

A legend.
A legacy.
A lifetime of inspiration.

Aristotle, Excellence, and Eric Liddell

Key Information

Subject area: Religious and Moral Education

Time required: This resource is planned to be taught as one 50 minute lesson. Depending on which parts of the content you use and the pace at which your class progresses through the activities you may wish to utilise the content over a series of lessons.

Activity: Reflection

Eric Liddell values: Passion & Integrity

Key skills:

- Empathy
- Reflective Skills

Learning intentions:

- To learn what Aristotle meant by a 'virtue'.
- To explore why Aristotle saw education as the thing that could make us virtuous.
- To learn that being virtuous is a skill that has to be developed.

Success criteria:

- I can explain that virtues are the right balance between two extremes.
- I can use these ideas to 'glimpse' virtues in other people.
- I know that Aristotle used the term 'phronimos' to describe someone excellent at knowing how much of each virtue to be and when.

Experiences and outcomes:

- *(RME 2-01c)* I can show understanding of Christian beliefs and explore the similarities and differences between these and my developing beliefs.
- *(RME 3-09b)* I am developing my own understanding of values such as honesty, respect and compassion and am able to identify how these values might be applied in relation to moral issues.
- *(RME 3-09c)* I can explain how the different beliefs that people have, including beliefs which are independent of religion, relate to their moral viewpoints and how this leads them to respond to moral issues.
- *(RME 3-09d)* I am developing my understanding of the nature of belief and morality.

Supporting Materials:

- [Presentation](#)
- [Virtuous Sheet](#)
- [The Virtuous Person Sheet](#)



Uncle Eric Fact

Eric sincerely believed that it was important to keep Sunday as a special day that was dedicated to God. This was why he refused to run in the 100 meter event at the 1924 Paris Olympic Games, and why he originally refused to arrange and referee sporting games on a Sunday in the internment camp. One Sunday a group of youngsters, weary of the humdrum rhythm of the listless day, began a game to occupy themselves. Without a referee, the hockey game had disintegrated into quarreling and fighting. Liddell had a decision to make and from that point on Eric added Sunday refereeing to his busy Sunday schedule. By taking on this important role, Eric showed that the ongoing safety of the young people was of greater importance to him than his chosen lifestyle and beliefs. Everything Eric did was for the greater good. It seemed that anywhere there was a problem, Uncle Eric would be there to sort it out.

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Lesson Format

In this lesson, pupils will discuss virtues and learn about Aristotle's belief in 'balancing' virtues. Pupils will be encouraged to reflect on how they have caught glimpses of virtues in people and how they can continue to develop virtues within themselves.

If the class hasn't seen the ['Eric Liddell 100 introductory video'](#) please show this now.

Introduction

Using the presentation slides, start the lesson by recapping the content covered in the previous lesson(s) about Jesus, Christianity, and incarnation.

Using the information on slide 5 of the presentation introduce to the class the idea of full humanity and the beliefs of philosopher Aristotle.

Glimpses of virtues

Eric Liddell was an amazing athlete, who achieved something incredible at the 1924 Olympic Games. But when Aristotle talks of a 'glimpse' he doesn't mean noticing the achievement. He means noticing the character traits that lie behind the achievement. These character traits are known as virtues.

Ask pupils to think of the last time they witnessed a glimpse in someone. Who was it and what was the glimpse? Emphasise to pupils that the person they are thinking of doesn't need to have achieved something great (although they could have) and they don't need to think the person is perfect either.

Ask pupils to share these glimpses with the person next to them and try to identify what virtues (character traits) the people were demonstrating.

Task 1—Virtuous

Using the 'Virtuous' worksheet, ask pupils to write any virtues they can think of around the outside of the human shape. To help pupils with this they could think of someone they know who they think is excellent and the character traits they have. Pupils must understand that this person does not necessarily need to be famous.

Aristotle's breakthrough

Share the following facts about Aristotle's breakthrough:

- We usually think that you either have a virtue or you don't have enough of it. One or the other.
- But Aristotle thought this was too simplified. Being great is more complicated.
- Most people think that every good character trait is the opposite of a bad one.
- Whereas Aristotle believed that every virtue was the right balance between two bad 'extremes'.

Referring to the virtues/traits that the pupils have already identified in Task 1, pose the question "Is it possible to have too much of a trait?"

Ask pupils to consider the following questions:

- Can someone be too confident?
- Can someone be too brave?
- Can someone be too humble?
- Can someone be too serious?

If pupils think 'yes', then they agree with Aristotle.

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Finding the Balance

Share the diagram on slide 10 of the presentation which shows the idea of balance between two bad traits. Ask pupils what they think the virtue between the following extremes would be:

- Someone who is cripplingly shy and someone who is overconfident.
- Someone who is stingy and someone who is extravagant and flashy.

Share the answers with pupils shown on slide 11 of the presentation.

Task 2

Using 'The Virtuous Person' worksheet pupils should provide examples of people who have demonstrated a virtue and the achievements it has led to.

Task 3

To check pupil understanding, ask pupils to answer true or false to the following statements:

Aristotle believed that...

- Virtues are excellences of character. (T)
- Virtues are when you avoid the extremes of having too much or too little of a trait. (T)
- The best way to live your life is to look at the achievements of others, rather than their character. (F)
- Every so often we 'glimpse' virtues in other people. (T)
- Every so often we glimpse perfect people. (F)
- Being virtuous helps us to do well in life. (T)

Back to Eric Liddell in the camp

Ask pupils to read the excerpt from Sally Mgnusson's book 'The Flying Scotsman' seen on slide 14 in the presentation which details the moment Eric decided he would break the Sabbath by referring on Sundays. Ask pupils to consider the following statements:

- Why does this story make some people think Eric Liddell was an excellent person?
- Thinking back to the previous lesson (Religious and Moral Education part 1) why do you think this story makes some people think that Eric Liddell was very much like Jesus?

Following rules

Introduce the concept that Aristotle believed that living life is hard because just following rules doesn't ensure you 'get life right'. Aristotle believed that following rules doesn't mean you are guaranteed to make good decisions. Life is harder than that. There are lots of virtues, and you have to work out 'how much of each' for any situation. Living well means constantly weighing things up. Importantly the golden mean/virtue is not just the average between two extremes. In different situations, the correct response can be different.

The story about Eric Liddell deciding to referee on the Sabbath in the camp is a good example of this; Eric had all sorts of rules that would inform his decision making. But ultimately he chose to break one that he had never broken before. Because it was better for some people in a bad situation.

Aristotle believed this 'weighing up' was the most important thing in doing well in life.

Phronimos

Introduce the word 'Phronimos' to the class. Aristotle used the word 'Phronimos' to describe a person who has become good at making decisions. They have rules they may sometimes follow, but the key is that they get great at deciding when to break them. Aristotle said the whole point of education was to help you get good at this.

Part of making good decisions is being really clear on what you're aiming for. For Aristotle, it had something to do with creating communities that help us all to do well. For Christians, this will involve trying to be as much like Jesus as possible. And we saw this was something Eric Liddell did well.

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A modern day phronimos

Share the story (seen on slides 17 and 18 of the presentation) of a modern-day phronimos Ivan Fernandez Anaya. After sharing the story with the class emphasise to your pupils that to make good decisions as Ivan did, you need to know what you're aiming for.

Practice

Aristotle believed that virtues do not occur naturally. He believed that virtues have to be taught and that schools should provide opportunities for and help pupils to develop virtues and decision making skills. To make good decisions, you need to get better at making decisions.

Task 4 - Redesign your school

In pairs, ask pupils to imagine they are redesigning their school to help people flourish - to become excellent human beings - what would they change? Pupils should be encouraged to focus on the following two points:

- Ensuring the school they design helps its pupils to get clear on what they are aiming for.
- Ensuring the school they design helps its pupils to become virtuous and better at making decisions.

Life is like a race

Jesus' and Aristotle's ideas have a lot in common. One metaphor, that Eric Liddell chose to make use of, was the idea that life was a bit like a race. Not a race to beat others, but a race to achieve your human potential and to help others do the same. Show pupils the video on slide 22 of the presentation which shows a part of the 'Chariots of Fire' movie showing Eric speaking at an after race event about these views.

Plenary

Ask the pupils to consider the following questions:

- Is life like a race? What are the similarities and differences?
- What can you take from what you have learnt about Aristotle, Jesus, and Eric Liddell that might help you in your life?