

Examination Days: The New York African Free School Collection

Primary Documents for Lesson Plan 2

Emblem of Education—Nineteenth Century Education and Moral Instruction

The first selection is a transcript of African Free School student Henry Hill's performance "Emblem of Education." Image number 1 in the African Free School Collection archive on the Examination Days Web site is a facsimile of the original of this document.

The second selection is an excerpt from: *An Address to the Parents and Guardians of the Children Belonging to the New-York African Free School, by the Trustees of the Institution* (New York: Samuel Wood, 1818).

The third selection is an excerpt from: Wynne, John Huddleston. *Choice Emblems, Natural, Historical, Fabulous, Moral and Divine for the Improvement and Pastime of Youth. Displaying the Beauties and Morals of the Ancient Fabulists . . .* (New York: James Oram, 1814).

**HENRY HILL'S PERFORMANCE
EMBLEM OF EDUCATION**

See in what Evil plight yon vine appears
Nor spreading leaves, nor purple clusters bears,
But if around the elm her arm she throws,
Or by some friendly prop supported grows,
Soon shall the stem be clad with foliage green,
And cluster'd grapes beneath the leaves be seen.

Moral

Thus prudent care must rear the youthful mind,
By love supported, and with toil refin'd
'Tis this alone the human plant can rise;
Unprop'd, it droops, and unsupported dies.

APPLICATION

This is a fit emblem of youth; which, if left to itself, will never grow up in wisdom or in virtue.—To education alone must children be indebted for their morals; and the care of the parents is always visible in the conduct of their offspring.

When a youth has received a virtuous and liberal education, no gratitude can be sufficient to discharge the debt he owes to his parents, since he is not only indebted to them for his being, but also for all his hopes of peace *here*, and of eternal happiness *hereafter*.

On the other hand, he who has been neglected in his youth, has a heavy accusation to bring against those who reared him, when he comes to years of maturity. Evil inclinations, if not checked, will grow amazingly upon us; while good ones, if they be not properly encouraged, will fade and die away and that will be too late deplored in age, which might have been remedied in our earlier years.

[. . .]

The education of children is indeed a matter of such consequence, that it concerns not only private persons, but the public in general; and that nation will always be the most virtuous, and the most respectable, whose youth are educated with the greatest care, and are earliest instructed in the duties of men and of Christians.

These, like the generous vine, will fully repay the pious care of the planter; and, while they are known by their fruit, will reflect honour upon the hands that reared them.

AN ADDRESS TO THE PARENTS AND GUARDIANS OF THE CHILDREN BELONGING TO THE NEW-YORK AFRICAN FREE SCHOOL

RESPECTED FRIENDS,

WE, the trustees of the School, feeling a desire that your Children should become useful and respectable in society, are impressed with the propriety of addressing you in this way, in order to call your attention to a few subjects connected with their and your present good, and consequent future happiness.

It will, we presume, be admitted by you, that great pains are taken at the school to teach your children, not only how to read, write, &c. &c. but also, that considerable care is bestowed in order to implant virtuous and correct principles in their minds. Nor can too much solicitude be felt on this subject, by those who take an interest in their real welfare. And who, we would ask, can or ought to feel more concern, that a child should be "trained up in a way he should go," than the parents of such child. Nothing, perhaps, is calculated to be so useful in successfully prosecuting that object, as the well directed efforts of a prudent parent. We, therefore, recommend your frequent perusal of our ideas on the following subjects.

Example.

CHILDREN, as well as ourselves, are creatures of habit, and at all times observing the words and actions of their superiors; not an idle word that passes the lips of the parent, (if it be within the comprehension of the child) but the child will endeavour to imitate. Few are the parents, though they are ready to acknowledge the truth of the remark, make it of that importance as to put a proper restraint upon these feelings or expressions. Your words, your manner, your actions, are all observed and practised by your children. Therefore strive to think twice before you speak to, or in the presence of a child.

Of attending Places of Public Worship.

CHILDREN should be taught and encouraged to attend places of public worship at the stated times of service, and especially in company with their parents or other friends, and to behave in a becoming and reverent manner while there, as well as in going and returning. This is an important duty to be performed by all parents and others having children under their care, as it is calculated to produce an inclination to good things, even from habit.

On Reading the Scriptures.

Such of your children as can read the Scriptures, should be encouraged and required, to do so at all suitable opportunities, when at home. If parents were to fix on stated times, (in the evening for instance) for this exercise, it would, perhaps, be productive of much good, especially if all present, during the time of reading, were to desist from every thing else, and spend half an hour, or more in solemn attention to the exercise. Let it be observed, that the scriptures should never be read in a careless irreverent manner, but with serious attention, seeing that they are given by The inspiration of God, and that with his blessing, they are able to make us wise unto salvation.

Of Speaking the Truth.

PARENTS should endeavour to impress upon the minds of their children the importance and excellence of always speaking the Truth, and also, to inform them, how *wicked* it is to utter a falsehood; as it is clearly pointed out in the Scriptures to be a very great offence against God; and he has sometimes punished liars in a very awful and exemplary manner: witness the case of Ananias and Saphira, recorded in the 5th chapter of the Acts. A liar is always looked upon, by our fellow-men, as a mean and dishonourable person, unworthy of respect or esteem.

[. . .]

On, giving Commands to Children.

WHILE the Scriptures strongly enjoin it on children to be obedient to their parents, they likewise point out the duty of parents to their children; hence, in the proverbs of Solomon, and in some of the Epistles, much instruction may be gathered on this important subject; and we earnestly recommend such passages as treat on it, to the careful perusal of parents.

We are persuaded that considerable trouble and unhappiness are experienced in families, in consequence of the improper manner which many parents give their commands to their children. Parents and others who have the care of children, are obeyed and respected in proportion to their own good or bad management of them. Those who expect obedience should first observe that their commands are given with prudence and moderation, and then enforce them with a becoming resolution. It is, however, to be regretted, that many persons give their orders in a boisterous and tyrannical manner, or else in a careless and indifferent way, so that they are hardly ever obeyed or respected by their children or domestics: for, in the first case, they only produce in the mind of the child, a slavish fear, dread, and hatred; and in the second, little else is produced but inattention and carelessness, and both of course, tend to disobedience.

Never make a promise to a child unless you intend fulfilling it; and when made, be careful you do not forget it. Many parents by the neglect of these simple rules, in effect, tell their children that they are not to believe what they say. The child hears your commands, but hopes, and often finds that you have either forgot what you have said, or you did not mean as you said.

Never correct in anger, but if a degree of it is felt, always wait 'till the mind becomes calm, the only state wherein a person can be qualified to correct in reason, without which, it will tend only to do harm, having a tendency of hardening or souring the mind, instead of convincing the judgment.

Of Industry.

As idleness leads to wickedness, so industry will be found happily to conduce to virtue and sobriety; and it is incumbent, on parents to find employment for their children, at a suitable age, as it is to furnish them with food and clothing, for a want of employment, or rather of suitable inducement to it, will soon deprive them of both food and raiment. Much more might be said on this subject, but we will only add one short sentence, viz. To suffer children to run the streets freely, with promiscuous herds of idle wicked companions, is only fitting them for *close Confinement at maturer age in a state prison or house of correction.*

Of Cleanliness.

PARENTS can, perhaps, scarcely show a greater proof of their care for their children, than by keeping them clean and decent, which contributes much to their health and comfort, and when they are sent to school, it is indispensable. It is also a very pleasing sight to see a large collection of children with their hands, faces, and heads perfectly clean, and their clothing clean and in good order. The appearance of the children exhibits to every observing mind, the character of the mother.

Of Dishonesty.

It is observable, though greatly to be lamented, that frequently children very early show a propensity to possess what does not belong to them, which if not checked in proper time, grows to a fixed and settled vice. It is, therefore, highly essential, that those who have the care of them should keep a watchful eye on the first buddings of this dangerous propensity. It generally shows itself first by cheating in the various games of play, well known among children, such as marbles, buttons, &c. &c. The stealing of a needle, pin, or a bit of thread, when known to the parent, should be treated with *great seriousness*, and if repeated, followed with timely correction, which, although it might not accord with the tender feelings of the indulgent parent, yet it is believed, that a steady perseverance would gradually lessen the painful task, and maybe the means of saving the child from future disgrace and ruin, and the whole family from sharing in the same.

Of using Profane and Indecent Language.

THERE are few crimes more degrading to human nature than that of making use of profane and indecent language; and yet, how often is the ear of modesty and piety assailed by the horrid imprecations, and the disgusting vulgarity of the passing multitudes. Parents should be careful, whenever they hear any improper expressions of the child, and by timely and moderate reproof, endeavour to show the evil tendency thereof. Too great, alas! is the number of youth, who, indulged or neglected, are suffered to become a nuisance to society. It is believed that much of this great and growing evil might be prevented by the timely admonition and care of those who have a daily opportunity of hearing, and authority to correct their children.

Of Cruelty to Brutes, &c.

PARENTS should discountenance every act of cruelty which they may discover in their children. The minds of youth are very susceptible of strong impressions: these may be tuned either to their advantage or disadvantage; and it is greatly in the power of those who are entrusted with their moral instruction, to influence their tender minds to acts of kindness and humanity, even to the brute creation.

It is very probable, that many men of noted savage cruelty, began their first career in youth, by torturing and killing poor harmless flies, &c. &c. even in the presence of their own parents; who, not reflecting on the evil consequences, have suffered their children to indulge in such *wicked sports*, until they have grown up, hardened and unfeeling, and at length think, perhaps, as little of the lives of their fellow-men, and even of their own, as in their youth they did of the lives of insects, birds, or beasts.