

# Introduction

Inspiring leaders. How do we inspire young people to look inside themselves to discover who they are as leaders? Who are the leaders in our past, in our communities, in our lives who inspire us and foster our personal aspirations to lead good lives and to act in positive ways in our families, neighborhoods, and communities? How do we inspire others by who we are, what we represent, what we teach, and how we act?

The word "inspire" means to breathe into, to touch the spirit—the spirit being our life force, our breath. The challenge each of us has as teachers and people who work with youth is to inspire them to be and to become their best selves, to set a course in the great adventure of life that is positive and bountiful, to find inside themselves the courage and stamina to lead. We inspire as role models, in what we say and do and what they observe us doing. Each of them will—as do each of us, their mentors—lead. We lead in our families—perhaps as fathers, mothers, spouses. We lead in our neighborhoods—the organizations we join, the activities we participate in. We lead in our community—as citizens of our community, state, nation, world.

How do we teach the skills of leadership? Perhaps more important, how do we foster integrity, responsibility, compassion, and peace in those we lead and mentor? *Inspiring Leadership in Teens* was developed for teachers, trainers, and youth leaders who want to foster and empower leadership skills in youth. It was developed through a number of leadership retreats and classes for middle- and high-school students. The book is designed as a field guide for those who want to create leadership classes in school or for those who develop leadership activities in organizations or at camps and retreats. The focus is on high-school students, but the material can be easily used with middle-school students.

Underlying the material in *Inspiring Leadership in Teens* is a set of beliefs. These beliefs include the following:

- Leadership skills can be taught.

- The most important learning experience in the lives of youth is the role modeling of leadership by the significant adults in their lives—teachers and trainers must walk their talk.
- Leadership ought to be based on integrity, authenticity, and compassion.
- Youth learning leadership skills ought to experience leadership and responsibility directly through in-class group dynamics and through service learning situations they develop themselves.
- Everyone will be called on to be a leader some time in his or her lifetime—as parents, as employees, as citizens.
- Leadership training is essential for all students—not just for those who appear naturally gifted as leaders.
- Effecting leaders understand the group process.
- Everyone has a leadership style and role that is important in the group dynamic when teams work toward accomplishing a common goal.
- Inspiring leadership rests on integrity, responsibility, compassion, and peace.

The material in *Inspiring Leadership in Teens* is organized for a teacher in a traditional high school or middle school. Activities are designed for classes of approximately 25 students in class periods of 45 to 50 minutes. It is assumed classes meet once daily, Monday through Friday. Included in the book, however, are outlines for creating one-, two-, three-, and five-day leadership camp workshops using many of the same activities.

The material begins with a unit on creating a learning community. It is vital to take time to create a positive community of learners who are invested in each other's success. The learning community creates its own norms, procedures, and boundaries. Rules and consequences are established by the learners themselves. Creating a learning community is of itself a lesson in leadership because it demonstrates how a group of people can come together, form a community, and achieve a set of goals. Taking time to establish a learning community fosters and empowers learning and growth for the entire enterprise of teaching leadership skills.

Following the establishment of a learning community, the class conducts team research on inspiring leaders (Unit 2). It is important to create a context for examining leadership based on a set of criteria, established by the group, to identify what is meant by an inspiring leader and by studying specific leaders who can be classified as inspirational. Youth should have role models they can trust and interact with on a daily basis, and they ought to be inspired by men and women who have lived lives of integrity, responsibility, and compas-

sion. In Unit 2, small teams publish books of biographies, create PowerPoint presentations, and design an Inspiring Leaders Hall of Fame.

In Unit 3, students construct personal leadership portfolios. Each portfolio includes the following:

- A personal mission statement
- The eight components of inspiring leadership
- A set of personal goals to achieve
- A personal brochure highlighting the student's leadership skills, talents, and experiences

The focus in Unit 4 shifts to building communication skills. Communication skills taught include:

- Communicating one-on-one
- Communicating leader-to-group
- Understanding various learning styles
- Negotiating agreements

The bases of the communication skills include neurolinguistic programming (NLP), verbal and nonverbal strategies, and recent developments in common-ground planning such as Future Search, Search, and Open Space technologies for group planning. The activities in the unit will help students sharpen the communication skills that can enable them to build relationships of integrity with peers and others, understand group dynamics, run an effective meeting, and participate in group-planning processes.

In Unit 5, students develop skills in leading groups and making presentations. These skills include an understanding of:

- The team-building process
- Personal leadership styles
- Roles people play on teams

The unit also helps student learn how to:

- Conduct an effective meeting
- Create and give a presentations
- Develop an action plan for a project

The last unit of *Inspiring Leadership in Teens* challenges students again to look at themselves, this time to determine their spiritual strengths, personal aspirations, and what they believe.

*Inspiring Leadership in Teens* is a comprehensive approach to student leadership. By understanding themselves as leaders, students can be confident in their skills and continue to build on these experiences

as they become leaders in school activities, athletics programs, and clubs, and then develop into good citizens, parents, members of the workforce, and participants in their local communities.