Don’t Hurt People, Don’t Take Their Stuff (Lessons in Lyrics)



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Concept Overview

"Don't hurt people, and don't take their stuff." It may be the simplest rule a society can live by, and one of the most important. It asks two things of everyone: respect other people's bodies, and respect what belongs to them. It's the Golden Rule put into practice: treat others the way you want to be treated.

Most people learn this rule as young children, on the playground or at the dinner table. Yet it reaches far beyond childhood. A porch pirate who swipes a package, a shoplifter who walks out with merchandise, and a bully who throws the first punch all break the same rule. The harm does not stop with the person who was hurt or robbed. When theft rises, stores raise prices, lock up their shelves, or close their doors. Jobs disappear, and neighbors stop trusting one another. One "little" crime can spread through an entire community.

The rule works in the other direction, too. When people can count on being safe in their persons and secure in their property, they are free to plan, build, trade, and cooperate. Respect for people and property is the foundation that makes peaceful, voluntary cooperation possible.

The rule's two halves also stand behind two kinds of rights. "Don't hurt people" protects personal rights: your body and your life are your own. "Don't take their stuff" protects property rights: what you earn, make, buy, or receive as a gift belongs to you. Because everyone has these same rights, each person's freedom has a boundary. As an old saying puts it, "Your right to swing your fist ends where my nose begins." That boundary is why nearly every society has laws against assault and theft. It is the bedrock of a civilized society.

As Thomas Jefferson wrote in an 1819 letter to Isaac H. Tiffany:

"…rightful liberty is unobstructed action according to our will, within the limits drawn around us by the equal rights of others."

Source: Thomas Jefferson to Isaac H. Tiffany, April 4, 1819, Founders Online.

Through four musical versions—pop, country, rap, and rock—this lesson makes the concept clear and memorable. Each version delivers the same message: Don't hurt people, and don't take what isn't yours.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

- explain the principle "Don't hurt people, don't take their stuff" and how it connects to the Golden Rule and to personal and property rights.
- distinguish between voluntary exchange and taking something by force or theft.
- analyze how theft and violence affect not only victims but also businesses, workers, and entire communities.
- evaluate how respect for people and property builds trust, safety, and cooperation.

Vocabulary

Civilized: Living by shared rules of respect, fairness, and peaceful behavior.

Consent: Permission that is freely given.

Golden Rule: The principle of treating others the way you want to be treated.

Karma: The idea that a person's actions, good or bad, eventually come back to him or her.

Porch Pirate: A person who steals packages left outside someone's door.

Property: Something that belongs to a person or business, such as a home, a phone, a bike, or a store's merchandise.

Property Rights: The right of people to own, use, sell, or give away what belongs to them.

Respect: Treating people and their belongings with care and consideration.

Rights: Freedoms and protections that belong to every person, such as the right to be safe from harm and the right to keep what he or she owns.

Shoplifting: Stealing merchandise from a store.

Theft: Taking someone else's property without permission.

Trust: Confidence that others will act honestly and keep their word.

Voluntary Exchange: A trade that both people freely agree to because each expects to benefit.

Discussion Questions

1. What does "Don't hurt people, don't take their stuff" mean?
2. How is this idea connected to the Golden Rule?

3. The pop version says, “The way I treat me is how I treat you.” What does that line ask of each of us?
4. The country version opens with a grandfather’s advice. Why do you think families pass this rule down from one generation to the next?
5. The country version says, “Neighbors knew trust was worth more than gold.” Why is trust so valuable in a community?
6. Every version mentions shoplifting. According to the songs, who pays the price when someone steals from a store? Do you agree? Explain.
7. The rap version says, “One ‘little’ crime spreads misery.” How can one small theft affect people who were not directly involved?
8. The rock version says, “Hurting ain’t strength, it don’t make it right.” Why do some people see violence as strength? What does real strength look like?
9. The pop and rap versions both say doing what’s right matters even when no one is watching. Why does it matter how you act when no one is watching?
10. The country version says, “Borrow a tool, you bring it back.” What is the difference between borrowing something and taking it?
11. What’s the difference between getting something through a voluntary exchange, such as buying, trading, or receiving a gift, and taking it without permission?
12. The rap version says, “If we all break rules, then nobody’s free.” What does this line mean? How does respecting other people’s rights protect your own freedom?
13. Why might someone be tempted to take something that isn’t his or hers? What are the consequences for the victim and for the person who takes it?
14. The rock version calls the Golden Rule “the law we trust.” Why might one simple rule work better than a long list of rules?
15. Three of the four versions use the word “civilized.” What does it mean to be civilized? How does respect for people and property make civilization possible?
16. Should the rule “don’t take their stuff” apply only to individuals, or should it also apply to groups, businesses, and governments? Explain your reasoning.
17. An old saying goes, “Your right to swing your fist ends where my nose begins.” What does it mean? Where else does one person’s freedom end because of another person’s rights?
18. Why do you think nearly every society has laws against hurting people and taking their property?
19. What would owning something mean if anyone could take it from you?

20. How does knowing that your property is safe make it easier to save, plan for the future, or start a business?

21. What can you do to build a culture of respect for people and property in your school or community?

Lyrics – Pop Version

Play It Fair – Don't Hurt People, Don't Take Their Stuff

[Intro]
If we all want peace, it starts with me,
Hands off my stuff, hands off me!

[Verse 1]
Don't take my backpack, don't grab my phone,
What isn't yours, just leave it alone.
Respect is cool, it shines right through,
The way I treat me is how I treat you.

[Pre-Chorus]
Even when no one's watchin', you see,
Doing what's right sets everybody free.

[Chorus]
Play it fair, that's the key,
Hands off my stuff, hands off me.
Golden Rule, it's tried and true,
Do for me what I'll do for you.

[Verse 2]
Stealing from stores makes the prices rise,
Soon the doors close, that's no surprise.
Jobs disappear, the town is hurt,
All 'cause you didn't pay for your shirt.

[Pre-Chorus]
Even when no one's watchin', you see,
Doing what's right sets everybody free.

[Chorus]
Play it fair, that's the key,
Hands off my stuff, hands off me.
Golden Rule, it's tried and true,
Do for me what I'll do for you.

[Verse 3]
Don't grab my locker, don't steal my gear,
Trust is the thing that keeps friends near.

Keep your hands gentle, your words kind too,
The way I treat me is how I treat you.

[Bridge]
Do what's right, it's plain to see,
Hands off my stuff, hands off me.
Living fair is how we agree,
Golden Rule for you and me.

[Final Chorus]
Play it fair, that's the key,
Hands off my stuff, hands off me.
Golden Rule, it's tried and true,
Do for me what I'll do for you.

Lyrics – Country Version

Hands Off What Ain't Yours – Don't Hurt People, Don't Take Their Stuff

[Intro]
My granddaddy told me when I was a kid:
"Son, it ain't that tough…
Don't hurt people, don't take their stuff."

[Verse 1]
Back in the day, they made it clear,
Don't steal a horse, don't take the gear.
Neighbors knew trust was worth more than gold,
Your word was your bond, that's what we were told.

[Chorus]
Hands off what ain't yours, can't you see,
Hands off my stuff, hands off me.
Golden Rule's how we all get along,
Do unto others and keep life strong.

[Verse 2]
Shoplift a store, the whole town pays,
Doors close down, jobs slip away.
Prices climb higher, folks get burned,
Respect's a lesson we all must learn.

[Chorus]
Hands off what ain't yours, can't you see,
Hands off my stuff, hands off me.
Golden Rule's how we all get along,
Do unto others and keep life strong.

[Verse 3]
Borrow a tool, you bring it back,
That's country code, don't get off track.

From cattle and land to the clothes you wear,
Respectin’ each other shows we care.

[Bridge]
Civilized living, it starts this way,
Respect what is mine, I’ll respect what you say.
Simple enough for us all to agree,
Hands off my stuff, hands off me.

[Final Chorus]
Hands off what ain’t yours, can’t you see,
Hands off my stuff, hands off me.
Golden Rule’s how we all get along,
Do unto others and keep life strong.

Lyrics – Rap Version

Hands Off! – Don’t Hurt People, Don’t Take Their Stuff

[Intro]
Uh—listen up.
It ain’t complicated, it’s plain to see:
Hands off my stuff, hands off me.

[Verse 1]
Porch piratin’ boxes, thinkin’ it’s slick,
But karma comes back, and it hits quick.
Shoplift a store? We all pay the price,
Stores close down, and that ain’t nice.
Prices go higher, the jobs get thin,
Neighborhood’s hurt, that’s where it begins.
One “little” crime spreads misery—
Hands off my stuff, hands off me.
Even when nobody’s watchin’ you move,
Doing what’s right is how you prove.
Respect’s the code, the guarantee—
Hands off my stuff, hands off me.

[Chorus]
Hands off my stuff, hands off me,
That’s the rule, it’s the way to be.
Golden Rule makes the whole world see:
Treat me right, I’ll treat you equally.

[Verse 2]
You think it’s sweet when you take what’s mine,
But when it’s your turn, it don’t feel fine.
If we all break rules, then nobody’s free,
That’s why the code is the guarantee.
Keep your fists down, don’t start no fight,

Hurting ain’t strength, it don’t make it right.
Respect my body, respect my space,
Peace is the power we bring to this place.
Civilized folks know the deal,
Do unto others—that rule is real.
Simple enough for all to agree:
Hands off my stuff, hands off me.

[Bridge]
Hands off my stuff—(“Hands off!”)
Hands off me—(“Hands off!”)
Keep it fair, keep it true,
What I want for me, I want for you.

[Chorus]
Hands off my stuff, hands off me,
That’s the rule, it’s the way to be.
Golden Rule makes the whole world see:
Treat me right, I’ll treat you equally.

Lyrics – Rock Version

Don’t Cross the Line – Don’t Hurt People, Don’t Take Their Stuff

[Intro]
Yeah—you know the rule.
It ain’t complicated:
Hands off my stuff, hands off me.

[Verse 1]
Hands off my locker, hands off my ride,
You don’t get stronger by crossing that line.
Bullies and thieves always crash and burn,
Respect is the power you need to learn.

[Chorus]
Don’t cross the line! Can’t you see?
Hands off my stuff, hands off me!
Golden Rule’s the law we trust,
Don’t hurt people, don’t steal their stuff!

[Verse 2]
Shoplift a store, the prices climb,
We all pay more for somebody’s crime.
Shut down a shop, the jobs go too,
Hurts the whole town—and it started with you.

[Chorus]
Don’t cross the line! Can’t you see?
Hands off my stuff, hands off me!

Golden Rule's the law we trust,
Don't hurt people, don't steal their stuff!

[Verse 3]
Keep your fists down, don't start no fight,
Hurting ain't strength, it don't make it right.
Civilized people, we rise above,
Respect and peace are the things we love.

[Bridge]
Don't want it done to you? Don't do it to me.
That's the code, the guarantee.
Simple, strong, and tough enough—
Don't hurt people, don't steal their stuff!

[Final Chorus]
Don't cross the line! Can't you see?
Hands off my stuff, hands off me!
Golden Rule's the law we trust,
Don't hurt people, don't steal their stuff!

Activities

Quick Use: Bell Ringer or Filler Activity

Instructions:

Play one version of the *Don't Hurt People, Don't Take Their Stuff* video (pop, country, rap, or rock) at the start of class. After viewing, ask students to respond to a single prompt in their notebooks or on a sticky note:

- What's one lyric that stood out to you? Why?
- Why do you think "Don't hurt people, don't take their stuff" is a rule nearly everyone agrees on?
- Think of a time when someone respected—or didn't respect—your belongings. What did you think about it, or how did it make you feel?

This short activity takes 5–10 minutes and can serve as a warm-up, informal assessment, or transition into deeper discussion. It also works well for previewing or reviewing a full lesson later in the week. You can choose a different music genre each time.

The Ripple Effect

Objective tie-in: Analyze how theft and violence affect not only victims but also businesses, workers, and entire communities.

Instructions:

1. Divide students into small groups. Give each group a large sheet of paper with one event written in the center, such as "A neighborhood store is

shoplifted every day," "Packages keep disappearing from porches on our street," or "A fight breaks out at the community basketball court."

2. Groups draw a ripple map. In the first ring, they list the immediate effects of the event. In the second ring, they list what happens next because of those effects. In the third ring, they list the longer-term effects on the whole community. (Examples: higher prices, locked display cases, extra security costs, a store closing, lost jobs, neighbors traveling farther to shop, fewer deliveries, parents keeping children away from the court, and less trust among neighbors.)
3. Groups find a lyric from any of the four songs that matches something on their map.
4. Each group shares its map with the class.

Debrief with a discussion:

- Who ended up paying for the original event? Were they the people you expected?
- Which effects were easy to see, and which were hidden?
- What would the third ring of your map look like if the rule "Don't hurt people, don't take their stuff" were followed instead?

Optional Extension: Students find a news story about a store that cited theft as a reason for closing or for changing how it operates. They evaluate the claim: What evidence does the story offer? Do different sources describe the cause differently? What other factors might have played a role?

Borrowed, Bought, or Taken?

Objective tie-in: Distinguish between voluntary exchange and taking something by force or theft.

Instructions:

Provide students with the list of scenarios below. In pairs or small groups, students sort each scenario into one of three categories:

- **Voluntary:** Both people freely agreed.
- **Not Voluntary:** Something was taken without permission or by force.
- **Gray Area:** The group is not sure, or members disagree. Be ready to explain why.

Example scenarios:

- You trade your sandwich for a friend's chips at lunch.

- A classmate borrows your calculator without asking and returns it the next day.
- Someone takes a package from a neighbor's porch.
- You find a wallet on the sidewalk and keep the cash.
- You find a wallet on the sidewalk and return it to its owner.
- A friend lends you a video game and asks for it back in a week.
- An older student tells a younger student to hand over his or her lunch money "or else."
- You use a neighbor's Wi-Fi without asking because the password is easy to guess.
- A street vendor sells you a bottle of water for $3 on a hot day, and you choose to buy it.
- Someone spray-paints graffiti on the wall of a local store.
- You ask to borrow a teammate's cleats, and your teammate says yes.
- You stream a movie from a website that posted it without permission.

Debrief: What makes an exchange voluntary? Why does consent matter? Which scenarios caused the most disagreement, and why?

Keep Your Fists Down: Two Endings

Objective tie-in: Evaluate how respect for people and property builds trust, safety, and cooperation.

Instructions:

Divide students into small groups. Give each group a conflict to act out, such as:

- Someone bumps into you in a crowded hallway and knocks your books to the floor.
- Two players argue over a foul during a pickup basketball game.
- A classmate takes your seat in the cafeteria and refuses to move.
- You find out someone has been using your locker without asking.

Each group writes and performs a short skit with two different endings: one where the conflict escalates and one where it is resolved peacefully.

Follow with a discussion: What choices changed the outcome? Which ending took more strength? How do the rock and rap lyrics "Keep your fists down, don't start no fight" apply to each ending?

What If Everyone Did It?

Objective tie-in: Explain the principle "Don't hurt people, don't take their stuff" and how it connects to the Golden Rule and to personal and property rights.

Instructions:

Students imagine a town where, for one week, nobody follows the rule "Don't hurt people, don't take their stuff." They write a short news report or journal entry describing daily life in that town. What do stores do? How do neighbors act? What is a school day like? Then students write a second, shorter entry describing the same town when everyone follows the rule.

Follow with a discussion: The rap version says, "If we all break rules, then nobody's free." How do your two entries show that idea? Which town has more freedom, and why?

Same Message, Different Beat

Compare how the same concept is communicated through different musical genres and visuals.

Instructions:

1. Choose any two *Don't Hurt People, Don't Take Their Stuff* music videos (pop, country, rap, or rock).
2. Watch both versions, paying close attention to:

- Word choice and tone
- Use of metaphors or imagery
- Overall mood and pacing
- How strongly the message comes across

Using either a Venn diagram or the table worksheet that follows on the next page, compare the two videos. Which version made the biggest impact on you personally? Why? Did the genre affect how seriously you took the message? How did the choice of music style change the way the message felt or was understood?

Name _____ Date _____

Class _____ Period _____ Teacher _____

Don’t Hurt People, Don’t Take Their Stuff

Video Comparison Table

Instructions: Watch two of the *Don’t Hurt People, Don’t Take Their Stuff* videos and complete the table below.

Feature	Version 1 (Genre) _____	Version 2 (Genre) _____	Similarities / Differences
Tone / Mood			
Key Metaphors			
Visual Style			
How Direct Is the Message?			
Most Memorable Line			
Overall Effectiveness			

Create Your Own Lesson in Lyrics

Instructions:
Challenge students to become the creators! Working individually or in small groups, have students choose an economic or civic concept (from class or from a provided topic list) and create their own *Lesson in Lyrics*. They should write a short, original song or rap that explains the concept in a clear, creative, and engaging way. Encourage them to include a chorus, define key vocabulary, and use real-world examples. For an added layer, students may storyboard or describe the kind of visuals they would use in a music video.

Students are welcome to use AI tools—such as ChatGPT, Suno, or music video generators—to help brainstorm, write, or even produce their project. It's the perfect time to explore how new technologies can become tools for learning, creativity, and innovation.

This project can be submitted as lyrics only, or students may choose to perform or record their creation if time and resources allow. (Perhaps an extra-credit opportunity?)

If your students are willing, share their videos with us! Put it into a Google drive or other sharable platform and send us a link! We'd love to see what they're creating.