INFAMOUS EXAMPLES

Use the name-cards that would be most relevant to your students. Use blank cards to create additional cards tailor-made to accommodate your students’ knowledge and interests. Distribute one card to each small group.

Marcus Brutus

Roman senator who agreed to join the conspiracy to assassinate his friend, Julius Caesar. He may have done so to prevent Caesar from claiming too much power and becoming a tyrant, or he may have done so for other reasons.

Robert Hanssen

A former FBI counter-intelligence agent who sold United States intelligence secrets to the Soviet Union, and later Russia, between 1979 and 2001. His activities led to the deaths of a number of members of, or informants for, the U.S. intelligence service. The subsequent report described his actions as “possibly the worst intelligence disaster in U.S. history.” He did all this for nearly $1.5 million and diamonds.

Judas Iscariot

One of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. He is the one who betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver and led the Roman soldiers to Jesus. In paintings of “The Last Supper,” Judas’s cup is typically portrayed as having overturned and spilled. After Jesus’s crucifixion, Judas hanged himself.

Aldrich Ames

A former CIA counter-intelligence officer who gave U.S. intelligence secrets to the Soviet Union, and later Russia, between 1985 and 1993. Numerous members of the U.S. intelligence service, or their informants, were executed by the Soviets as a result of the information he provided. His motivation for selling the secrets appeared to be money to support a lifestyle more luxurious than he could otherwise afford.

Lord and Lady Macbeth

From Shakespeare’s Macbeth. Lord Macbeth is a general in King Duncan’s army and eventual Thane of Cawdor. Lady Macbeth is his wife. After speaking with the Three Witches, Lord Macbeth entertains visions of becoming king. When he hesitates at this ambition, Lady Macbeth strongly urges him to kill King Duncan in order to seize power for himself. He does so and, in the aftermath, additional murders occur.
The Chicago Black Sox

Eight players for the Chicago White Sox during the 1919 World Series in which the White Sox lost to the Cincinnati Reds. These players were accused of intentionally losing games in exchange for money. Although acquitted of charges, they were banned from baseball for life. Questions have been raised about whether one of the players, Joe Jackson, had truly been a full participant in the plot.

The Cambridge Five

Five British men who infiltrated the highest levels of British intelligence services while spying for Russia during World War II, and for the Soviet Union during the Cold War. After being recruited by the KGB in the 1930s, Kim Philby then recruited four of his Cambridge classmates—Donald Maclean, Guy Burgess, Anthony Blunt, and allegedly John Cairncross—to the spy ring. They sought no compensation for their work, apparently motivated by political solidarity with Soviet communism.

Scar

From the animated film and Broadway musical The Lion King. The younger brother of Mufasa, King of the Pride Lands. Jealous for power, he murders Mufasa and allows Mufasa’s young son, Simba, to believe himself responsible. Simba runs away into exile. Scar tells the other lions that both Mufasa and Simba have been killed, and proclaims himself the next king.

Prince Hans

From the animated film Frozen. The prince is the youngest of 13 siblings and, therefore, with no country of his own to eventually rule. He courts the orphaned Princess Anna, proposing marriage shortly after having met her. Once he believes both she and her sister, Queen Elsa, will soon be dead, he reveals that his true aim has been to acquire power as Arendelle’s new monarch once both sisters have died.

President Snow

From the book and film The Hunger Games. Tyrannical president of Panem. Although his title is president, it is unclear whether he was democratically elected. He is in charge of the oppressive military regime that rules Panem’s districts, disturbed about the uprisings begun by Katniss and Peeta, and ruthless in his actions to preserve both his pride and his power.

Darth Vader

From Star Wars. Former Jedi knight who turned to the Dark Side of the Force in order to gain power. He serves alongside a Sith master (Siths are enemies to the Jedi and try to master the dark side of the Force), and as apprentice to the emperor of the Galactic Empire. Having left the Jedi order for the Siths, he mercilessly fights against the Jedis in order to maintain Galactic power. His son Luke’s eventual willingness to sacrifice himself on his behalf eventually redeems Vader.
During the first six years of the American Revolution, no one sacrificed more for the cause than Benedict Arnold of Connecticut. In 1775, he led a failed American invasion of Canada, in which the participants nearly died from starvation and exposure traversing the wilderness of Maine. The following year, Arnold helped turn back a British invasion of the United States from Canada at Valcour Island on Lake Champlain. Most important, in the fall of 1777, General Arnold played the critical role in forcing the British to surrender at Saratoga, New York. This victory convinced France to enter into an alliance guaranteeing American Independence. In securing that critical success, Arnold suffered grievous wounds that cost him a couple of inches of bone in one of his legs and left him disabled.

In the opening months of the Revolution, Americans shared Arnold’s patriotism. But as the war wore on, many lost their enthusiasm and dropped out of the cause, leaving Arnold increasingly disgusted by the apathy of his fellow countrymen. Not only did Arnold’s fellow citizens leave the tough job of fighting the British up to a tiny minority; they also neglected to support the army financially, instead concerning themselves with their civilian pursuits. Arnold grew more and more frustrated with these “sunshine patriots.”

Many Continental Army officers and enlisted men shared Arnold’s bitterness toward the American public. Others expressed their frustration either by simply resigning and going home, or by organizing themselves to lobby Congress for a redress of grievances. Officers pressured Congress to recognize their services by voting them a military pension and to provide for the widows and orphans of those killed in action.

But the tactless Arnold lacked the patience for collective action. Instead he preferred to take lonely and dramatic stands on his own. Denied the major general’s commission he believed he deserved (Connecticut, it seemed, already had its quota of major generals), he battled Congress on his own for justice. Thanks to the loyal support of his commanding officer, General George Washington, Congress grudgingly awarded Arnold the position, but refused him the seniority he merited. Arnold saw this as Congress being petty. Instead of joining the officers’ campaign for a pension, Arnold fought a personal crusade to win financial relief for the family of Dr. Joseph Warren, killed at Bunker Hill. When all else failed, Arnold opened his own wallet to help the suffering Warren family.

A “perfect storm” of factors—his crippling injuries, his intolerable mistreatment, and even his recent marriage to a lady half his age with strong British connections and a lifestyle he could not afford—all drove Arnold to reckless measures. He concluded that the new United States had become even more corrupt than Great Britain. And if that was the case, then the colonies might as well reconcile with the
mother country. And who better to bring about that reconciliation than Arnold himself—the one and only virtuous revolutionary remaining? Self-pitying and increasingly delusional, Arnold contemplated the unthinkable: He would defect to the British! He even convinced himself that his treason would inspire other officers to defect, crushing the Revolution once and for all.

Arnold used his influence with his loyal mentor, General Washington, to obtain command of the critical U.S. fort at West Point on the Hudson River. He then closed his infamous secret deal with the British: He would turn over West Point to the enemy without a fight! Even worse, he would betray the commander who had always stood up for him. Arnold carefully arranged the surrender to take place while General Washington was present at West Point, so that the British would not only acquire the strategic stronghold, but would also obtain Washington as a prisoner! In return, Arnold would receive a general’s commission in the British army and a whopping cash reward of 10,000 pounds sterling.

In the end Arnold’s treasonous plot against both his country and his commander failed—only because some local militia forces by chance captured a spy, Major John Andre, carrying last-minute details of the conspiracy. Washington, who now knew of Arnold’s treachery, secured West Point. The turncoat fled to the British for protection. Washington demanded Arnold’s return, so that he could be hanged for treason. When the British refused to hand over Arnold, Washington instead hanged John Andre, the captured British courier. Andre, a handsome, charming, well-liked young British officer, died at the gallows in place of Arnold. Although appointed a British general as he had been promised, Arnold never obtained the fame and recognition he craved. Having proven himself a traitor, the British could never trust him with significant responsibilities. Arnold’s claim to fame during the remainder of the war was to burn to the ground the city of New London, Connecticut (just a few miles from his birthplace in Norwich), in a British raid. After the war, Arnold went to England, where he lived until he died at the age of 60. He has been reviled in American history ever since as a traitor to his country.

The ultimate irony of Arnold’s treason is that it sent such shock waves across the U.S. that instead of inspiring mass defections and a reconciliation with Great Britain, it instead inspired the very patriotic sacrifices for the cause that Arnold had once sought—the very sacrifices needed finally to secure American Independence.

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Defining Civic Virtues: Integrity
To tell the truth, expose untruths, and keep your promises.
Discussion Guide

Directions: Discuss the following questions with your partner(s).

1. How did Benedict Arnold serve his country in the Revolutionary War?
2. Why did Arnold grow frustrated with his fellow Patriots?
3. Should Arnold have joined with his fellow officers in lobbying Congress to recognize their services? Should he have fought alone for the pension of one man killed in action? When that failed, should he have used his own money to help that man’s family? Explain.
4. Make a list of all the betrayals you note in the story. Were any merely imagined?
   If Arnold had been correct that he had been betrayed, or that the United States had lost its virtue, would those things have justified his actions? (If you have studied the Articles of Confederation and the reasons some Founders believed a new Constitution was needed, you may choose to use that information to inform this part of your discussion.)
5. In your judgment, what is the very worst thing Arnold did? Which of his actions (or inactions) is least understandable or forgivable? Why?
6. In literature, tragic heroes are individuals who could have been great but for one flaw that causes the audience to feel pity and fear. If you were to analyze Arnold as a character in a drama, what would be his tragic flaw?
7. Certain historical markers bear the stigma of Arnold’s treachery. How do these tributes reveal the shame that Arnold brought to his name?
   • A memorial of the Saratoga Battlefield, site of the decisive battle, is now preserved at Saratoga National Historical Park. The memorial names and features monuments to three other generals at the battle; a fourth niche is empty.
   • At the United States Military Academy at West Point, plaques memorialize all the generals who served in the Revolutionary War. One has no name and reads only “major general ... born 1740.”
8. Can we come closer to understanding a virtue by examining its opposite? How did Arnold’s actions evidence dishonor, dishonesty, and cowardice? What virtue(s) does his story help you understand?
9. Do you think Benedict Arnold believed he was acting with integrity?
   • What is to keep people who believe they are doing right from hurting the people they believe they are protecting?
   • Explain the danger of self-deception in relation to civic virtue.
   • What is the importance of integrity in a constitutional republic such as in the United States?
   • Describe a situation in which you be may be susceptible to self-deception about your own integrity.
Virtue In Action

Strive for integrity in your daily life. Keep a journal and note the ways you act with honesty, honor, and integrity.

- Benedict Arnold's self-deception may have been rooted in self-congratulatory or self-righteous attitudes. Identify the areas in which you can tend toward those traits, and be aware of the self-deception to which they can lead.
- Stay on top of your academic studies. Take responsibility for both your good and bad grades.
- If you do poorly on an assignment, don’t blame others.
- If you do well within a group assignment, ensure that due credit is given to all.
- If you play a team sport, remember that your teammates are counting on you. Practice regularly, arrive at each practice prepared, and do your best on game day, even if you aren’t the star of the team.
- If you are a member of a musical group, remember that your fellow musicians are counting on you. Practice regularly, arrive at each rehearsal prepared, and play with excellence at performances, even if you are never assigned a solo.

Sources & Further Reading


Integrity

Directions  It is sometimes said that your name is the only thing you truly “own.” What are some ways you work to keep your good name? What types of situations are the most challenging tests of honor? How might honesty about your shortcomings help you to guard against the kinds of temptations to which Arnold fell victim?

“No man can purchase his virtue too dear, for it is the only thing whose value must ever increase with the price it has cost us. Our integrity is never worth so much as when we have parted with our all to keep it.”

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