



LESSON 1

LA4 TERM

We are all made a little different from each other. It's when we are not strong in character that we work hard at hiding our unique qualities.

People who aren't strong in character also criticize those who are unique. It seems that uniqueness makes others feel uncomfortable. It scares them.

I have funny-looking ears. They look like little dishes or cups. I got teased a lot when I was a kid. But I wouldn't trade them for anything now. Why? Well, I don't know anyone else who has ears like mine. People remember me after they meet me. If not for any other reason, they remember my ears. That's fine with me. (Besides, my wife says they are more lovable—I believe her!)

When we are strong in character, we can appreciate those little differences—in others and in ourselves. How boring would it be if we all drove red station wagons? Then why in the world do we expect others to look like us and think like us? And do the same boring things?

The only way I can truly be free to be uniquely me is to have the strength of character to let others be unique without criticizing them for it.

Quick thought

Strength of character is great. We can freely be ourselves without fear and without feeling pressure from others. (Remember our expression section?) This strength will enable you to enjoy life much more—appreciate others’ differences in tastes and ideas while having the freedom to enjoy your own.

Be free to enjoy uniqueness, both in yourself and in other people. Let that creativity shine—no more being pushed where you really don’t want to go just to fit in with the crowd.

Storytime

“First Day of School and a Furry Bathroom Rug”

Discussion questions

Sometimes, as with the case with my furry rug, we have something or must do something that others think is a little different, and they choose to make fun of it. Has this happened to you? If so, please describe.

Have you made fun of others for being different or unique? If so, what was the situation? How would you handle it differently now?

LA4 - Think Unique

Did having the unique nap mat (furry rug) hurt my relationship with other kids? Why or why not?

First Day of School and a Furry Bathroom Rug

As school reopens each year, I think of the excitement of students entering a new grade and the anticipation of those starting school for the first time.

I remember my first day of school in '69. Because my mother was a teacher and was busy preparing for school herself, we didn't get all my supplies together until that very morning.

While we were racing around the house, we found the paste, scissors and some broken crayons. The crayons had rubbed together so often it was hard to tell the original colors. Finally, we came to the last item on the list—the nap mat.

This seemed to puzzle my mother. For a moment she pondered, then dashed into the bathroom and picked up the lime-colored, furry rug that almost every American has lying on the floor next to the bathtub. With the sack of supplies in my hand, she draped the furry rug over my shoulder and hustled me out the door, where I took that fateful leap onto the big Blue Bird bus.

When I arrived safely at school, I expected to see my fellow classmates with big furry rugs hoisted over their shoulders . . . maybe one would have white, another blue or maybe red. Shoot! Not a furry rug in sight.

While kids stared at me, I realized what was “kindergarten hip” and what wasn't. A little boy named Artie was strutting around with what appeared to be a briefcase, but with a flip of the wrist, it sprung into a beautiful multi-colored nap mat. Boy, was I jealous! Another child had a pack of crayons with 487 colors and an electric sharpener that

was so large she had to pull it on wheels and carry an extension cord around to use it.

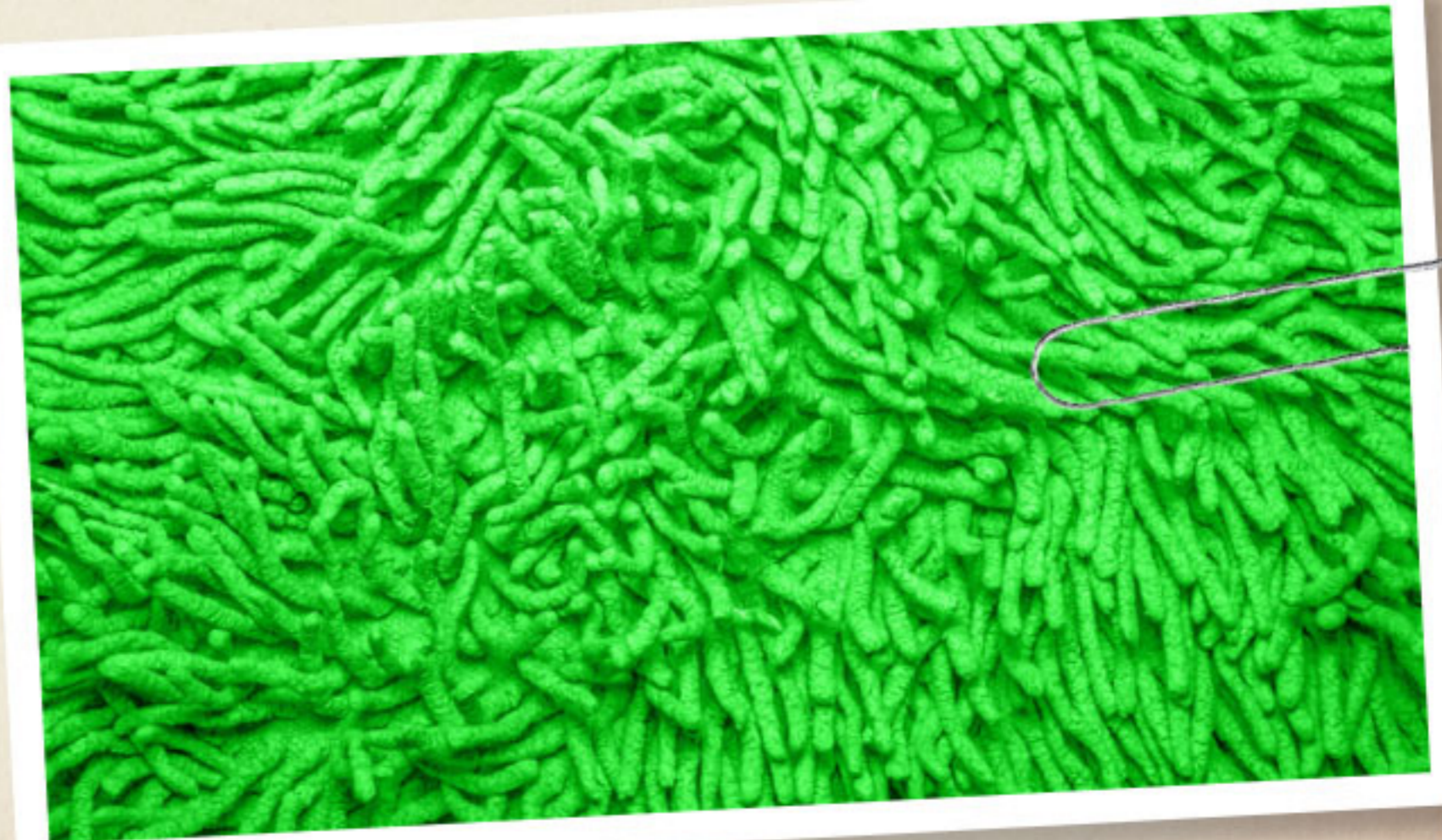
The day, however, improved. The teacher was nice and we colored. But during the introduction to show-and-tell, we were on our nap mats (my furry rug) when little Jimmy chirped, "Maybe next show-and-tell Troy could bring his matching toilet seat cover."

Hey, that's okay! A few weeks later, when milk and cookies didn't agree with me, I threw up all over little Jimmy's lap. Oh, and that furry rug. Well, as our nap pattern developed, it was "lights out" right after recess. Funny thing about those multi-colored nap mats that come in a briefcase—they're made of hard plastic. Combine that surface with sweaty skin and it's not a pleasant sensation. Soon they were calling out to me, "Hey, you wanna swap?"

Like an actor in a commercial, I propped my hands behind my head and said, "No thanks, guys. I feel good!"

I knew it was gonna be a great year.

Troy



LESSON 2

Activity

Take a few moments and write down something unique that you appreciate about each person in your class. Write each comment on a separate piece of paper and sign it.

Discussion questions

After everyone has had a few moments to silently read the comments from classmates, discuss some things that surprised you. Maybe even share one of your own "furry rag" stories.

Life applications

Begin to enjoy the uniqueness of the way you think or look or do certain things. Also, be strong enough in character not to be threatened by other people's differences.

Section 2: Summary

LESSONS 1&2

Quick thought

Character is doing the right thing at the right time. It's "practicing what you preach." All this ties into two other LA 4 topics: truth and law and order. Some people like to sit around stroking their chin, acting like they're being profound by saying, "Oh, what is truth?" They don't really care. If they did, they would be pursuing truth, living and loving truth instead of sitting around talking about.

You have that opportunity now to begin living and loving truth. You can speak truth to the best of your understanding and begin to look for what's right, and you'll find it. If you do that, you are already becoming a person of strong character.

Your journey to truth will take strength as well, simply because when you're doing your best to live and speak truth, sometimes things get a little messy. That's OK. However, there will be plenty of people happy to criticize you for your efforts. That only confirms that you're on the right track. They want to see you fail because they don't have what it takes to pursue truth. Keep pushin'. Remember: It's the lazy who lie—and it's easy to be a critic.

In addition, don't forget the "railroad tracks" of the law. They bring order and freedom and even more strength of character. Enjoy their structure and begin to function within those rules (or laws).

Finally, mix all that with the No. 1 quality—honor—and you're on your way to walking in strength of character. You're also on your way to being a good leader, a person others can count on in tough times. There are just not that many people out there like that. Rise up and be one—you're desperately needed.

Lesson from the barnyard

Turkeys sit and gobble,
chickens pick and peck,
but eagles soar. It's time
for you to fly.

LA4 - Summary

Discussion questions

What are some areas where you are strong in truth?

What are some areas in which you still lie to get your way or avoid dealing with reality?

Are you willing to give up these lies? If so, how are you going to change? Plan a course of action.

Can you see how walking in truth with a healthy respect for law and order will help you become a person whom others will want to be around and trust?

Are you strong enough in character to even give up a few friends who refuse to respect your desire to speak truth and honor law and order? If so, you are well on your way to being considered a young man or young woman who is strong in character.

Journal entry

Discuss how your life and friends will change as you begin to live truth and love law and order. (And as for those friends you may lose, don't worry, even more friends, friends of honor, are around the corner for people like you who are developing strength of character.)

Journal entry 2

How much better do you feel about yourself as you begin to speak truth and honor law and order?