

# What Makes a Leader? *Lessons from Judy Baar Topinka's Life*

## Lesson Plan for grades 6-9

*Average class time: 45 minutes*

**Perspective and background:** Recently, we've seen great debate in the news about values, civility, and what we as citizens perceive as good traits in our leaders at all levels of government. By studying Judy Baar Topinka's life and philosophy, students can discuss qualities of leadership as well as how her thinking and life is relevant today.

*Key topics* will include: good government is good management and leadership; civility; protocol; compromise; integrity, perseverance; heritage; respect and advocacy.

**Objectives:** Using Judy Baar Topinka's career as a springboard, students will

- Recognize the value of leadership characteristics
- Understand how to apply those characteristics in their lives today
- Develop their own philosophy and supporting characteristics of that way of thinking

**Outcome:** By studying the life of Judy Baar Topinka and her "philosophy of life," students should be able to identify core characteristics of a strong leader and good citizen. Learning about these characteristics can both provide role modeling tools for students and encourage students to see how and why to use history as a lesson for the present.

**Prep and content:** *Just Judy: Citizen and Leader for Illinois* Chapter 10

**Class discussion questions:**

- 1. What do you think was the most important characteristic of Judy's philosophy?**
  - a) Do you think that any of the characteristics we discussed are more common today or less common today in the world? Explain. *(Answers will vary. Encourage students to support their answers with examples from society and their world.)*
  - b) How do people develop such traits? Are they born with them? Do they learn them from their parents, friends, teachers, community, media?? Can a person choose to develop these characteristics and become a great citizen that others will follow? *(Ask students to read out loud some sentences from each of the characteristics and ask them to consider how they could develop such a characteristic.)*
  - c) What characteristic appeals to you the most? *(Answers will vary.)*
- 2. Why do you think the author described the characteristic of advocacy last? What is advocacy and how important is being an advocate within our republic government in the United States?** *(Ensure students realize that the United States is not a democracy but rather a republic with democratic representation. Encourage students to understand the importance of advocacy by our leaders who are democratically elected.)*
- 3. Who in your life (family, friends, etc.) demonstrate any of the characteristics described in chapter 10? Do you think any of these people should consider running for elected office? Why?** *(Probe on gender if responses are skewed by gender.)*
- 4. If you could meet Judy Baar Topinka, what would you tell her about her philosophy? What would you tell her about your philosophy?** *(Answers will vary.)*

**IF TIME ALLOWS: Enrichment Activities**

- a) Ask students what is the difference between leadership and management? Are they the same? Can a person be a good leader and a good manager? Can they think of any leaders in the world that are both?
- b) What does civility mean? Ask students why Judy Baar Topinka had such a strict sense of protocol and respect. Are manners old-fashioned or can they encourage civility toward others?

## **What Makes a Leader? Lessons from Judy Baar Topinka’s Life (*continued*)**

### **Lesson Plan for grades 6–9**

#### ***State Standards addressed***

##### **ELA STANDARDS**

6–12 RH and RI 1–3: Key ideas and details

6–12 RH and RI 7–9: Integration of knowledge and ideas;

5 Speaking and Listening 1: Collaborative conversations

5 Speaking and Listening 4–6: Presentation of knowledge and ideas. Produce and share information.

##### **SOCIAL SCIENCE STANDARDS**

SS.IS.8.6–8.LC: Explain how a democracy relies on people’s responsible participation, and draw implications for how individuals should participate.; Analyze how a problem can manifest itself and the challenges and opportunities faced by those trying to address it.

SS.IS.8.6–8.MdC: Assess individual and collective capacities to take action to address problems and identify potential outcomes. Identify core civic virtues (such as honesty, mutual respect, cooperation, and attentiveness to multiple perspectives) and democratic principles (such as equality, freedom, liberty, and respect for individual rights) that guide our State and nation

SS.H.1.6–8.MC: Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant.

SS.H.3.9–12: Evaluate the methods or characteristics utilized by people and institutions to promote change.

SS.H.7.9–12: Identify the role of individuals or groups in people’s struggle for safety, freedom, equality, and justice.