

CHARACTERS UNITE

NATIONAL TOWN HALL

Newseum
Washington D.C.

ACTIVITY GUIDE

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WELCOME

A house divided against itself cannot stand.

Abraham Lincoln

The problems that exist in this world cannot be solved
by the level of thinking that created them.

Albert Einstein

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Welcome to USA Network's **Characters Unite National Town Hall**.

Characters Unite is a new campaign committed to combating prejudice and intolerance while promoting greater acceptance and mutual respect in America. Started by USA Network, together with the support of the nation's leading non-profits, this initiative was created on the simple idea that life is richer and our country is stronger when we see beyond stereotypes and appreciate our individual differences.

We are all unique Characters; our differences are what make America great.

At our Town Hall, we have gathered some of the most esteemed leaders in politics, education, arts, business, media, entertainment and more. Our panel of experts leads us in productive dialogue to find strength in our differences, stop prejudice and intolerance, and foster greater understanding.

We may be diverse, but we do not need to be divided.

You can join the **Characters Unite** campaign. You can develop character traits that are important for leadership and inspiring change. You can promote tolerance and celebrate diversity. You can identify social injustice and take action in your own community. You can honor every American Character and create a stronger, more unified nation.

YOU can be a great leader of change.

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MEET THE LEADERS

Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Margaret Mead

Mike Allen, *Chief White House Correspondent, Politico*

The Honorable Xavier Becerra, *Representative, California*

The Honorable Cory Booker, *Mayor, Newark NJ*

Tom Brokaw, *NBC News Special Correspondent*

The Honorable Ahn “Joseph” Cao, *Representative, Louisiana.*

The Honorable Max Cleland, *Secretary, American Battle Monuments Commission*

Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, *Professor of Sociology, Georgetown University*

Wade Henderson, *President and CEO, Leadership Conference on Civil Rights*

Jon Bon Jovi, *Singer, Songwriter, Philanthropist*

David Mixner, *Writer and Civil Rights Activist*

Kathleen Parker, *Syndicated Columnist*

Chancellor Michelle Rhee, *DC Public Schools*

Dr. Christine Sierra, *Professor of Political Science, University of New Mexico*

For complete bios of our panelists, see www.charactersunite.com

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THE IMPORTANCE OF LEADERSHIP

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more,
do more and become more, you are a leader.

John Quincy Adams

A leader takes people where they want to go.

A great leader takes people where they don't necessarily want to go but ought to be.

Rosalynn Carter

What is the character of a great leader? How do these traits help address the challenges in America?
How can you become a great leader to affect positive change?

Remember: Leaders come from diverse backgrounds, but they share similar character traits that define them as great.

There is no standard definition of a leader. Leaders come from all walks of life with individual personalities, interests, styles, occupations, thoughts and experiences.

Despite these differences, there are certain character traits that great leaders have in common. They represent the way they choose to be in the world and how they behave toward all Americans.

Look at the following list. Think about how these traits are important as you do your part to help solve the nation's problems.

Passion: A leader has great devotion and loyalty and makes a personal commitment to do everything he can to share his enthusiasm and experience with others.

You can be passionate about promoting tolerance and celebrating diversity.

Knowledge: A leader always makes an effort to understand as much as she can. She asks questions with sincerity and curiosity. She develops a real willingness to learn.

You can increase your knowledge of the challenges in the USA.

Honesty: A leader tells the truth, even when it is difficult. He helps people see the reality and possible causes of a situation so they can do something about it.

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You can be honest about our country's social injustices and cultural divides.

Honor: A leader values every opinion, even when she disagrees. She challenges her conventional thinking and respects all viewpoints.

You can listen to different beliefs, honoring diversity as a way to greater understanding.

Vision: A leader recognizes the current state of the world but can imagine the greater future possibilities as well. He thinks creatively and can confidently communicate his big picture ideals.

You can create a shining vision of a stronger, more unified nation.

Dedication: A leader takes steps towards change. She implements a plan, on a consistent basis, with deliberate action and relentless determination.

You can take constant action with dedication and enthusiasm.

Bravery: A leader knows that his work will not always be easy. He will encounter obstacles and opposition. He has courage to make tough decisions because he is following his heart.

You can be brave, despite setbacks, by continually safeguarding the character of America.

Empowerment: A leader inspires and enlightens, providing direction and support. She is a role model, using her influence to motivate people to listen, to understand, to care and to act.

You can empower all Americans to be great leaders of change.

Questions to consider:

How are you a leader? What words from the above list define you?

How do you demonstrate leadership in everyday life with your family, your friends, in school and in your community?

In what ways do the Town Hall leaders demonstrate these character traits?

What have you learned about the importance of being a leader?

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FINDING COMMON GROUND ON DIFFICULT ISSUES

What are the issues affecting America today? Below are some issues that are discussed and debated in halls of power and in the media, and many of them will be raised during the Characters Unite Town Hall. There are many different viewpoints on how, when and why to address them. People do not have to agree, but how do we unite as a nation to solve our biggest problems?

Which issues do you think are most pressing?

Why do you think those issues are most important?

Who do you think is most responsible for addressing them?

What can leaders do to guarantee positive debate on these issues, instead of angry and bitter fighting?

Affirmative Action	Environmental Issues	Pollution
Affordable Housing	Family values	Poverty
Ageism	Free Speech	Prejudice
Anti-Muslim Discrimination	Gay Rights	Racism and Race relations
Anti-Semitism	Gender Equality	Religious Freedom
Censorship	Global Warming	Same Sex Marriage
Children's Rights	Hate Crimes	Segregation
Civil Liberties	Health Care Reform	Separation of Church and State
Civil Rights	Homeland Security	Sexism
Corporate Greed	Homelessness	Sexual Harassment
Crime	Homophobia	Terrorism
Defamation	Human Rights	Unemployment
Disability Rights	Hunger	Veteran's Issues and Care
Discrimination	Immigration Reform	Violence
Diversity	Illness and Disease	Voting Issues
Economic Crisis	Intolerance	War
Education Reform	Islamic Extremism	Welfare and Welfare Reform
Energy Dependency	Moral Values	Women's rights
English as the Official Language	Pay Equity	Xenophobia

There are no easy answers, but one thing is clear: We need to discuss the issues, value our diversity, unite as a nation and move collectively towards positive change. This is our important first step, because we are stronger together than we are apart.

As a leader, you can help promote a more tolerant society. Sometimes, it is as simple as starting a conversation and being open, without judgment, to what occurs. Here are questions about some key issues. Answer them for yourself, and find ways to start **productive dialogue** in your community:

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Questions to Consider:

- Our nation was founded on the principle of freedom. Do you feel completely free to express yourself as a unique American Character?
- Do you think our society is becoming more or less tolerant towards issues of race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and physical or mental disability? Have you ever personally experienced intolerance because you were considered “different?”
- What values do you have in common with students in your school? How do you respect these similarities each day, particularly when there is conflict or discord?
- What messages and stories about prejudice and discrimination do you see when you watch TV, see a film or read about popular culture? What impact do they have on your views and opinions about these problems?
- Do you think that the infinite and varying ways we receive information in this global world – media, cable TV, blogs, internet - helps or hinders productive dialogue?
- Do you believe that you have the right to be heard by the leaders in your community on issues that matter most? How have you reached out about things that are important to you? What were the results?
- What do you think the election of Barack Obama, our first African-American president, says about the state of racial and ethnic relationships in the country?
- Do you think that the current conflicts along political lines ultimately strengthen or challenge our goal of creating a more united country? Does this represent a healthy way for all American Characters to interact?
- Does your school spend time addressing issues of prejudice and intolerance? What are you learning from your teachers and other adults about the character of America? Do you feel that your education is preparing you with the skills and knowledge to succeed in a diverse, global world?
- Do you feel more hopeful or more worried about your future in America? Are you concerned, as the younger generation, to inherit the struggles affecting our country today?

Discuss these questions freely with your friends, family, and at school. Be **brave** and talk with people from different races, religions, ethnicities, nationalities and sexual orientation. Be honest that you do not know all the answers. Be passionate about learning, and gain as much **knowledge** as possible. **Respect** everything you hear. **Dedicate** yourself, one person at a time, one circumstance at a time. Be **empowered** by similar ideals, beliefs and visions for a stronger, more united USA.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ACTION

And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.

John F. Kennedy

Everybody can be great because anybody can serve.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

What social issues do you see affecting your community? As a leader, how can you make a difference? What specific actions can you take?

Remember: Leaders take steps towards change. They implement a plan, on a consistent basis, with deliberate action and relentless determination.

The word **action** means “something a person can do.” It suggests that you are accountable and in control.

This country becomes great when every American Character realizes that we are responsible for doing something to address the nation’s challenges. We must commit to help our neighbors, build our community and make the world a better place. We must take necessary action!

You can start right now. The problems you see globally are the same problems you see in your own community. You don’t have to have money to make a difference. You don’t have to know the “right” people. You just have to have the passion and perseverance to act, taking one step at a time.

You can inspire positive change for all American Characters and create a stronger, more unified nation.

Understand The Issues. There are so many important issues affecting America today. Which ones interest you? Look back at the list in this guide for inspiration. Pick a few to research and study. Talk with other leaders in your community. Watch the stories on the news. Read books. Increase your awareness.

Connect to Your Community. Pay attention to what is going on in your school, family, place of worship and work. Is there a student in your school who is treated unfairly? Do you have a disabled friend that needs special care? Think about the things that frustrate, anger and sadden you. Make a decision to do something about them.

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Identify Your Skills. There is no one who has the same gifts, skills and abilities as you. Make a list of all the things you love to do. Can you give a piano concert for charity? Can you use your computer skills to promote tolerance online? Find a mentor who can help you develop and utilize your skills to make a unique contribution in the world.

Observe Leadership In Action. Watch what other leaders in your community are doing to create positive change. Observe them in politics, sports, education, entertainment, business and more. See how they use the character traits listed in this guide. Commit to doing the same in your daily life.

Use Your Voice. Speak up if you see examples of intolerance or prejudice in your community. You have the right, as well as the responsibility, to say something. Use the power of your voice to state your disapproval. Be respectful but clear that it won't be tolerated... not in the USA!

Serve and Make a Difference. Get engaged in activities, and find opportunities to serve. Clean up a park. Help an elderly neighbor with grocery shopping. Organize your own Town Hall in school. Do random acts of kindness. For more great ideas, go to Characters Unite (www.charactersunite.com) and look at 50 things you can do.

Take the Characters Unite Pledge. (www.charactersunite.com). Get your family to pledge too.

“As a Character of the USA, I hold these truths to be self-evident – that life is richer and we are stronger when we see beyond stereotypes and appreciate each other for characters that we are. I take this pledge to stand against prejudice, intolerance and hate, and promote greater acceptance and understanding in my daily life. After all, characters are what make us USA.”

Live the Pledge. Be bold. Be brave. Be passionate. Be inspired. You can make a difference.

Remember: You are a great leader of change.

Questions to Consider:

- What actions are you inspired to take to help your community? What do these actions say about who you are?
- What types of service activities are most effective in creating social change? Why?
- In what ways do you see the Town Hall leaders taking action to help change the world?
- What have you learned about the significance of action?

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SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

The highest result of education is tolerance.

Helen Keller

Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other.

John F. Kennedy

- 1 Many of the leaders who made the biggest contributions to our society battled intolerance because they were seen as different. Rosa Parks was arrested for not giving up her seat to a white passenger. Harvey Milk, an openly gay politician, was assassinated. Research an American leader and the cause he/she championed. Pay close attention to the hardships and prejudices encountered in his/her work. List the ways he/she used leadership qualities to combat discrimination and take action. Discuss your findings with your classmates.
- 2 Our Town Hall leaders inspire change in varied and unique ways. Jon Bon Jovi supports numerous social causes, using his artistry to give concerts for charity. Chancellor Michelle Rhee advocates for education reform in the DC public schools. Choose two of our Town Hall leaders and research their life stories. What experiences led each of them to have passion for the issues they support? What skills and knowledge have they acquired? What are their visions for a more unified Nation? Write an essay comparing each leader and address the importance of diversity in solving America's problems.
- 3 Write about a time when you showed intolerance to a person or situation. What happened? Were there opposing beliefs and viewpoints? How did you react? Was there a resolution? How did the experience make you feel? Look at this guide's principles on creating a tolerant society to see what steps you could have taken to create a more positive outcome. Share your story and conclusions with your classmates.
- 4 Create an historical timeline on a problem in the USA today. Include relevant dates, events and people. When did the problem begin? What were the underlying causes? How have things changed over time? Has the situation gotten better or worse? Be prepared to justify your answers with facts and data.
- 5 Pick a story about a racial, cultural, ethnic or religious conflict, and learn all you can about the issue. Find newspaper articles, interview people, watch media coverage and read books to understand every viewpoint and opinion on possible solutions. Create dialogue for two people discussing the conflict. Give them different points of view. Be thorough in explaining the reasons. Then, write an end to the conversation where they find common ground. Perform the dialogue for your classmates.

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- 6 Identify a social injustice that is prevalent in your community. Create two pictures, one representing the present where the injustice is still going on; and one representing the future where the injustice has ended. What do both pictures look like? Be imaginative. Use magazine clippings, take photographs, draw and paint. Share your pictures with your classmates, explaining your ideas for ending this injustice in the USA.
- 7 If you had no fear, all the necessary time, and the assurance you would succeed, what are some of the things you would love to change in your community and the world? Imagine you are 75 years old and receiving recognition for your lifetime commitment to this work. Write the speech honoring you, being specific about your cause, your vision, your actions and the challenges encountered along the way. What positive change have you created in America?
- 8 What is the character of America? Why is it so important to protect? What specifically must we do as a nation to preserve it? Write an essay answering these questions from your unique point of view.

This activity guide is written by Lesley Mazzotta. Lesley is an innovative and creative producer with over fifteen years experience conceiving and implementing education programs, special events, themed experiences and fundraising benefits in the entertainment industry. For six years, she served as Producing Director of Camp Broadway, an award winning theater arts education company. She has been an associate producer on and off Broadway and in London. In 2007, Lesley helped create After The Storm, a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization that provides financial aid, managerial support and event programming to community centers in New Orleans that are working with children and the arts. Lesley is a member of The League of American Theaters and Producers, where she serves on the education committee.