

Identity Posters

IN SCHOOL, SOME NAMES INVOKE TEASING. TO START OUR year off right and to stop teasing before it begins, I have students create identity posters about themselves.

We begin by sharing what we know about our names. Who named you? Were you named after someone? Next, I send home a sheet for students to interview their parents or guardians. Why did you give me this name? What does my name mean? What is its origin? Who chose my name?

When students return to class with their answers, we take time to share. Some of the students with the same name discover their parents named them for different reasons. Some find that though they share the same name, their research of origins turned up different meanings.

Students bring in photos of themselves and their families and use magazines to cut out pictures of favorite things. These images, along with written explanations, will be used to create their identity posters. These posters tell who they are and what makes each of them unique.

This provides a springboard discussion for our study of world history. During the year, we will learn about all the world's religions, and students learn that many of their names have religious origins even if it's not the religion their families practice.

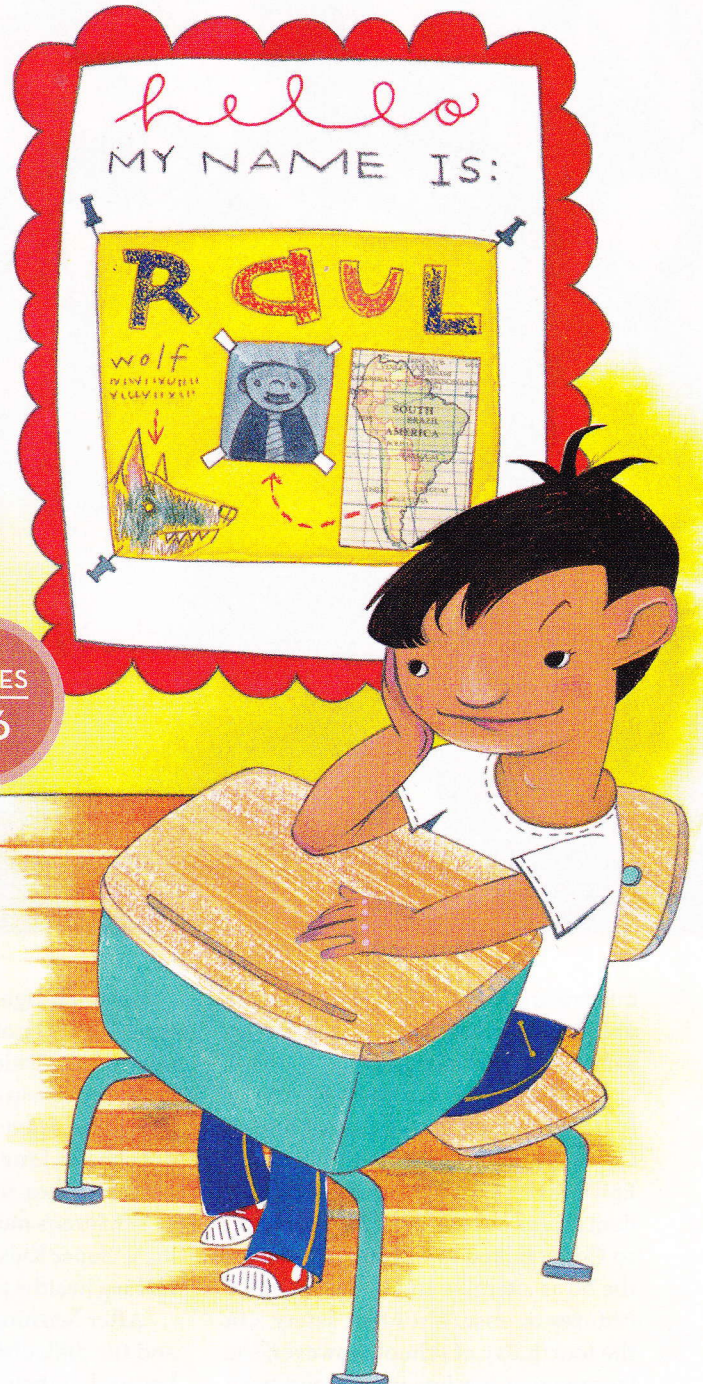
We all enjoy walking around the room and looking at the posters. The students' discussions often reveal the importance of this activity. Students ask each other if they like their names, or if they would choose a different name. Once, I overheard a Chinese student tell his classmate, "I'm glad my parents gave me an English-sounding name, but I wish people could pronounce my real name." That year, we all learned how to say his Chinese name correctly. It really wasn't difficult at all.

We hang the posters along the back wall of our classroom all year long. Each week, I take down one to place in a prominent position in the room where everyone can focus on it.

As an extension activity during the year, students create identity posters of famous people we are studying in history.

Students learn that although their names may carry certain information, it is not all of who they are, what they like, do or think. We are multifaceted. This activity curbs students from making fun of each other's names.

Ellen Mulholland
Wood Middle School
Alameda, CA



TEACHING TOLERANCE RECOMMENDS For more information on the importance of the arts in education, read Eric Jensen's *Arts with the Brain in Mind* (\$22.95; ISBN# 0-87120-514-9).

Riding With Rosa

EVER WISH YOU COULD GO BACK IN TIME AND BE PART OF history? With this activity, students can be “riding with Rosa” and join her on the journey that changed the world.

After children have learned the story of Rosa Parks refusing to go to the back of the bus, they are ready to travel back in time. For this activity you will need a copy of the famous, although staged, photograph of Mrs. Parks sitting on the bus and a head/shoulder photograph of each child in your class (a small copy of each child’s school photo works best).

Copy the photograph of Mrs. Parks onto the top half of a piece of paper. On the bottom half, provide lines for the children’s writing.

Tell the students that they are to travel back in time to 1955. They can use their imaginations as to how to accomplish this (e.g., a time machine, a magic wand, a magic wish).

Say to the children, “You have arrived in Montgomery, Alabama, and are actually on the same bus as Rosa Parks!

Glue your picture onto the photograph so that you are sitting there close to Mrs. Parks. You hear the bus driver tell Mrs. Parks to go to the back of the bus. She sits still, refusing to obey. The bus driver threatens to call the police. Mrs. Parks speaks up for herself. What will you say, since you are there, too, to help support Mrs. Parks? What will you say to the bus driver? Write that down on the lines below the paragraph.”

When the class completes their writing, take some time to give the children an opportunity to share what they wrote. Role-play the situation and have students take turns reading aloud what they’ve written to support Mrs. Parks, thus allowing each child to insert him/herself into the history of what happened.

Afterward, display the students’ work for all to see, or compile it into a collection titled “Riding with Rosa” that can be checked out from your classroom or school library.

Michael Penkava
West Elementary School
Crystal Lake, IL

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Write for Us

We welcome submissions of Activity Exchange items from classroom teachers. Submissions (up to 400 words) should include concise information on specific activities. A fee of \$100-\$200 is paid for each Activity Exchange item we publish. Longer lesson plans will be considered for publication on the web; payment for these ranges from \$200-\$500. Send submissions to: Teaching Tolerance, 400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36104. Allow 1-3 months for reply.



TEACHING TOLERANCE RECOMMENDS There are many books for young children that introduce the story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott. We suggest *The Bus Ride That Changed History: The Story of Rosa Parks* (\$16; ISBN# O-618-44911-6), by Pamela Duncan Edwards. For students in grades 5 and up, order a free copy of Teaching Tolerance’s kit, *Mighty Times: The Legacy of Rosa Parks*, from www.teachingtolerance.org/rosa.

Ladder of Prejudice

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

— MARGARET MEAD



THIS IS THE QUOTE MY 8TH-GRADE STUDENTS DISCUSS AS WE BEGIN TO TALK ABOUT the Holocaust. I use the Holocaust to address issues of diversity, bullying and community-building. When an article in the local newspaper provided an overview of Holocaust studies and defined and illustrated “The Ladder of Prejudice,” it inspired one of the most effective activities my 8th-graders engage in during our Holocaust unit:

The Ladder of Prejudice

- The Fifth Rung: Extermination
- The Fourth Rung: Physical Attack
- The Third Rung: Discrimination
- The Second Rung: Avoidance
- The First Rung: Speech

Utilizing this ladder in the classroom provides the students with a clear visual of what happens when prejudice takes control. I draw a ladder on the whiteboard, or I create a bulletin board to illustrate this ladder. The key is that this ladder stays up to represent a visual of the prejudice and discrimination that is happening in the school and community.

As a whole group or in small groups, we define and discuss what the ladder’s terms mean. I have the students place these terms on the ladder in the order of their severity. The ladder begins with speech—people talking about others. The gossip and talk leads to the avoidance of a group of people. Once people begin to avoid one another, the discrimination begins—treating people differently. The next level is the physical attack, which finally leads to extermination.

Once the terms are defined and placed on the ladder, I ask the students to write on a Post-it Note something that has happened in the school or community that could be posted somewhere on the ladder. To the students’ surprise, they see a variety of Post-it Notes on all levels of the ladder — all the way to physical attack. This ladder is a great way to provide a visual to the students that they are experiencing what happens on the ladder of prejudice every day. More importantly, the following question becomes unavoidable: What keeps the students and community from reaching the extermination level? We then discuss the stages people experienced during the time of the Holocaust.

The Ladder of Prejudice discussion leads back to Margaret Mead’s quote—a quote that seems to relate a real-life message to students, that they can create change. We continue using this ladder of prejudice by watching the news or reading newspaper articles and placing these articles on the ladder. The Ladder of Prejudice is a strong visualization of the prejudice that is happening in the school, community and world that the students have the chance to change, a change that can happen once students understand and see for themselves what prejudice looks like.

Stefanie Fox
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TEACHING TOLERANCE
RECOMMENDS Enrich your Holocaust unit with our free kit, *One Survivor Remembers*. Go to www.teachingtolerance.org/osr



Interviewing Immigrants

“THOSE KIDS ARE LAUGHING AT ME,” LISA SAID. “THEY SHOULD speak English.”

Lisa, a high school sophomore, speaks only English. The students she referred to were speaking Spanish because they hadn't yet learned English. I often noticed the same pattern among students. My English speakers routinely underestimated the difficulty of learning a new language. They sometimes assume non-English speakers are laughing at them and then make negative comments about immigrants.

To create an experience that might change perspectives, I arranged with an ESL teacher down the hall to bring my U.S. history students to her room. I wanted my students to interview newly arrived teenagers as part of their unit on immigration. I hoped my students would connect the difficulties of recent immigrants with those who arrived during the late 19th and early 20th centuries who were described in our text.

I prepared a detailed assignment sheet but did not tell my students about the plan until they arrived in class. Since facing the unknown and the unexpected is a common experience for immigrants, this was an intentional part of my lesson. I assigned three tasks:

- Find out how and why the person came to the United States.
- Sketch the route of the person's journey on the world map that I provided.

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- Learn two phrases in the person's language and be ready to teach them to our class.

My students looked worried when I told them their tasks, even when I assured them they would have a partner from our class and the two of them would interview their non-English-speaking colleague together.

When our group arrived at the ESL classroom, my students hovered by the door. I had to guide some by the elbow to their assigned interviewees. Their first attempts to communicate were very tentative, and the ESL teacher and aide circulated to translate for the immigrant students who understood the least English.

After a few minutes, students began to relax. Everyone recognized the map, and all groups were able to draw in the routes taken to the United States. With help, in halting English, newly arrived students shared their stories, arousing interest and empathy in the other students. When it was time to learn two phrases in another language, the tables were turned. Suddenly the English-only students were struggling with unfamiliar pronunciations and learning that success comes only after much practice. My students realized that when non-English speakers laughed, it was often nervousness or the difficulty of communicating that reduced them to giggles. Other times it was clear that the laughter was about the difficulty of getting some idea across.

By the time we returned to our classroom, noisy chatter filled the air. My students had stories to share, and some had made plans to attend a soccer game to see their new friends play. I was happy that they'd had a positive experience and hoped it would cause a re-examination of their previous negative assumptions.

Carol Steele
Union High School
Grand Rapids, MI



TEACHING TOLERANCE RECOMMENDS Mitali

Perkins immigrated to the United States from Kolkata, India. She writes books for young adult immigrants who find themselves caught between two cultures. Visit her website – or arrange for her to visit your school – at www.mitaliperkins.com.

Mystery and Mayhem

FOR THE LAST SIX YEARS I HAVE USED ROBERT MCCAMMON'S *Boy's Life* (\$7.99; ISBN# 0671743508) to emphasize social unrest, violence and loss of innocence in the 1960s to my sophomore English students.

The story is centered on 12-year-old Cory Mackenson and his hometown of Zephyr, Ala., a white community that abuts the neighboring town of Bruton, a black community. The conflict is introduced when a non-racial murder occurs, and speeds up with an intricate plot centered on vivid racial issues.

My students, through McCammon's words, learn of the brutality of historical events including the bombing of the Birmingham 16th Street Baptist Church that killed four young black girls. The image of this senseless deed stays with Cory throughout the story. A similar act of terror is uncovered during the series of events in this story.

The real comprehension of the adolescent novel happens from written responses in the form of essays. Essay topics include prompts, such as:

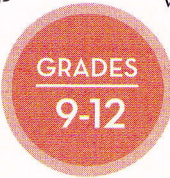
- Analyze the plot to bomb the Community Center in Bruton and the actual events that happened in Birmingham, and show their correlation. How is the rationale of those accused similar?
- The scenes of violence in *Boy's Life* show the reader that even though Zephyr was a small town with a penchant for vio-

lence, the ugly side of humanity can permeate any area. Explain how some of the conflicts in the novel could have been rectified with simple conversation.

- More than 40 years have passed since the incidents in the story occurred. Have we become more tolerant of each other? Are we more accepting of those who are different? Have we learned to overcome our fears, biases and timidity to certain issues? What do you feel we have learned in the past four decades?

Ultimately, the real power of this reading comes as Cory, struggling to understand the forces of good and evil, arrives at an inner peace and realizes the world is an innocent place if he can let it be. This is a lesson benefiting us all.

Rick Fowler
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Boyne City, MI



TEACHING TOLERANCE RECOMMENDS This is *the Dream* (\$16.99; ISBN# O-06-O55519-X), by Diane Z. Shore, tells the story of America's Civil Rights Movement throughout the South in both art and poetry and is a perfect complement to this lesson.



Using “Objects” to Object to Objectification

MY HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AND I SPENT A LOT OF TIME EXPLORING FUNCTIONS IN our pre-calculus and algebra classes. Indeed, the function concept has been described as the biggest single vehicle around which essential high school mathematics can be organized. The basic level of the function concept is “function as a process.” The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics requires that students view a function as an object that can itself be acted on. Another useful way of viewing a function as an object is by subjecting it to being classified in various ways.

Because our high school had a strong mission of pluralism and tolerance, I was moved to see this traditional mathematics content as an opportunity to be enhanced with a metaphor for tolerance — a goal not commonly discussed in mathematics classrooms.

First, I gave my students a table where each row had a different function. Each column had a trait by which the function could be classified as having (or not), such as whether the function was even, odd, increasing, decreasing, continuous, 1-to-1, going through the origin, or satisfied $f(a+b) = f(a)+f(b)$.


After filling in the table with “yes” or “no,” students noted how difficult it is to find a single simple property shared by all, or to find a single row that is uniquely defined by any one of its traits. And yet doesn’t most intolerance stem

from assumptions in the form of “all people in Group Y have trait X”?

As a follow-up discussion or writing exercise, I ask students to explore this problem: “In popular usage, the phrase ‘treating as an object’ has negative connotations, because it implies an entity as rich as a human being can be reduced to a single dimension, such as gender, ethnicity, financial status, sexual orientation, religion or occupation. Would it be just as foolish to say that we know everything about a function or its behavior from one particular classification of it? Why?”

This activity can be easily adapted in other math classes by changing the row and column headings in the table. Students in younger grades can be given a version using simple whole numbers (i.e. 1-10) instead of functions. Possible “traits” of numbers include whether a number is even, prime, composite, square, perfect, triangular, Fibonacci or factorial.

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 **TEACHING TOLERANCE RECOMMENDS** For more on equity issues infused with mathematics content, order *Rethinking Mathematics: Teaching Social Justice by the Numbers* (\$16.95; ISBN# O-942961-54-4) by Rethinking Schools from www.rethinkingschools.org.

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