



**Future Ready Pathways for
School, Work and Life**

Communication & Leadership

*Lessons for middle school
students, aged 11-14*

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*Lessons for middle school students, aged
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Teacher/Parent Guide

Welcome

Middle school is a time when identity is forming, influence is increasing, and choices begin to shape reputation. Students are no longer just learning how to speak and listen—they are learning how to express themselves with clarity, navigate differing perspectives, set boundaries, take initiative, and act with responsibility.

This workbook is designed to help students strengthen the personal leadership skills that shape how they communicate, make decisions, and influence the world around them. Throughout these lessons, students will examine who they are when they use their voice. They will reflect on how others experience their words, practice assertive communication, explore responsible decision-making, and consider what it means to lead with integrity—especially in digital spaces.

Students will learn that leadership is not about status, popularity, or control. Leadership is about awareness, courage, responsibility, and using influence thoughtfully.

Learning Objectives

By the end of these lessons, students will be able to:

- Describe how personal values, identity, and character influence communication style and leadership presence.
- Analyze the difference between intention and impact in conversations and explain why perception matters.
- Demonstrate awareness of tone, body language, and word choice in both in-person and digital communication.
- Practice assertive communication that expresses needs and boundaries clearly without aggression or withdrawal.
- Distinguish between passive, aggressive, and assertive responses in real-life scenarios.
- Evaluate decisions by considering short-term and long-term consequences.
- Take initiative in appropriate situations without waiting to be directed.
- Accept responsibility for choices and demonstrate accountability when mistakes occur.
- Recognize how influence can be used constructively or destructively.
- Apply thoughtful decision-making and communication skills in digital environments.
- Explain how online actions contribute to personal reputation and long-term credibility.
- Reflect on their evolving leadership identity and identify the kind of leader they want to become.



Teacher/Parent Guide

Learning Rationale

In middle school, communication becomes more nuanced. Tone carries weight. Silence can signal confidence—or avoidance. Digital interactions blur the line between private and public expression. Students are increasingly faced with moments that require initiative, boundary-setting, perspective-taking, and responsible decision-making without constant adult guidance.

This workbook is designed to support students during this developmental transition by making personal leadership skills explicit, reflective, and actionable. The workbook emphasizes individual agency. Students are encouraged to understand that leadership is not a position granted by others—it is expressed through daily choices. By strengthening self-awareness, assertiveness, thoughtful decision-making, and digital responsibility, students develop the internal foundation needed to navigate increasingly complex social environments.

The workbook is grounded in the understanding that:



Voice reflects identity and values



Perspective shapes interpretation



Boundaries protect well-being and self-respect



Leadership begins with self-awareness



Initiative requires courage and responsibility



Digital spaces amplify voice and visibility



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Universal Design for Learning

Overview

This workbook is designed using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles to ensure that all students can access, engage with, and benefit from the lessons. The goal is not to lower expectations, but to remove unnecessary barriers so every student can participate fully.

Multiple Means of Engagement

(How students stay interested and motivated)

- Lessons incorporate a variety of formats including reflection prompts, scenario analysis, partner dialogue, role-play, visual mapping, journaling, and real-world digital examples.
- Students are encouraged to make choices in how they participate—whether responding verbally or in writing, selecting scenarios that feel relevant to them, or choosing how deeply to reflect on personal experiences.
- Content is grounded in realistic middle school situations involving social pressure, identity, boundaries, decision-making, and digital communication. This relevance increases motivation and personal investment.
- Opportunities for private reflection are balanced with structured discussion to support both introverted and extroverted learners.

Multiple Means of Representation

(How information is presented and understood)

- Key concepts such as assertiveness, perception, initiative, and digital responsibility are introduced using clear language, structured explanations, and short scenarios.
- Abstract leadership ideas are connected to concrete, situations.
- Lessons intentionally revisit core ideas (voice, impact, responsibility) across different contexts to strengthen understanding and transfer of learning.
- Sentence starters, guiding questions, and reflection frames support students who benefit from structured thinking prompts.

Multiple Means of Action & Expression

(How students demonstrate understanding)

- Students are offered varied ways to demonstrate learning, including: written reflections, structured discussions, scenario responses, role-play practice, personal goal-setting, and visual organizers or mapping activities.
- This flexibility supports students who may struggle with traditional written responses but can demonstrate strong understanding through conversation or applied examples.
- Opportunities for self-assessment and goal-setting allow students to monitor their growth in communication and leadership skills.
- The focus remains on demonstrating understanding of concepts.



Pre-Assessment



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Pre-Assessment Lesson Plan

Learning Objectives

By the end of the pre-assessment activity, students will:

1. Reflect on how they currently express their ideas, opinions, and needs in different situations.
2. Identify strengths in their communication style, such as confidence, clarity, perspective-taking, or boundary-setting.
3. Recognize areas that feel challenging, including speaking up, managing tone, handling pressure, taking initiative, or accepting responsibility.
4. Increase self-awareness about how their words and actions may be interpreted by others.
5. Reflect on how they communicate and show leadership in digital spaces.
6. Establish a personal baseline that will guide reflection, discussion, and skill development throughout the lessons.

Learning Rationale

The pre-assessment gives students an opportunity to pause and reflect on how they currently use their voice and navigate influence during the middle school years. This brief reflection serves several important purposes:

Builds self-awareness – Students begin to recognize patterns in how they speak, respond under pressure, take initiative, and manage responsibility.

Normalizes growth in communication and leadership – Students understand that assertiveness, decision-making, and digital responsibility are skills that develop over time—not fixed traits.

Provides insight for adults – Teachers and caregivers gain a clearer understanding of students' confidence levels, communication habits, and areas that may need support.

Encourages ownership – Reflecting on current strengths and challenges increases student investment and readiness to grow.

Establishes a meaningful baseline – When paired with a post-assessment, students can clearly see how their awareness, confidence, and leadership skills evolve across the pack.



Pre-Assessment Lesson Plan

Step 1: Introduce the Activity

- Explain: “This activity helps us understand how you currently use your voice and handle responsibility. It looks at things like how you speak up, set boundaries, respond to pressure, make decisions, and communicate online. There are no right or wrong answers. Everyone is at a different starting point. Your responses simply show where you are right now.”
- Encourage honesty and self-reflection.

Step 2: Clarify the Format

- Students read each statement and mark their response in the rating column.
- If working one-on-one or in a small group, you may also read the statements aloud.
- Remind students to respond quickly and honestly, without overthinking.

Step 3: Optional Discussion

- After a few selected statements, invite short, low-pressure sharing, such as:
 - “When is it hardest for you to speak up?”
 - “How do you usually decide whether to say something or stay quiet?”
 - “What does being ‘assertive’ mean to you?”
 - “What do you think makes someone a strong leader at this age?”
 - “How do people sometimes misunderstand tone in texts or online comments?”
- Keep the tone reflective and non-judgmental.

Step 4: Record Insights

- Teachers/parents jot down notes on patterns you notice:
 - Areas where the student feels confident.
 - Areas where the student expressed uncertainty or challenge.
 - Student example.
 - Strategies students know for how to take initiative and lead.
- These notes create a baseline snapshot that can be revisited during the post-assessment.

Step 5: Set the Tone

- Reassure students that this is a starting point: “This is just a starting point. Over the next lessons, you’ll explore how your voice shapes your identity, how others may interpret what you say, how to set boundaries confidently, how to take responsible initiative, and how to lead thoughtfully in digital spaces. If your answers change later, that’s growth.”
- Keep the atmosphere positive and reflective. Frame this as exploration, not a test.



Pre-Assessment

For each statement below, rate how well you understand the idea by choosing one of the following:

- I understand this well
- I somewhat understand this
- I'm unsure or confused by this

Statement	I understand this well!	I somewhat understand this.	I'm unsure or confused by this.
I understand how my personality, values, and experiences shape the way I communicate.			
I understand that leadership is not about being in charge, but about how I use my voice and actions.			
I understand the difference between staying quiet by choice and staying quiet out of fear			
I understand that my intention and my impact can be different.			
I understand how tone, body language, and word choice can change how others interpret what I say.			
I understand why it's important to consider other perspectives before responding.			
I understand the difference between passive, aggressive, and assertive communication.			
I understand how to say no or set a boundary without being disrespectful.			



Pre-Assessment

Statement	I understand this well!	I somewhat understand this.	I'm unsure or confused by this.
I understand how to stay calm and express myself clearly when I feel pressured or emotional.			
I understand when it is my responsibility to take initiative instead of waiting for someone else to act.			
I understand that what I post or say online contributes to my reputation.			
I understand how tone can be misunderstood in texts, comments, or social media.			
I understand how to pause and think before responding or posting online.			

When it comes to using your voice and showing leadership, what feels easiest for you right now—and what feels most challenging?



Lesson 1

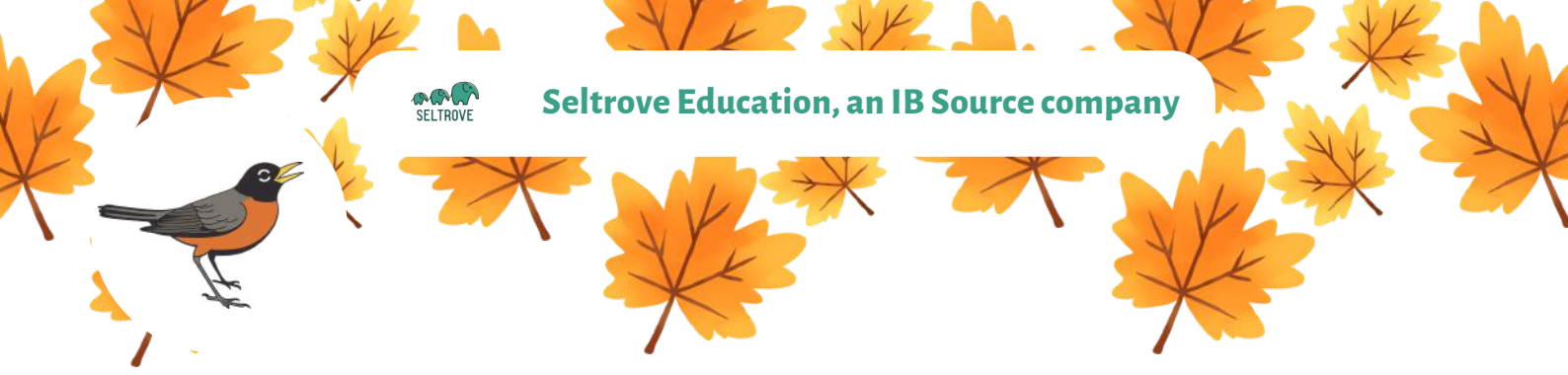
Leading With Your Voice

Essential Question

How can I use my voice with confidence and purpose as I grow into leadership?

Core Idea

The way you speak, respond, stay silent, or step forward sends a message about who you are. Leadership is about using your voice with confidence, clarity, and intention.



Lesson Plan: Leading with Your Voice

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Recognize that leadership begins with how they use their voice and actions.
2. Identify personal communication strengths.
3. Reflect on moments when they speak confidently and moments when they hold back.
4. Understand that confidence does not require volume or dominance.
5. Begin defining the kind of leader they want to become.

Learning Rationale

During middle school, students begin testing their independence. Their opinions strengthen. Their social awareness increases. Their voice becomes more visible — both in person and online.

At this stage, students often send one of two messages:

- They overcompensate to be heard.
- They shrink to avoid attention.

Neither builds intentional leadership.

This lesson reframes leadership as awareness and ownership. Students begin understanding that their voice already carries influence — and they have the ability to shape how it is used. Before students can set boundaries, take initiative, or lead responsibly online, they must first recognize:

- Their voice already matters.
- The question is how they will use it.



Lesson Plan: Leading with Your Voice

Read the **Student Lesson** out loud. Ask students to share their ideas after reading the Reflection Question, if they wish.

Activity 1: Voice Snapshot

- Read the directions to your students.
- Avoid interpreting answers publicly.
- Watch for repeated “I stay quiet” responses — these students may need later encouragement.
- Model one example of your own voice pattern.
- Reinforce that noticing habits is strength, not weakness.

Activity 2: Silence — Power or Avoidance?

- Read the directions to your students and help them get into pairs.
- Avoid labeling student responses as “correct” or “incorrect.”
- Emphasize that context matters.
- Reinforce that leadership includes thoughtful pauses.

Activity 3: Leadership Style Quiz

- Read through the directions with your students.
- Emphasize there is no “best” style.
- Watch for students who feel disappointed in their result — remind them all styles matter.
- Encourage students to see styles as tendencies, not limits.
- Consider grouping students by style for brief discussion.
- Keep tone light and exploratory.

Activity 4: Reputation Builder

- Read the directions with your students.
- Keep this future-focused, not corrective.
- Avoid turning this into peer evaluation.
- Encourage concrete actions (“Raise my hand once this week,” not “Be better.”)
- Consider allowing anonymous sharing of “Next Leadership Moves.”
- Close the lesson by reinforcing: leadership is built daily.

Activity 5: “Voice in Action” Mini Research

- Read the directions with your students.
- Let your students choose whom they want to research.
- Keep this activity focused on communication and leadership; not the biography.



Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Supports

Lesson 1: Leading With Your Voice

Engagement — Multiple Ways to Motivate & Sustain Interest

- Normalize that identity and confidence are still forming during middle school. Students are experimenting with their voice — that is expected.
- Emphasize that all leadership styles are valid and valuable.
- Frame self-awareness as strength, not self-criticism.
- Allow reflection before any discussion (Voice Snapshot and Silence activity, especially).
- Reinforce relevance by connecting voice to reputation, credibility, and digital presence.
- Encourage students to set a personal intention for the week, such as:
 - “I will speak up once even if I feel unsure.”
 - “I will pause before responding when emotional.”
 - “I will practice inviting another voice into a conversation.”
- Keep quiz results exploratory and growth-focused rather than labeling.

Representation — Multiple Ways to Understand the Skill

- Present leadership as a spectrum of styles rather than a single model.
- Use real middle school scenarios.
- Model tone and delivery differences verbally so students hear the contrast.
- Repeat core lesson phrases throughout:
 - “Leadership begins with awareness.”
 - “Volume is not confidence.”
 - “Your voice shapes your reputation.”
- Break complex ideas (identity, influence, reputation) into concrete behaviors students can see and name.

Action & Expression — Multiple Ways to Show Learning

- Allow students to demonstrate understanding through: written reflection, small group discussion, scenario analysis, leadership quiz results explanation, and goal setting.
- Provide structured prompts rather than open-ended abstract questions.
- Encourage highlighting patterns rather than writing responses.
- Offer choice in how students reflect (write, highlight, map, or discuss).
- Offer sentence starters such as:
 - “I tend to hold back when...”
 - “A strength of my leadership style is...”
 - “One way I can grow is...”



Leading With Your Voice



At the end of this lesson, I will be able to:

- Recognize that leadership begins with how you use your voice and actions.
- Identify personal communication strengths.
- Reflect on moments when you speak confidently and moments when you hold back.
- Understand that confidence does not require volume or dominance.
- Begin defining the kind of leader you want to become.



When people hear the word leader, they often imagine someone in charge — a team captain, a class president, or the loudest person in the room. But real leadership starts long before a title. Leadership begins with how you use your voice.

Your voice includes:

- The *words* you choose
- The *tone* you use
- The way you *respond*
- The moments you *speak up*
- The moments you *stay silent*
- The *actions* that support your words

Every time you speak — or choose not to — you are sending a message about who you are.

Your Voice Reflects Your Identity

As you grow, you begin forming stronger opinions, values, and beliefs. The way you communicate reflects those parts of you.

For example:

- Do you speak calmly during disagreement?
- Do you shut down when challenged?
- Do you interrupt to be heard?
- Do you stay quiet even when you have something important to say?

Leading with your voice means becoming aware of those patterns — and deciding whether they represent the leader you want to become.



Leadership Is Not Volume

Being loud does not equal being strong. Being quiet does not equal being weak. Confidence is about clarity.

A strong leader:

- Speaks with intention
- Chooses words carefully
- Knows when to step forward
- Knows when to listen
- Understands that influence grows through respect

Some leaders lead through encouragement. Some lead through calm decision-making. Some lead by asking thoughtful questions. There is no single leadership personality. But there is intentional communication.

Silence: Power or Avoidance?

Sometimes staying quiet is wise. Sometimes it protects peace. Sometimes it gives you time to think.

Other times, silence comes from fear of disagreement, judgment, or being wrong. Leading with your voice means learning the difference.

Ask yourself: Am I choosing silence — or hiding behind it?

Your Influence Is Growing

Your classmates notice how you respond. Your friends notice what you tolerate. Teachers notice how you contribute. Online spaces record what you post.

The way you use your voice shapes:

- Your reputation
- Your credibility
- The trust others place in you

You may not feel like a leader yet. But your actions are already shaping the kind of leader you are becoming.



Reflection Question

What message do you think your voice currently sends about you — and is that the message you want to be known for?



Activity 1: Voice Snapshot

Before you can grow as a leader, you need to understand how you currently use your voice. Every situation brings out a different version of us.

Read each prompt and respond honestly.

I speak most confidently when _____

I hold back or stay quiet when _____

I tend to react quickly when _____

I carefully think before speaking when _____

One communication strength I have is _____

One area I would like to grow in is _____



How confident do you feel using your voice most days?

Very confident

Somewhat confident

Not very confident



One pattern I notice about my voice is _____



Activity 2: Silence — Power or Avoidance?

Silence can be powerful. Silence can also be avoidance. Strong leaders know the difference.

In partners, read the scenarios below and answer the questions.

Jordan disagrees with a group idea in class but says nothing because they don't want to stand out.

- Is the silence powerful or avoidant?
- What might the student be thinking or feeling?
- What would leading with your voice look like here?

Ava pauses during an argument with a friend and says, "I need a minute to think before I respond."

- Is the silence powerful or avoidant?
- What might the student be thinking or feeling?
- What would leading with your voice look like here?

Miguel knows the answer in class but avoids raising his hand because he's worried about being wrong.

- Is the silence powerful or avoidant?
- What might the student be thinking or feeling?
- What would leading with your voice look like here?

Lena doesn't respond to a rude comment in a group chat because she doesn't want to make it worse.

- Is the silence powerful or avoidant?
- What might the student be thinking or feeling?
- What would leading with your voice look like here?

Noah watches someone being teased, but stays silent because he doesn't want attention.

- Is the silence powerful or avoidant?
- What might the student be thinking or feeling?
- What would leading with your voice look like here?