about what justice means. I asked her what she thought it meant and we talked through some examples.
2/9/2024 14:55:51	Student A	Without any prompting, he mostly talked about other moments of the day. When I asked specifically about St. Anthony, he said that St. Anthony gives back to people what belongs to them or what they lost. I don't know if this is what was	We talked about justice when we were talking about St. Blaise this weekend and I told him a short story about how St. Blaise helped a wolf realize it wasn't fair that he

		taught, or if he was just telling me what he knows about St. Anthony because we pray to him often for lost items.	stole a pig and needed to return it to its owner.
2/9/2024 18:51:31	Student K	I don't know	Some yes - being fair with others
2/10/2024 8:02:21	Student L	No, but when prompted about virtues she mentioned learning about kindness	Explaining what kindness is
2/10/2024 13:10:47	Student M	I don't know	
2/10/2024 18:23:02	Student P		
2/10/2024 18:25:17	Student F	Thumbprint art	I've mentioned it but not much
2/10/2024 18:54:17	Student E	"Something really important and interesting"	We have really discussed justice and fairness especially as it relates to siblings and friends
2/10/2024 19:03:54	Student B	He did not give a detailed response this week.	Yes. This week we discussed justice regarding his behavioral issue at school (lying and making bad choices). I asked him if his consequences of missing play time was justice. He said "no" but I think it's mostly because he feels guilty.
2/11/2024 6:40:41	Student G	Lent is starting soon	Yes have begun reading a book naming the virtues and with stories/examples
2/11/2024 7:16:56	Student I		
2/11/2024 10:10:30	Student S		
2/11/2024 20:46:17	Student K	We played and made maps.	Yes, we talk about how life works and how doing the right thing is the best because we only have one judge in our life and God is the only one who we need to answer to. As long as our intentions our pure and honest we have nothing to worry about.
2/12/2024 9:20:07	Student M		Only in the capacity of what he is learning about virtues at school.

2/12/2024 11:49:47	Student I	Did not answer	Yes
2/13/2024 19:58:00	Student M	Hole punching.	Trying
<b>TEMPERANCE</b>			
2/14/2024 13:48:48	Student D	What she worked on and what was for snack.	
2/14/2024 19:22:36	Student G		We have been working on this, continuing to read our new book and vocalizing when we catch virtues in action!
2/14/2024 19:34:57	Student K	We talked about ash Wednesday and he sat with Louie at lunch.	Yes, he said Temperance is confusing and doesn't get it. I tried to explain it but it is hard for him to understand.
2/14/2024 19:49:08	Student A	It sounds like he has the definition of Temperance backwards - he said "Temperance is if you watch a movie again and again and again..." He also said "did you know there was a saint that never talked to God and only talked to her friends?" And "we read a book that says if you are fussy, you are turning away from God. So Julia (baby sister) is turning away from God because she's being fussy today"	Student A has been actively looking for more ways to be kind. We are trying to teach him about obedience and why it's important to learn and practice how to listen well so he will always listen to God and what He asks.
2/14/2024 20:26:05	Student E	Nothing	Not this weeks subject. She's been set on justice for awhile.
2/14/2024 20:27:43	Student I	I didn't go downstairs today	
2/14/2024 20:30:31	Student K		
2/14/2024 20:31:03	Student B	Student B says he read a green chapter book. He played a 10s matching game. He learned that St. Therese is kind and nice. "She is helpful. She talked to her friends too much so she forgot to talk to Jesus. She lived holy and prayed a lot."	We've been talking about consequences, making good decisions, and how that intertwines with justice. Sometimes punishment is justice. Justice is sometimes consequences of poor choices. Student B defines justice as "being fair."

2/14/2024 20:49:08	Student J	He is with dad today	Same as prior posts. Discuss pros and cons
2/14/2024 21:16:42	Student F	He said they learned about Temperance and it means balance in all things. But he did say he doesn't know what that means.	
2/15/2024 8:01:59	Student P	Nothing	
2/15/2024 13:54:39	Student C	We usually start with recess :) then I ask him do I send you to recess school? He laughs and says know and then will share some of his works usually. When prompted he will share pretty freely.	We ask him to try to define the virtue and give an example of how to live that out. I like these topics when the kids are struggling with something related to the virtue (which we all do!) I can refer what they are learning to help integrate the knowledge into real life application or living out.
2/15/2024 18:31:57	Student D	She showed me the egg for lent	
2/15/2024 18:46:12	Student K	We had popcorn today but I didn't have any. I didn't like it. Temperance is a good thing for me and you. Again and again and again. St Theresa of Avila we talked about her.	Yes, we talk about moderation and not over indulging
2/15/2024 19:05:49	Student G	Pin poking a cross in the atrium	
2/15/2024 19:44:15	Student A	Temperance is only eating a little bit because I'm not very hungry.  He still seems confused about St. Teresa of Avila. He is very adamant that she never talked to God and was always talking to her friends so she didn't have time to talk to God.	
2/15/2024 20:08:53	Student P		Yes I asked about Temperance and he tapped his knees and tried to explain something but I wasn't sure what he meant
2/15/2024 20:32:24	Student I		
2/15/2024 21:10:19	Student J	Student J is at his dads	Yes

2/15/2024 23:40:31	Student M		Yes - talking a lot about having patience these days!!
2/16/2024 8:33:28	Student S	Nothing	Yes
2/16/2024 11:24:42	Student K		
2/17/2024 16:31:08	Student D	Valentines fun	No
2/18/2024 19:51:06	Student O		Yes. I asked which virtue he was discussing at school. He didn't seem to remember, but We chatted about Temperance.
<b>FORTITUDE</b>			
2/22/2024 20:35:01	Student G	She willingly shared with me (on her own) that Miss Victoria taught about the virtue of being brave and how we can take deep breathes to be brave when we are scared. A couple hours later she came back to me and was so proud "oh mom it was <b>fortitude, that was the virtue about being brave</b> "	Yes! We just found the Hallow App has a kids virtue of the day audio (2-4 minutes long) so we have added that to our morning routine for lent and then throw it on again during the car ride to school and the girls love it!
2/22/2024 20:42:24	Student O	<b>Fortitude!</b>	Yes- asked about fortitude , discussed justice
2/22/2024 21:25:34	Student A	Yesterday he told me he learned about fortitude but he was a little confused what it meant. I explained that it means that you never give up and you keep loving God, praying, and doing what He asks you to do even when it's hard or you don't feel like it. He also said he learned about a saint who had fortitude, but he couldn't remember who it was. I couldn't get much out of him today about what he learned.	
2/22/2024 22:00:42	Student K	We had 2 circle times.	Yes. We talk about how things are hard sometimes but we need to trust in God and know he has a plan. We need to remain strong when we feel something is too hard
2/23/2024 7:57:53	Student I	He didn't answer me 😊	



2/23/2024 19:30:33	Student J	I don't know	I ask him what he's learned at school this time
2/24/2024 17:53:52	Student K		
2/24/2024 17:54:24	Student K		
2/24/2024 18:16:43	Student C	Fortitude is being brave and strong when it feels scary. We talked about the saint who saw Mary (St Bernadette). People thought she didn't see Mary and she needed fortitude.	We just ask him about the virtues he is learning and then try to apply it in an example.
2/24/2024 18:38:25	Student S	nothing	yes, when ask what virtues meant; raya's response was Jesus
2/24/2024 19:39:06	Student G		Yes!
2/24/2024 21:00:21	Student I		
2/25/2024 6:04:48	Student D	The h and I sound	No
2/25/2024 6:06:00	Student D		No
2/25/2024 7:45:44	Student A	He was so excited about stations of the cross that he wouldn't talk about anything else.	He has brought up fortitude and not giving up, and has been praying for God to help him do what he needs to do.
2/25/2024 7:52:50	Student O	No response	Ask what virtue he wants to work on today. He chose Fortitude on his own.
2/25/2024 16:40:14	Student B	Student B explained the definition of virtue is "strong and brave." We discussed how fortitude is doing what is right in God's eyes and not what "feels good." He also tells stories of saints but can't remember their names.	See above.
2/26/2024 15:21:20	Student E	She doesn't really say much	No
2/26/2024 15:22:17	Student E	You can turn towards Jesus or turn your back away but you can always turn back to Jesus	No

2/26/2024 15:22:56	Student E	Nothing happened	No
2/26/2024 15:23:39	Student E	Letters	No
<b>PRUDENCE</b>			
3/1/2024 15:32:45	Student G		Yes! Hallow app, book/stories, talking about when we see them in action!
3/1/2024 15:51:47	Student P	Yes he mentioned that fortitude is "again and again and again"	
3/1/2024 16:15:23	Student I		
3/1/2024 18:04:11	Student K	Fortitude. It's a good thing for me and you. And again and again	When things we have specific examples in real life we bring up virtues
3/1/2024 18:42:52	Student K		
3/1/2024 21:37:22	Student M	Learned about fortitude	Yes, just by using examples
3/3/2024 6:08:18	Student O	No response	We have been talking about patience when Thomas wants my attention immediately
3/3/2024 9:06:49	Student D	Bingo	Asked her what a virtue was. She responded with a good choice made over and over again.
3/3/2024 15:25:24	Student B	Student B read green book #9. He says phonics are "pretty easy." He restored a map for a friend. Student B did soap work and explained how to make soap bubbles.	Not this week.
3/3/2024 20:04:37	Student S		
3/4/2024 11:03:54	Student Q	Didn't really provide an answer	We name various virtues when correcting behavior
3/4/2024 13:45:05	Student C	We will have to prompt him by asking what virtue did you learn about in school today.	We ask him which virtue that he is learning about and to try to describe it in his own words and then ask for an example of what that would look like in practice.

3/5/2024 16:40:43	Student J	I don't know. Then he said he's working on a new presentation of letters	Yes
----------------------	-----------	--	-----

**Appendix L: Data from Instrument 5-Teacher Observations**

Week	Observations/Comments
Justice (Week 2)	Multiple children responded with Jesus! When asked what is Justice.
Temperance (Week 3)	<p>Popcorn activity            Every child in Casa likes popcorn. Everyone took as least one handful. Given instructions at the beginning to take what you would like and we want everyone to get some.</p> <p>Student A-only chose some popcorn because he said he did not feel very hungry  <i>Is this in part because of influence of Montessori environment? Children can help themselves and prepare own snack or do food work.</i></p> <p>Student E-only chose some popcorn because she wanted to make sure there would be enough for everyone  <i>Actually followed intent of lesson in relation to Temperance but only child to put it into words. Purposely made choice to not take as much as she wanted</i></p> <p>Student B/Student O-both took large handfuls because they felt really hungry            Most kids only took one smallish handful-by the end there was a little bit left over</p>
Fortitude (Week 4)	<p>Student J-<b>Drew picture of Jesus and the man who helped him carry the cross</b>            When asking what is a virtue, children often responded with one of the virtues we were learning: Fortitude, Justice</p>
Prudence (Week 5)	

**Appendix M: Response Data from Parent Surveys**

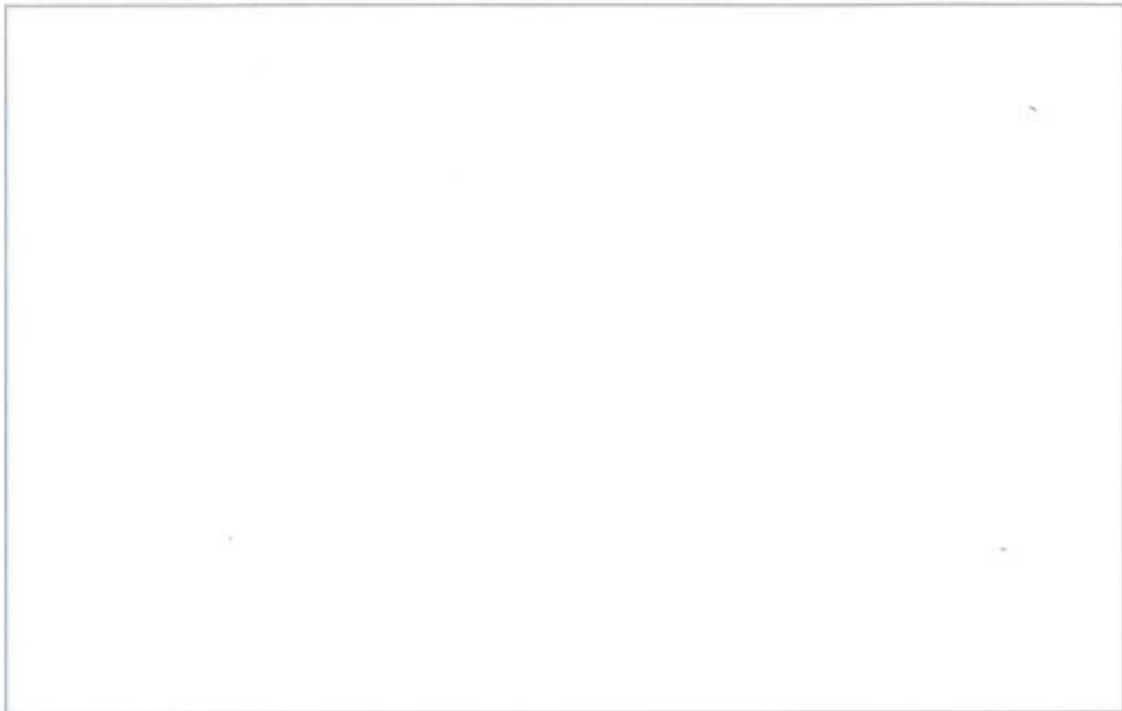
<b>Response Data and Percentages for Parent Surveys</b>					
<b>Responses in Week 1</b>	<b>Total Number of Students</b>	<b>Responses Maintained from Week 1 to Week 5</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents in Week 1</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents in Week 5</b>	<b>Percentage of Respondents Maintained</b>
18	23	13	78%	56%	66%

**Appendix N: Scanned Virtue Journals and Saint References**



Date: 1.30.24

Day 1: What is justice? Use words, draw a picture, or both.

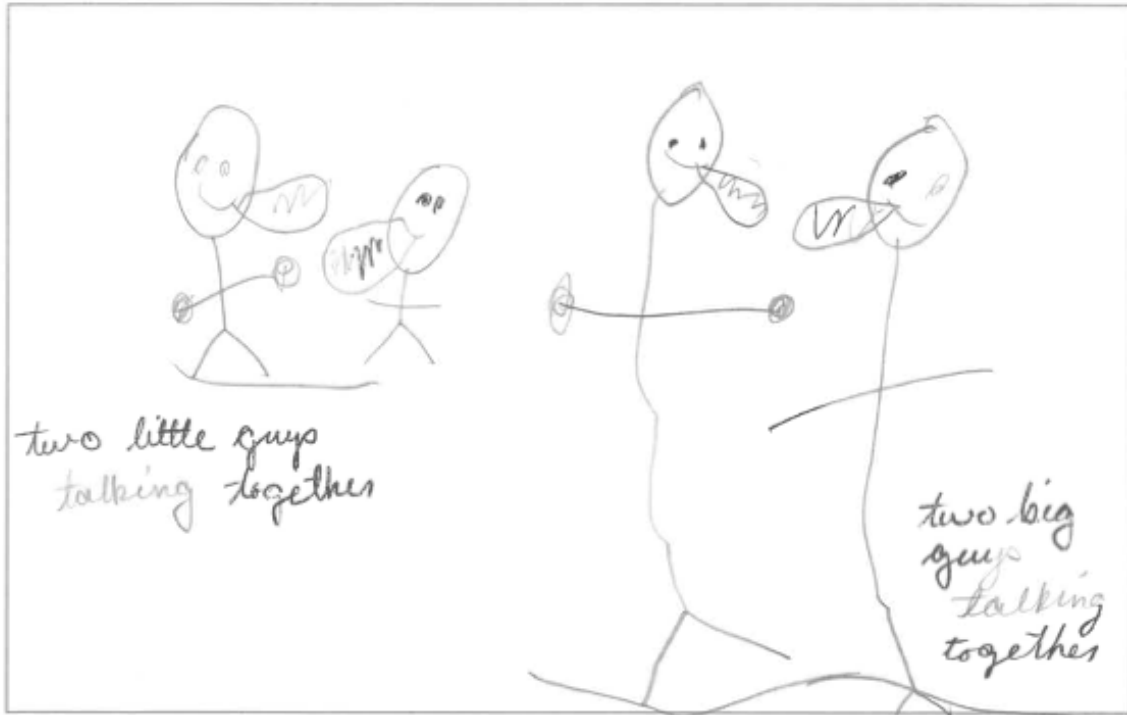


when somebody takes something  
and gives it back



Date: 2.12.24

Day 1: What is temperance? Use words, draw a picture, or both.



All the people spent so much time talking  
together they forgot to talk to Jesus.

---

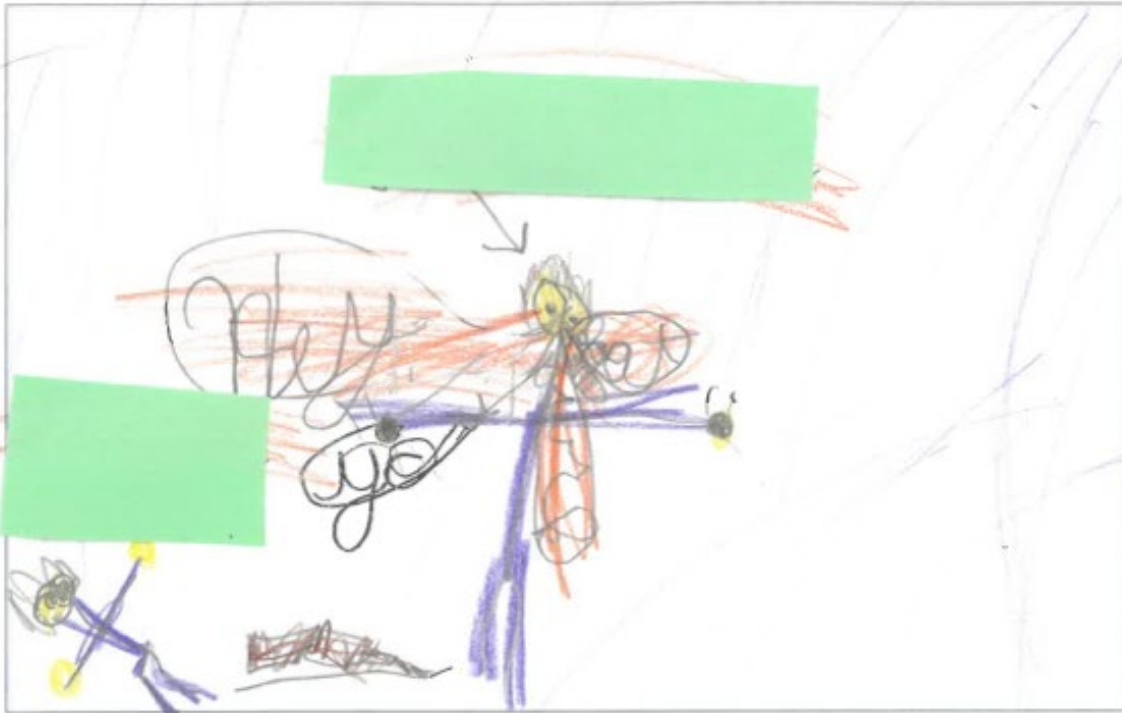
---

---

---

Date: 2.28.24

Day 1: What is prudence? Use words, draw a picture, or both.



[redacted] took [redacted] brown stain work. [redacted] got mad and  
said, "Hey! You took my work." Then [redacted] gave it back  
but it took a long time

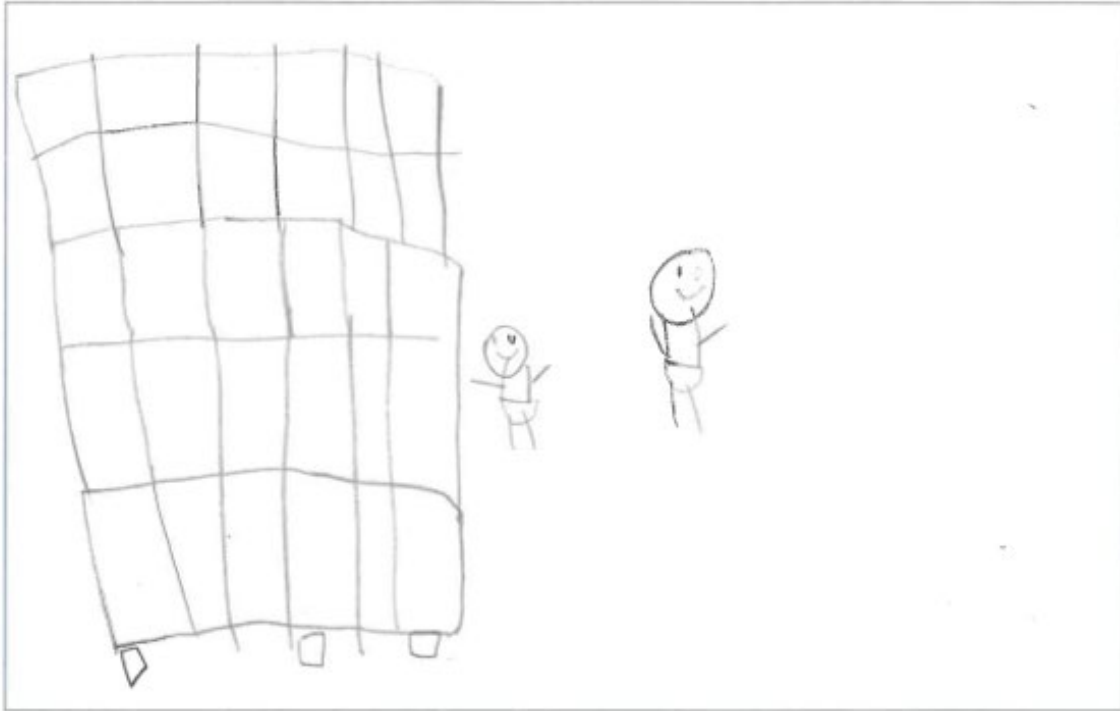
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_





Date: 1.8.0.24

Day 1: What is justice? Use words, draw a picture, or both.



When somebody take something  
away

---

---

---

---

---



Date: 2 / 2 / 2024

Day 1: What is temperance? Use words, draw a picture, or both.



jesus was born

---

---

---

---

---

---

Date: 2.28.24

Day 1: What is prudence? Use words, draw a picture, or both.



Max said "May I help you?" Tom said, "yes"

Tom was trying to pick up a rock

\_\_\_\_\_

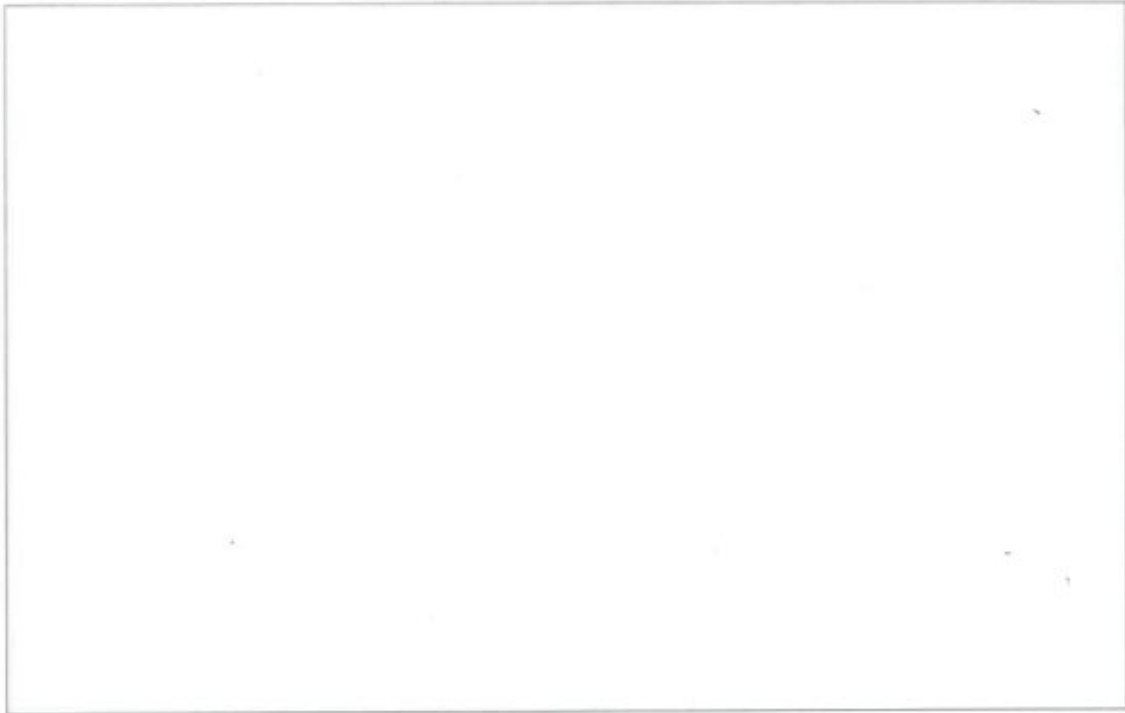
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



Date: 13.1.24

Day 1: What is justice? Use words, draw a picture, or both.



being fair

---

---

---

---

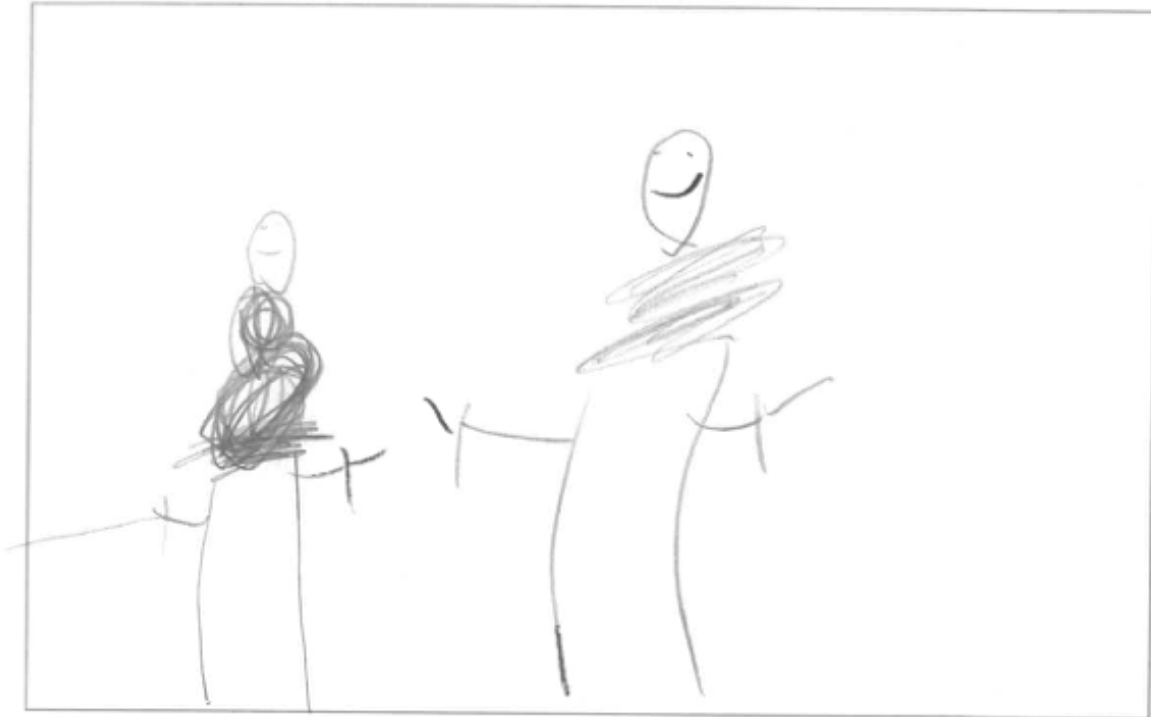
---

---

44

Date: 1.30.24

Day 1: What is justice? Use words, draw a picture, or both.



how about  
a game of tag

Date: 2.28.24

Day 1: What is prudence? Use words, draw a picture, or both.



Max said "May I help you?" Tom said, "yes"

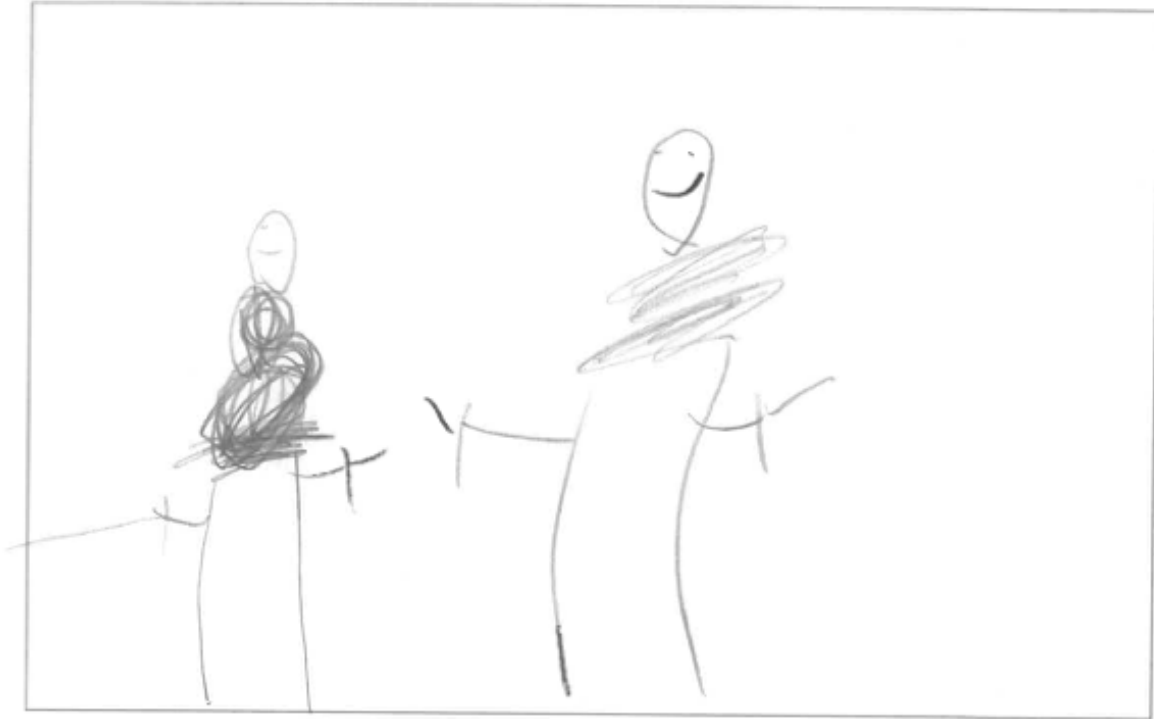
Tom was trying to pick up a rock

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

411

Date: 1.30.24

Day 1: What is justice? Use words, draw a picture, or both.

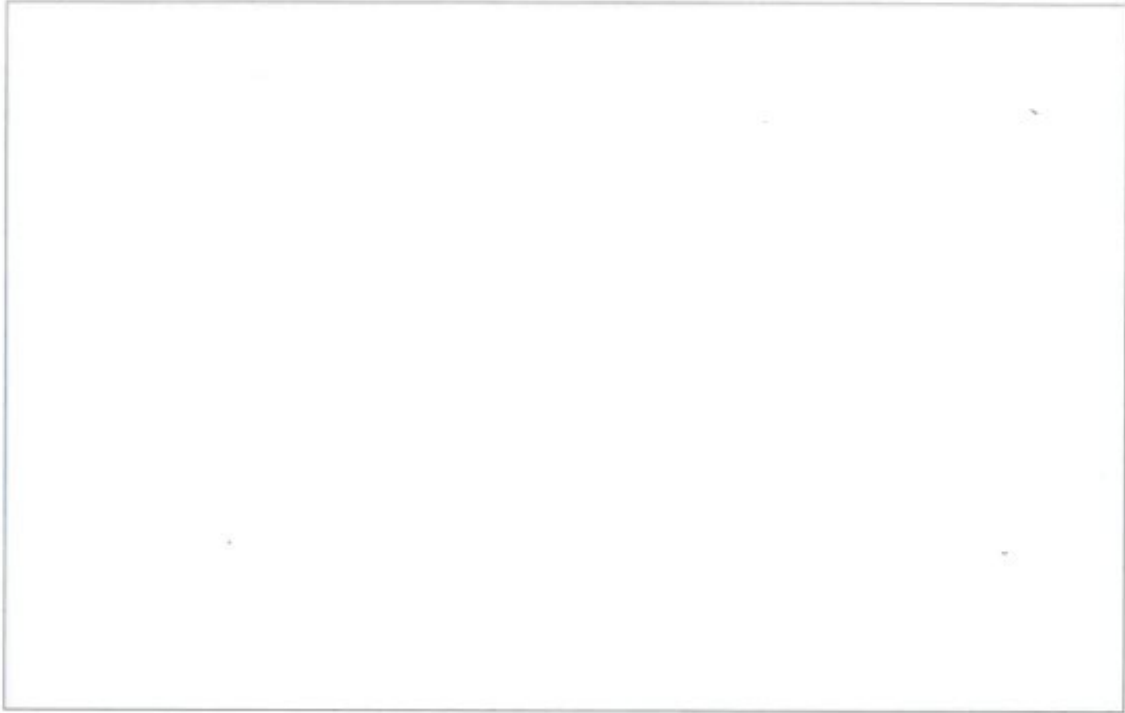


how about  
a game of tag



Date: 1.30.24

Day 1: What is justice? Use words, draw a picture, or both.



"I don't know"

---

---

---

---

---

---



Date: 2.12.4

Day 1: What is temperance? Use words, draw a picture, or both.



"I don't know"

People died

---

---

---

---

---

11

<b>Virtue Journals Instances of Saint References</b>		
<b>Total Number of Entries</b>	<b>Entries Referring to Saints</b>	<b>Percentage of Saint References</b>
23	10	43%