

MILLSAPS

M A G A Z I N E

FALL-WINTER 2005

Remembering Katrina

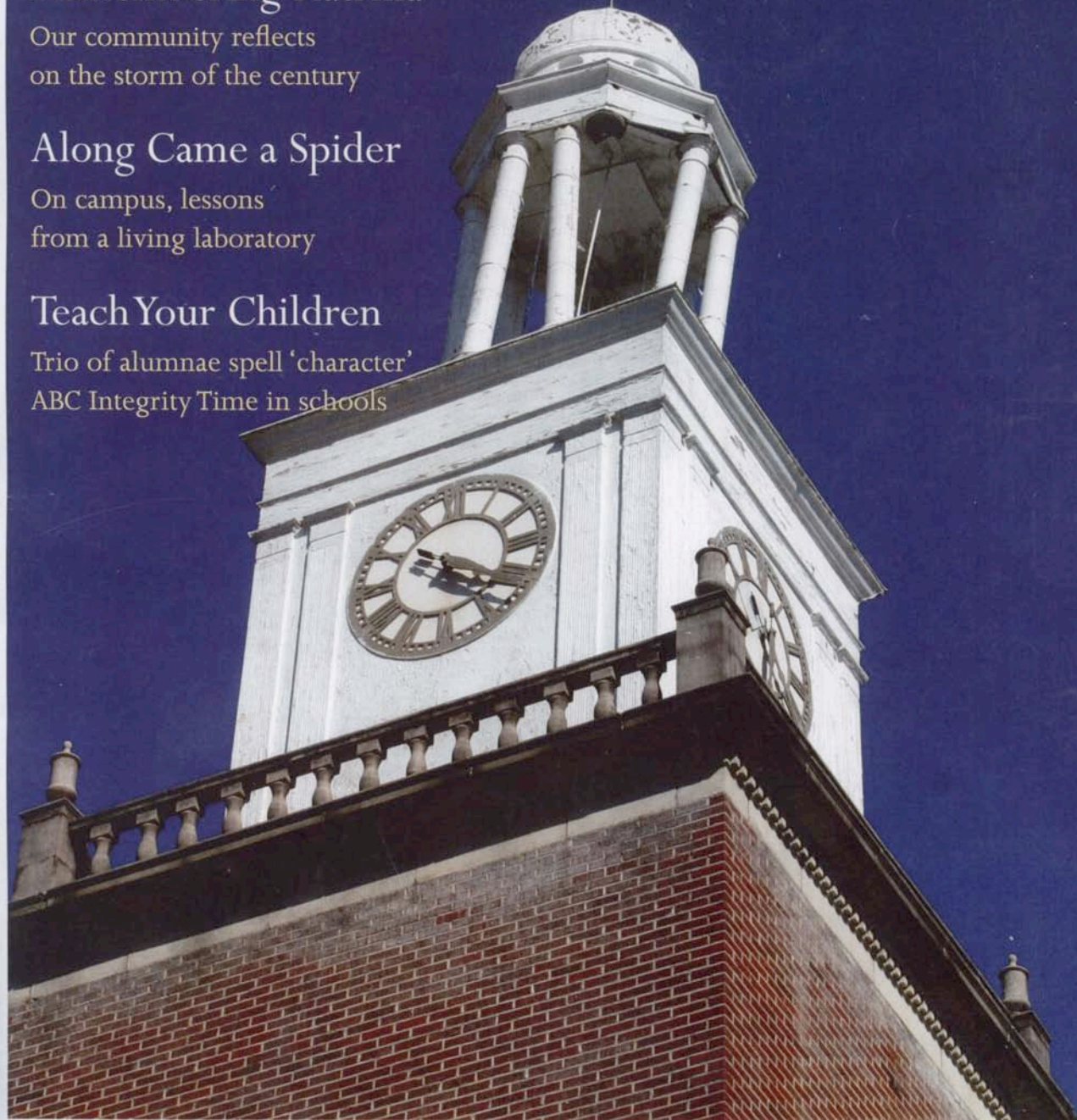
Our community reflects
on the storm of the century

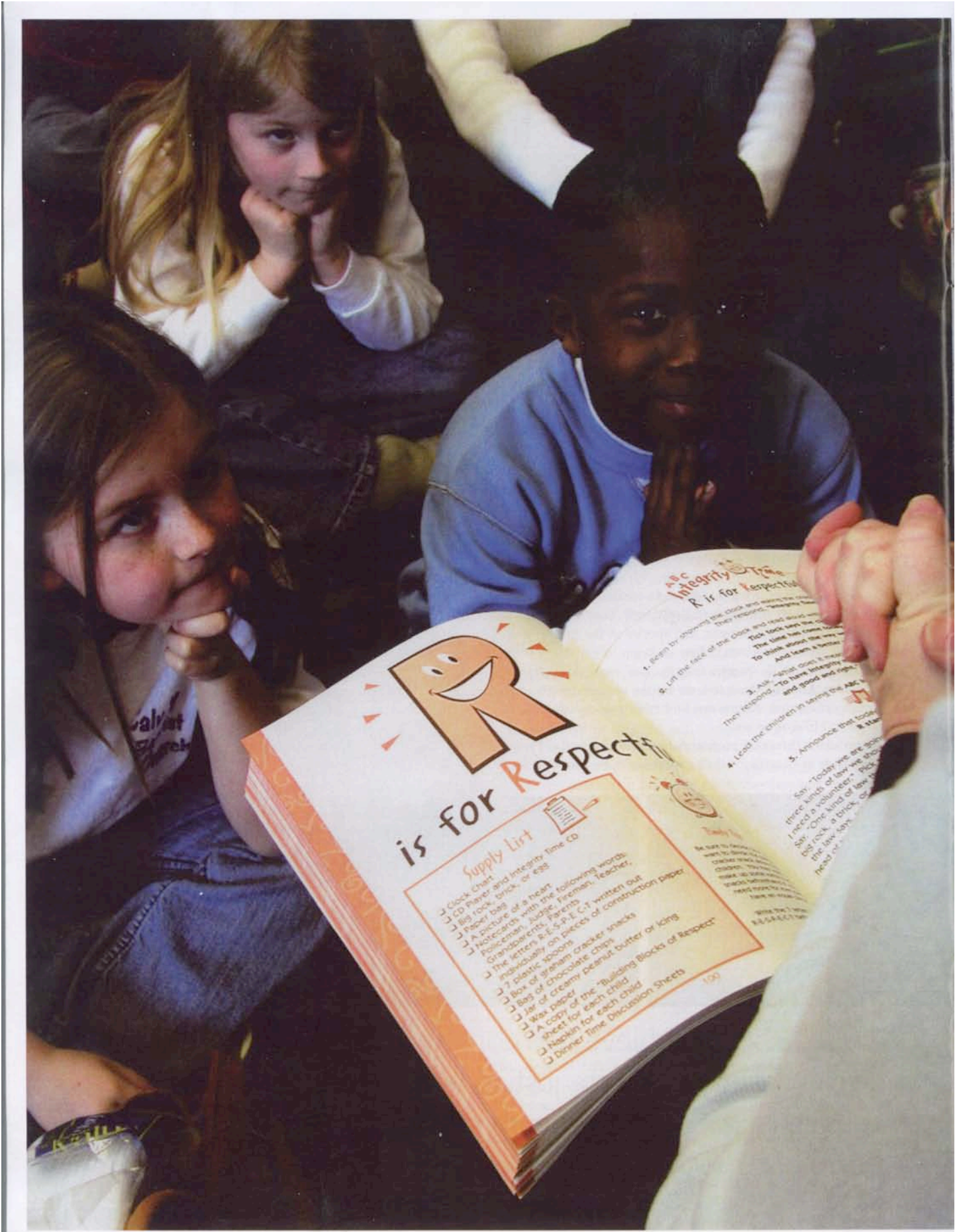
Along Came a Spider

On campus, lessons
from a living laboratory

Teach Your Children

Trio of alumnae spell 'character'
ABC Integrity Time in schools





ABC Integrity Time R is for Respectful

R is for Respectful

Supply List

- ✓ Clock Chart
- ✓ CD Player and Integrity Time CD
- ✓ Big rock, brick, or egg
- ✓ Paper bag with the following words: Policeman, Judge, Fireman, Teacher, Grandparents, Parents
- ✓ The letters A-E-S-P-E-C-T written out individually on pieces of construction paper
- ✓ 7 plastic spoons
- ✓ Box of graham cracker snacks
- ✓ Jar of chocolate chips
- ✓ Wax paper
- ✓ A copy of the "Building Blocks of Respect" sheet for each child
- ✓ Heekin for each child
- ✓ Dinner Time Discussion Sheets

1. Begin by showing the class and asking the children what they require.
2. Tick tick with the clock and read aloud with the children. The time has come to think about the way we act. And learn a letter.
3. Ask, "What does it mean to have integrity and good and right?"
4. Lead the children in saying the ABC's.
5. Announce that today we are going to focus on the letter R. Today we are going to focus on three kinds of law we should follow. We need a volunteer. Pick up the rock, a brick, or a head of...

You Have to Be Carefully Taught

the ABC's of Integrity

By John Webb



In a little classroom in Tupelo, scattered with little desks and little chairs, little people are grappling with a big idea. The children, ages 6 to 7, are considering what it means to live an authentic and respectful life—to make choices based on “what is true and good and right.” In other words, to have integrity. Pretty advanced stuff for first graders. After all, those are the same ideas that students in the Millsaps Faith & Work initiative are encouraged to tackle at the college level. So perhaps it comes as no surprise that it was three Millsaps alumnae who created and developed the groundbreaking curriculum ABC Integrity Time, which has been quietly making its way into classrooms across Mississippi, the nation, and the world.

For the founder of the program, Sara (Williams) Berry, B.S. 1988, it was concern for her daughter, Katie, that led her into Church Street Elementary School’s first-grade classroom, where she began to teach the meaning of integrity from lessons she had written at home. “I did not start out trying to write a book,” said Berry, an education major with five children. “I started out volunteering in my child’s classroom. My first child was starting first grade, and each week I would write a lesson on integrity. The children really responded well to it.”

It satisfied in their hearts a universal hunger for a sense of right and wrong, she said. “I believe strongly that integrity should be caught but it also should be taught,” Berry said. “We should lead our lives in such a way that it is caught through example, but I also believe that children need to be taught these principles in a way that they can understand, so that they can learn to choose what is true and good and right.”

Soon after Berry began the classroom project, pupils were talking about their integrity lessons at home, and the program became contagious. Other parents wanted to get involved. “Then the PTA became involved, and other teachers wanted to use it, and by the next year the whole school was covered with different volunteers doing it,” Berry said.

Meanwhile, teacher Allyson (Shive) Willis, B.A. 1995, was discovering, at the behavioral level, overwhelming obstacles to learning in the classroom. “I was an education major at Millsaps,” said Willis, business manager of Integrity Time. “When I graduated, I started teaching fifth grade. There were so many behavior and communication problems that often I couldn’t teach because the classroom was so volatile. I would have to stop the class, go out to the playground, and do activities to help the children learn how to communicate, treat each other with respect, and work together as a team—so that the environment would calm down enough that we could come back into the classroom and learn.”



Armed with the conviction that improving the classroom environment was a key to healing a behavioral crisis in education, Willis pursued a master's degree in counseling. "That way, I could come back and work with kids on the basis of teaching them techniques where they could learn to control

their anger and behavior so that they could move past that to learn more," she said. "I love the students. I love the educational environment, and it made me sad to see so many kids having so many difficulties with their behavior, which kept them from learning. And it was sad to see some teachers not being given the skills that they needed to help manage these behaviors."

When Willis saw firsthand how Berry was teaching integrity in the classroom, she took what the children were learning and used that in her therapy sessions. "I saw also how it was being carried into the home," Willis said. "It not only helped behavior and attitude in the classroom but also in the home. And so that's how we started to form a company and put it into print."

As Willis and Berry began codifying what had been informal class discussions into a standardized curriculum, they knew they would need eye-catching visuals that would hold the interest of young children. Enter Tracy (Applewhite) Broome, B.A. 1989, who had studied business and art at Millsaps.

"Tracy was my sorority little sister at Millsaps, and she has her own design company in Gulfport," Berry said. "When we formed a company, Integrity Time LLC, and began to think of graphics, we knew Tracy to be very talented and full of integrity, so we got her involved."

Together, they produced a curriculum featuring catchy rhymes and chants to help children remember the lessons learned, a CD of familiar tunes (e.g., "If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands . . ." becomes "If your attitude is good, clap your hands . . ."); a complete set of reproducible puppets with both positive and negative character traits—children engage in role play with such characters as Helpful Henry, Kind Katie, and Negative Narl, and take-home sheets to encourage home discussions about each lesson. The songs and rhymes were written primarily by Berry, and the folk-flavored CD was produced by Rivers Rutherford, the Emmy-winning Nashville songwriter.

The emphasis is on simplicity, with both the pupils and parent volunteers in mind, Willis said. "The format is simple, easy, and direct, so kids can get the most out of the time possible," she said. "Even though it is just a 20- or 30-minute lesson per week, the kids can think of those puppets and say, 'How would Selfish Sellie handle this? How would Positive Polly handle this?' And the teacher can take all the concepts they've learned and use those to help reinforce the lesson or bring about helpful behavior



Luanne Funderburk, a parent volunteer, teaching Integrity Time at Church Street Elementary.

modification during the week."

Berry said the program was written to require a minimal time investment. "The whole program can even be led by volunteers if the parent-teacher organization gets involved," she said. "Teachers have a lot going on. We wanted to keep it simple so that they didn't have to spend a lot of preparation

time on it and could hand it over to a volunteer if they so chose."

Class supplies are included in the book in reproducible form. The teacher can make the puppets and use them in class or allow the children to make the puppets and take them home. The puppets are especially helpful because the message comes from the character as opposed to an authority figure, such as a parent or teacher, said Luanne Funderburk, a parent volunteer who teaches the curriculum.

There are other auxiliary components that drive home the message of each lesson. "They can take home the music CD, there is a frame you can print out that says 'I Am a Kid of Integrity' that you can put the child's photograph in, there are nametags and color stickers," Willis said.

ABC Integrity Time has an originality that appeals to children, says Diana Ezell, principal of Church Street Elementary, thanks in part to the parent volunteers. Ezell said children may respond better to a volunteer than a teacher. "To have someone fresh come in gives the material a whole new meaning," she said.

Educators say it works. "Just after this lesson that we did about respect, one of the children came back and said that another child was not being respectful in the bathroom and slammed the door," said Kim Fandel, a first-grade teacher at Church Street. "Once we had done a lesson about kind words and unkind words, sweet words and sour words, and a child came to me and told me about a classmate who wasn't being respectful. She, too, had slammed the door on somebody. That child was internalizing what she had learned by watching another child's behavior."

Fandel said that misbehavior at Church Street School had declined because of ABC Integrity Time and another character-building program called Random Acts of Kindness. "The number of kids sent to the principal's office is down," she said. "They're learning to control themselves better and thinking about what they're doing more often than acting out right off the bat. We've talked about the implications of their actions."

The children also respond to the positive reinforcement of metaphors, games, and treats. "As long as there's something tangible that they can hold on to, they remember the message," Fandel said. "Like once we made a trail mix to represent individual contributions to a team effort. When we talked about sweet and sour words, we had sweet candy and the real sour, lemony type candy. Those kinds of things really catch their attention. One time

“ABC Integrity Time has the potential of positively changing our classrooms, our homes, our communities, and even the world.”

we made bookmarks out of tongue depressors as a reminder for them to watch their words.”

Ezell, who has been principal at Church Street for 15 years, said that Integrity Time had helped ease tensions created by rezoning in Tupelo. “The demographics have fluctuated downtown more than any other area of Tupelo,” she said. “Integrity Time has really helped bring kids into line with the culture of the school. Integrity Time and other programs that support character development here have helped create and reinforce a stable environment for that demographic change.”

She added that Integrity Time had helped create a sense of an enlarged family among parents and all the children of the school. “We have the wealthiest families and also the poorest families that come here,” she said. “I’m fortunate that parents here are as interested in all the children as they are in their own.”

To see results of ABC Integrity Time, you just have to watch how the pupils treat each other. “I’ve seen days that a particular problem between the students has been exactly what the lesson was about,” Funderburk said. For instance, one girl was being verbally abusive to a classmate, Funderburk said. “It was ugly, what she was saying about another student, and that is exactly what we were talking about in our Integrity Time lesson—calling names,” she said. “You could tell the girls felt bad and started opening up when they realized I didn’t hold anything against them. I would love to see it get into as many schools as possible because I think it’s a creative way to teach life lessons to the children.”

According to Willis, ABC Integrity Time is now being used in seven elementary schools in Tupelo as well as in other areas of Mississippi. It has also spread to Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky, and Texas and been used in an elementary school in South Africa. Integrity Time was even donated by a Memphis philanthropist to a school in China. “The message is universal,” Berry said. “It’s not culture-specific. We have had people in other countries say they’d be willing to go through the curriculum and mark words that might need a teacher’s guide explanation. We’ve had requests to

have it translated into Spanish in Ecuador and Peru, but we haven’t gotten that far with it yet.”

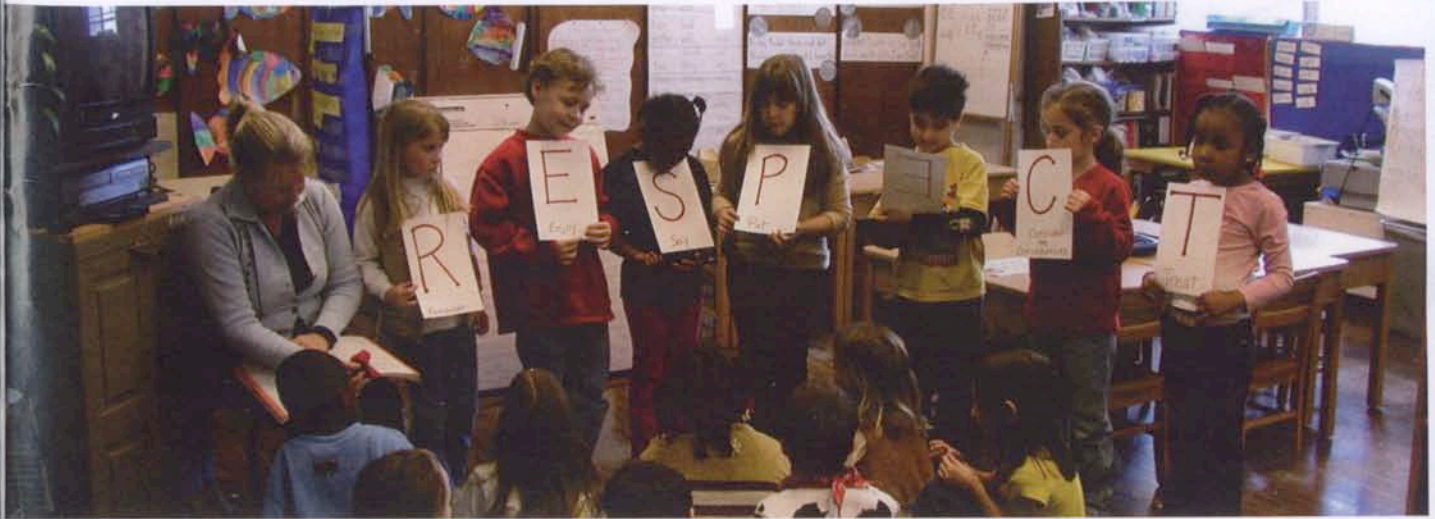
“ABC Integrity Time has the potential of positively changing our classrooms, our homes, our communities, and even the world,” said Kate Butler, the principal of West Corinth Elementary in Corinth, where Integrity Time has been taught for three years. “Character education in schools is so important in today’s diverse society. Without such values as respect, kindness, cooperation, and integrity, the academic achievement would be futile.”

Often, the Integrity message is spread through personal connections and word-of-mouth. To cover costs, Willis said, schools can apply for grants or participate in a corporate sponsorship program. The Pierce Foundation is an underwriter in Corinth, Coca-Cola helps shoulder the cost in Tupelo, and in Columbus, a restaurant franchise, Sweet Peppers Deli, has stepped in with funding.

Integrity is also being taught in churches and other religious settings such as parochial schools. “Sara has written a biblical version,” said Broome, who has won an Addie Award for the program’s graphic design. “The book we use in schools doesn’t bring in biblical aspects, and there are no references to scripture,” she says. “But the biblical version allows you to tie these ideas into the Bible.” She added that the religious version had not yet been published, but that is one of Integrity Time’s next projects.

The program has yet to be used in the public schools of Jackson, although it has been adopted in several preschools. “We are very interested in finding sponsors willing to put it in school systems where there are a lot of severe problems, where we could go in and train teachers and volunteers and make a difference where kids are dealing with a lot of social and behavioral problems,” Willis said.

She added that Millsaps had taught her to be creative and “to use your giftedness” as a tool for contributing to the greater good. “Millsaps also taught me how to think,” she said, adding



R-E-S-P-E-C-T (And What It Means to Me)

As the first graders gather at the feet of parent volunteer Luanne Funderburk, their faces light up as they join in the opening ritual of ABC Integrity Time ...

What time is it?

"Integrity Time!

"Tick tock says the clock

"The time has come today,

"To think about the way we act,

"And learn a better way!"

Today, Funderburk says, the session will focus on the letter "R," for respect. She discusses different kinds of respect:

—respect for the laws of nature (she holds an object over a little boy's head and asks what would happen if she dropped it);

—respect for the law of the land (she produces a picture of a judge), and teachers, parents, the police, and other authority figures,

—and, finally, respect for the law of the heart.

"That means we show respect for those around us and respect for ourselves," Funderburk says. "It means we respect our conscience and we act kind and honorably to everybody around us. You know that good feeling we talk about? We want to keep that good feeling. When you do things you know are right, you're going to have it. When you start having that question, 'I just don't know; I'd better stop and think.' That's your conscience trying to tell you something.

"Make the choice that gives you that good feeling. Y'all are going to love that good feeling. It always wins out in the end. It does."

Together, the class spells out the word R-E-S-P-E-C-T, assigning a meaning to each letter:

"Remember—that there are always others in authority over us. Remember to respect each other," Funderburk says.

"Enjoy—the differences in people. Not everybody's the same.

"Say—Bad words?" ("No!" shout the kids.)

"Put—on a respectful face.

"Encourage somebody. Don't let them down. What you say to somebody may make all the difference in the day they're having.

"Consider the consequences. Being disrespectful always has consequences.

"Treat others how?" ("Like you would want to be treated!" the children exclaim.)

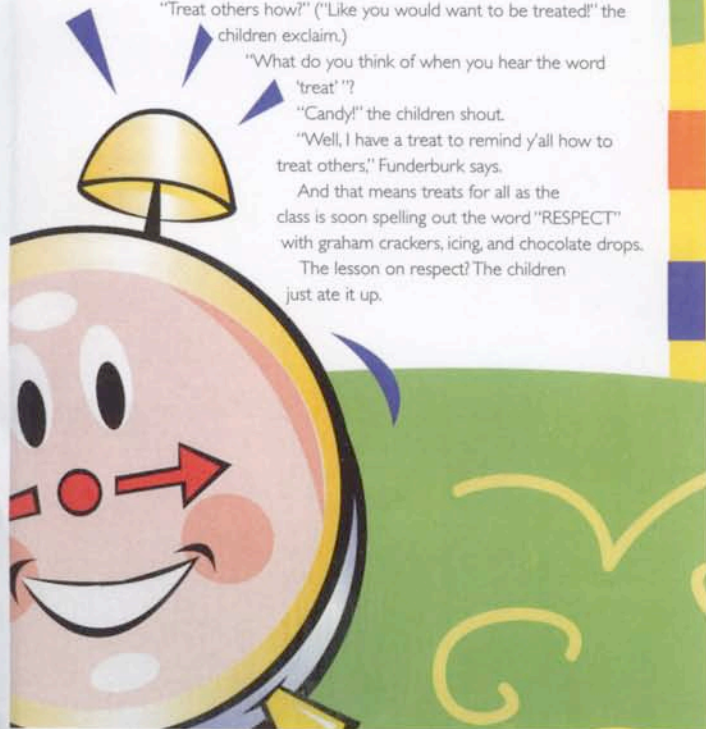
"What do you think of when you hear the word 'treat'?"

"Candy!" the children shout.

"Well, I have a treat to remind y'all how to treat others," Funderburk says.

And that means treats for all as the class is soon spelling out the word "RESPECT" with graham crackers, icing, and chocolate drops.

The lesson on respect? The children just ate it up.



From left, ABC Integrity Time creators Allyson (Shive) Willis, Sara (Williams) Berry, and Tracy (Applewhite) Broome with students at Church Street Elementary in Tupelo.

that Drs. Marlys Vaughn and Connie Schimmel had helped her to understand children and develop a passion for creating an educational environment. "A lot of times it's more about the environment the adult creates than it is about the child, and it's our responsibility as educators to create an environment that can foster learning and where they can bloom," she said.

Willis's father, Bob Shive, a professor of math and computer science at Millsaps, praised his daughter's involvement. "The curriculum that these young women produced is getting children started early in their thinking about what it means to have integrity," he said. "This seems to me to present a great opportunity to show an example of how Millsaps graduates are making a difference in our world."

Are they? Just ask the kids.

One said she had learned to stop and think before screaming at her little brother for breaking one of her toys. Another said the lesson on attitude helped her to welcome the arrival of a sibling without rivalry for her parents' attention. "I learned not to have a bad attitude when he was born," she said.

A third pupil said that if a classmate was mean to her she tried to never be mean in return. "I always look for a different way to handle it," she said.

"I've learned to treat people the way you want to be treated and help people the way you want to be helped," said Shannon O'Brien, 6.

Erica Fay, 6, said she had used the principles of Integrity on the playground. "Morgan and I are best friends and we play together and we take turns," she said. "Today is her day to pick a game to play. Tomorrow is going to be my day."

Would the world be a nicer place if more people had studied Integrity?

"Yeah," she said. "It would."

Those interested in bringing this program to their children's school may contact Allyson Willis at 662-231-9929. Or call ABC Integrity Time at 662-844-0813 or visit the website www.integritytime.com.