

# Honesty

**Syllables**  
hon•es•ty

**Pronunciation**  
on-uh-stee

**Definition**  
Truthfulness.

*(Helen always tells the truth because she believes that “**honesty** is the best policy.”)*

**Simply put:** Just stick to the facts.

**Related Terms**  
Deceive: Mislead.  
Tact: To avoid offending other people.  
Ethical: Morally upright.

## **Fundamental Question:** **Is it ever okay to tell a “little white lie”?**

**Students will investigate the idea that** occasionally, in order to avoid hurting another’s feelings, a person might feel that dishonesty is the best policy. That is, although lies are dishonest, some may seem ethically appropriate or justified.

### **Objectives**

Each student will:

1. Interview an adult in a position of leadership to get an idea of that individual’s philosophies about honesty/dishonesty in general and role of white lies (trivial lies told to protect someone or spare his or her feelings) in particular;
2. Investigate how schoolmates rank “degrees” of honesty;
3. Develop his or her own opinion about the legitimate use of white lies; and
4. Create a pamphlet to teach others about the importance of honesty.

### **Before you begin**

- Print out a copy of *Honestly!* for each student.

### **Suggested Sidebars:**

#### **Speaking of Honesty (Discussion Idea)**

How many lies does a person have to tell to be considered a liar? Explain your answer.

#### **Taking It to the Next Level**

Can you spot a lie? Someone with crossed arms, sweaty brows, or who is fidgeting might be uncomfortable about something. A mistruth, perhaps? And is a person who can’t look you directly in the eye shy ... or telling a fib? Stalling, changing the subject, and telling stories with lots of inconsistencies are all suspicious signs, too. Be on the lookout today.

# Honesty

## Procedure

1. Invite to your class a panel made up of three adult leaders (including such people as a principal, headmaster or headmistress, mayor, rabbi, scout troop leader, parent-teacher organization chair, police officer, or others).
2. Prior to the date of the panel's visit, have your class develop a set of five to ten open-ended questions to be answered by all of the panelists. The questions should be worded to elicit individual philosophies about honesty/dishonesty in general and role of "little white lies" in particular. (Examples: What do you think is the most important thing young people should know about honesty? When, if ever, is it okay – and maybe even more appropriate – to tell a lie rather than to tell the truth?) Be sure to decide how the panel will be moderated, how long the session will run, whom (outside of the class) will be invited to attend, how the responsibility for the thank-you notes will be handled, and so forth.

Alternative to steps 1 and 2: Depending on the interests and abilities of your class, students may research and report about the honesty-related thoughts and philosophies of a person such as Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant, Ayn Rand, Friedrich Nietzsche, or another who has been outspoken on the subject.

3. Following the panel's visit (or research project), review what was learned and invite each student to develop his or her own philosophy about honesty and the role of white lies. These personal philosophies may be noted privately in a daily journal or shared with the group.
4. **Follow Up:** After receiving permission from your school's administrator, have your class conduct a school-wide survey to find out if people think some dishonest acts – including telling little white lies – are more (or less) dishonest than others. Here's an example of how the survey might look:

Rate the following acts from most honest (1) to least honest (7):

- \_\_\_ keeping a library book (permanently)
- \_\_\_ telling your parents only part of the truth about something
- \_\_\_ finding something, but not trying to locate the owner
- \_\_\_ cheating on a test in school
- \_\_\_ stealing candy from the store
- \_\_\_ stealing money from your father's wallet
- \_\_\_ telling a little white lie (or a fib)

Help your students compile the results. Together, examine the results in light of the things the panelists (or individuals researched) said. Share the survey results and your class's conclusions in the school newspaper.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**Reminder:** Honesty means truthfulness.

## Honestly!

Design and write the words for a pamphlet that tells kids your age about the importance of honesty. Try to include ideas that no one else in the class will think of.

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Today's Thought: *Honesty is like an icicle; if once it melts, that is the end of it.*

— **American Proverb**