



Lesson Plan: Principles of Leadership

THE FILM

This lesson plan is designed to be used with the film **The Principal Story**, which follows the activities of two school principals, one a veteran and one a novice, during the course of a school year. Classrooms can use this film and its companion website resources to explore the nature of leadership.

POV documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from their initial broadcast. In addition, POV offers a lending library of DVDs and VHS tapes that you can borrow any time during the school year — FOR FREE! Get started by joining our Community Network: www.amdoc.org/outreach/events/.

Please visit our film library at http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_filmlibrary.php to find other films suitable for classroom use.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- React in writing to the question “What makes a strong leader?”
- Use viewing skills and strategies, including observations and note taking, to understand and interpret film clips.
- Discuss principles of strong leadership.
- Produce a written leadership analysis of a famous person or someone they know in their everyday lives.

GRADE LEVELS

6-12

SUBJECT AREAS

Behavioral studies, civics, U.S. history, current events

MATERIALS

- Method of showing the entire class online video clips and website resources
- Handout: Principles of Leadership

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

One 50-minute class period

SUGGESTED CLIPS

Clip 1: Meet the Principals (length 9:50)

The clip starts at the beginning of the film and ends at 9:50 when Tresa Dunbar says, “. . . they’re doing what they’re supposed to be doing.”

Clip 2: Getting Families Involved (length 2:02)

The clip begins at 30:50 with Kerry Purcell driving in her car and ends at 32:52 when Purcell says, “. . . they will do their very best for you.”

Clip 3: Addressing Student Behavior Issues (length 2:10)

The clip begins at 34:05 with a view of the exterior of Henry H. Nash Elementary School and ends at 36:15 with Tresa Dunbar listening to a parent.

BACKGROUND

The Principal Story tells two stories, painting a dramatic portrait of the challenges facing America's public schools — and of the great difference a dedicated leader can make. The feature-length (52 minutes) film follows two school principals, Tresa Dunbar and Kerry Purcell, for a year.

Tresa Dunbar is shown in her second year as principal at Henry H. Nash Elementary School, which prior to Dunbar had six principals over a five-year period and typically ranked at the bottom in statewide testing. Previously Dunbar served as an assistant principal, a teacher, a social studies department chair and an evaluation specialist, and she has extensive experience designing and facilitating professional development experiences for teachers. She has a Ph.D. in curriculum development with endorsements in language arts, reading and social studies.

Kerry Purcell is shown in her sixth year at Harvard Park Elementary School. Earlier in her career, she taught kindergarten for 12 years and served in various leadership capacities at the school, district and state level. Purcell has a master's degree in educational administration. During her tenure as principal, test scores increased by approximately 45 percent in reading and 50 percent in math. Purcell currently works for Focus on Results, where she provides professional development and coaching support to help educational leaders use data to make sound instructional, fiscal and human resource decisions.

ACTIVITY

1. Give students five minutes or so to react to this prompt in writing: What makes a strong leader?
2. Ask a few students to share what they've written. Take notes on the board to capture student ideas on the qualities and actions that they believe define a good leader. Can the class think of anyone who has these leadership qualities? Have students name examples and describe specific experiences or provide other evidence to back up their opinions.
3. Tell students that they are going to consider some everyday examples of leadership by watching video clips that show two principals in charge of troubled schools in Illinois. Distribute the handout to focus student viewing and then show the clips.
4. Discuss student observations and the supporting evidence noted on their handouts. How do the leadership skills of the principals measure up against the class list of leadership qualities on the board? What strong qualities and skills do the principals possess and where might there be room for improvement? Should school principals have different leadership qualities and skills than other types of leaders? Why or why not?
5. Ask each student to perform a written leadership analysis of either a famous person or someone in their everyday lives. In their papers, students should name specific leadership qualities and skills of the individuals they have chosen and provide concrete

examples of how those characteristics are demonstrated. Students should use these points to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of these leaders and what students can learn from their examples.

ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS

Students can be assessed on:

- Contributions in class discussions.
- Careful observations and supporting evidence noted on the handout.
- Mechanics and content of the written leadership analysis.

EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

- Explore what motivates student behavior by watching **The Principal Story** in its entirety. Discuss how extrinsic factors shown in the film (i.e., testing data, punishment, community and school environment, parental involvement/encouragement, good teachers) influence student achievement. To what degree are appropriate behavior and academic success determined by the student? Have students create a pie chart that illustrates to what degree these various factors influence their own behavior at school.
- Express gratitude to those who have inspired us to succeed. Throughout the film, both principals provide encouragement to students and tell them that they are confident the students can reach their goals. Ask students to identify people who have inspired them to work hard, persevere and be their best, such as teachers, principals, coaches, religious leaders or parents. Then, have students write thank you notes to these individuals to let them know that their support is appreciated.
- Watch, explore and discuss other POV resources that address education and leadership, including **The Hobart Shakespearians** (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/hobart/>) and **The Boys of Baraka** (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/boysofbaraka/>). These resources have companion educator activities to support their use in the classroom.

RESOURCES

The Principal's Role in Supporting Learning Communities

http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/feb09/vol66/num05/The_Principal's_Role_in_Supporting_Learning_Communities.aspx

This article from *Educational Leadership* magazine outlines specific approaches to supporting strong learning communities.

School: The Story of American Public Education

<http://www.pbs.org/kcet/publicschool/index.html>

This website offers resources that describe the innovators and development of our nation's public education system from the late 1770s to the 21st century.

Standards for School Leadership Practice: What a Leader Needs to Know and Be Able to Do

<http://www.e-lead.org/principles/standards1.asp>

This article reviews the principal's role and the skills a principal needs to perform his or her job effectively.

STANDARDS

These standards are drawn from “Content Knowledge,” a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>.

Behavioral Studies

Standard 1: Understands that group and cultural influences contribute to human development, identity and behavior.

Standard 4: Understands conflict, cooperation and interdependence among individuals, groups and institutions.

Civics

Standard 14: Understands issues concerning the disparities between ideals and reality in American political and social life.

Language Arts

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

U.S. History

Standard 31: Understands economic, social and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

Working With Others

Standard 5: Demonstrates leadership skills.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in secondary education and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive’s director of education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource website (now PBS Teachers) and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and northern Virginia.