

# Celebrate Each Other

ON THE FIRST DAY OF EACH SCHOOL YEAR, MY STUDENTS AND I form a circle and I ask them these questions:

- Do we all have the same hair color?
- Do we all have the same eyes?
- Do we all have the same skin?
- Do we all wear the same clothes?

Then I have them look around at each other and themselves so they realize that everyone is different. I ask them, "How would I know who you were if you all looked alike?" "Is it nice that we are different?" After the discussion, I get out art supplies and exclaim, "Let's celebrate that we are all special!"

I bring out a package of precut cardboard doll cutouts in a variety of skin colors. Students are encouraged to choose the one that is closest to their skin color. I provide construction paper, yarn, sequins and other easily available craft supplies. Students choose what they need to make their doll represent themselves. They choose yarn to match their hair, colored

shaky eyes to match their eye color and construction paper to match their clothes. Students who wear glasses are encouraged to draw those with a marker. We begin the year by proudly making ourselves, and it is a joy to see the children taking such care and pride in their representations.

After each doll is complete, we add names to the front and use them on our classroom responsibility board. Each student is given a job each week and their doll is proudly displayed next to that job to identify that it is their responsibility. This way, we extend the use of the diversity lesson into our daily responsibilities.

Because it asks students to identify racial characteristics by creating a doll that best represents who they are, this activity can introduce race to even the youngest of children. Students from different racial groups may find that they "match," sparking deeper conversations about race and ethnicity. You can follow up by introducing wonderful early children's literature like *The Skin You Live In* (order it at [www.ipgbook.com](http://www.ipgbook.com) for \$14.95) and *Skin Again* ([www.jumpatthesun.com](http://www.jumpatthesun.com) for \$16.99). Having students talk about their own doll and how they relate to dolls of other colors is a great way to begin children on the lifelong dialogue needed to heal race relations in our schools and communities.

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**USE MUSIC TO** enhance this lesson for young children by ordering *We Are Family: A Musical Message For All* (\$7) at [www.wearefamilyfoundation.org](http://www.wearefamilyfoundation.org). This charming sing-along DVD has young children's favorites like SpongeBob SquarePants and his friends. Children can dance along with their dolls to celebrate the family of the human race.

# Brush Up on Respect

WHenever I feel that students are starting to pick on each other and get disrespectful, I use this activity to get them to think about their behavior. For this activity, you need a tube of toothpaste, a four-by-six index card, a marker, a popsicle stick and a toothpick.

Tell students that today everyone is going to brush up on respect. Start by asking these three questions: "How does respect look? How does respect sound? How does respect feel?" Allow for five to ten minutes of discussion.

Using the marker, draw a big "R" on the four-by-six card. Let students know that the "R" represents "respect"; talk about what respect looks like when it comes out of our mouths. Talk about the words, the tone, the facial expressions and even the body language people use to show respect.

Tell students they're going to freshen their words by covering that "R" with toothpaste. A volunteer takes the tube and squeezes paste out of it to paint the "R." As your volunteer is making sure it's completely covered, help students make a connection between fresh breath and speaking good words, using good manners and maintaining a friendly tone of voice.

Then tell the students you've made a terrible mistake. You've just realized that this "R" actually stands for "rude." Invite your volunteer to help you take the word back.

Challenge your volunteer to put the toothpaste back into the tube. On the first attempt, your volunteer may try to retrace with the tube itself, hoping that the toothpaste will go back in.

When that doesn't work, offer your volunteer a popsicle stick or toothpick to keep trying, all the while discussing how it's impossible to take "disrespectful, hurtful" words back. This serves as an excellent visual demonstration of the power of words because in the end, it's very messy. Use that as a springboard to discuss the mess that ugly words can cause.

Follow up by brainstorming ways in which a student could fix a mess like that. Discuss the steps you'd have to take to right the wrong. Have students role-play to learn how to give a genuine apology. Ask them to reflect on the lesson during morning meeting the next day, or in their journal writing. And, of course, give everyone a breath mint to remind them that what comes out of their mouths matters.

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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 \$400 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.



**ORDER** *Benjamin and the Word* (\$14.95) at [www.artepublicopress.com](http://www.artepublicopress.com) to reinforce this lesson. It's a bilingual book that dispels the myth that "sticks and stones will break your bones but words will never hurt you." Perfect for starting discussions on name-calling.



# Discrimination in Banned Books

THE LAST WEEK OF SEPTEMBER IS BANNED BOOKS WEEK. Many teachers use the event to talk about free speech with their students. I also use it to begin a conversation about discrimination.

In class, I give each student a banned book. I do not immediately tell them why the book was banned. Instead, I ask them to look at the cover of the book, read the title page and first chapter. I ask them to look at illustrations in the book. Once the students have completed their investigation, I show the “reason” each book has been banned on the overhead projector.

Students then discuss the reasons each book was banned. I use the following questions to guide discussion:

- Are there valid reasons to ban books?
- Do the reasons listed for your book seem valid to you? Why or why not?
- What benefits, if any, are there to getting a book banned?
- What harm, if any, is caused by having a book banned?
- Is age-appropriateness a valid reason?

I allow approximately 15 minutes for discussion. That gives every student a chance to discuss their book and their impression of the reason it was banned.


I put up a list where everyone can view it, then have the students start to categorize the reasons books have been banned. Once all the reasons have been divided up, I divide the students into the same number of groups. Each group has a category.

The assignment for each group is to create something (a poster, an essay, a PowerPoint, a drawing, etc.) that will help other students to see why someone might see the category as a valid reason for a book being banned, and why someone might see it as an invalid reason. Students should think about the role discrimination might play in the banning of books. Are some books banned because of bias against a certain group of people? How can you tell?

As the groups finish their project, I let them know that the books they have been using will be in the classroom for the next two weeks, to give everyone a chance to investigate them individually.

This plan can be modified for use in the early grades, using banned children’s picture books. (Believe me, there are plenty of them!)

**Tressy Hart**  
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 **FOR LISTS OF** banned/challenged books and the stated reasons for banning them, go to the American Library Association’s website at [www.ala.org](http://www.ala.org) and search for “Frequently Challenged Books.”

# Core Samples

MY FATHER-IN-LAW IS A GEOLOGIST, SO HE OFTEN TAKES CORE samples from the earth. Core samples are fascinating columns of rock and mineral cut from deep below the earth's surface with a drill. They are marbled with shades of color that serve as a record of the history and composition of a particular piece of land.

I believe taking "core samples" of our students' values can be just as enlightening. The following activity is designed to help students think about their core values. These core values can be discussed as students examine history, literature, science and even their own behavior.

1) Ask students to divide a piece of paper into three columns.

2) Label the first column "Community." Discuss what communities your students belong to: the class, their school, the neighborhood, and so on. Ask students what characteristics they value in themselves as they interact with their communi-

ties. What traits should a member of a community have? Have students list the traits that they believe community members should possess in the first column.

3) Label the second column "Family." Here, students list traits that a family member should have. Ask: "What role do you play in your family? How do you think people in a family should behave?" Some characteristics from Column One may repeat in Column Two.

4) Label the third column "Friends." Students should fill in the third column with traits they value in their friends. Ask: "How do you strive to be as a friend? What do you expect from your friends?"

5) Now you can discuss these core values as a class. Compile a master list on the board. The students do not have to come to a consensus about which core values are correct, but it is interesting to see the variety of core values that people hold. Ask: "What traits show up in all three columns? Why? Which traits do many of us value?" The discussion should help them understand that different people value different things.

Continue the discussion by examining how these values affect our actions. Ask: "Do these core values influence the decisions you make? How? Can core values conflict with one another?"

If you help students identify their own core values, you can illuminate students' own decision-making processes and explain why literary and historical figures made the decisions they did. Why did Martin Luther King, Jr. preach nonviolent resistance? Why did Atticus Finch defend Tom Robinson? The acknowledgment and understanding of core beliefs opens up a deeper level of character and motivation analysis. It also offers an opportunity for students to compare reactions to challenging situations without judgment. Core values cross content areas and extend outside the classroom and into students' lives.

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**SHOW STUDENTS HOW** knowing and understanding their core beliefs can be the foundation for leadership with *Everyday Leadership* (\$29.95) [www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com).

# Rooting Out Termites

TERMITES, SMALL AND OVERLOOKED, CAN KNOCK DOWN forests and turn buildings to powder; intolerance operates in much the same way.

It's not uncommon to hear students — including students of color — repeating the biased language they've heard. (Not long ago, for instance, I overheard one of my students saying "You throw like a rich white girl.") Left unchallenged, comments like this can nibble away at our students, tearing town the futures they've envisioned for themselves.

I created an activity that isolates several of the acts of intolerance that so frequently exist in the lives of my students. I wrote short narratives that ask students to imagine themselves in scenarios of everyday bigotry, prompting them to think about how best to address these acts of intolerance. My narratives cover these topics:

**My uncle the racist:** Standing-up to racist family members.

**That's so gay, retarded or ghetto:** Using identity labels as put-downs or in a negative context.

**Speak English, this is America!** Confronting the racist messages that work to erase immigrant culture — isolating immigrants from their culture and from the mainstream at the same time.

**"Girl's aint nothin' but..."** Objectification of females by males — from music videos to playground chatter.

**My iPhone and your clothes from Wal-Mart:** Perception of what's "cool" and what's "not cool" and the class privilege that underlies these ideas.

**Men's work and women's work:** Gender roles at home, in the workplace and on campus.

**The "schoolboy" and the "schoolgirl:"** The alienation of high-performing students.

**Being different in a place where sameness is required:** Situations in which physical appearance, sexual orientation or religious belief could lead to ostracism.

I group my students into teams of three to four. I pay close attention to ensure each group has the best possible balance of males and females; of well-performing and struggling students; and of students from varying

socioeconomic levels. Each group receives one of the eight scenarios, and is asked to talk for five to ten minutes about how best to respond. When they have reached a conclusion they record their responses and rotate to the next table and scenario. I "work the room," listening and engaging with them to assist and elaborate where needed. This rotation, along with a debriefing, takes two periods.

In life, these scenarios are frequent and common, but they often pass before we can engineer the best response. Giving students time, support and guidance to formulate responses ahead of time gives them the awareness and confidence to speak up for themselves and one another.

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GRADES  
 6-12



**FOR TIPS ON** how to respond effectively to everyday instances of racism, check out the online guide *Speak Up!* at [www.tolerance.org/speakup/](http://www.tolerance.org/speakup/)



# Linguistic Tolerance

I AM A SPANISH LANGUAGE TEACHER AND I HAVE STUDENTS who are from Mexico, Guatemala, Argentina and many different Spanish-speaking countries. I find the diversity in the Spanish-speaking community to be truly fascinating. We Spanish speakers are not all alike, as popular media often portray us. Because I am teaching language, I use the diversity of Spanish to highlight the diversity of our community.

Linguistic discrimination is a growing trend in my school. Students from diverse backgrounds get together in class and use their home language, often associating only with fellow students who speak the same kind of English or Spanish they speak. Here's how I fight this kind of self-segregation.

First I show some photographs to students to get the discussion going. For example, I show photographs of corn, peanuts, and other common items. I ask students to write down the word they use for that item. Next I break students into groups based on the English name of the object they are naming (a corn group, a peanut group, and so on). Then students see how many different Spanish names they had for this one single object. Students are asked to identify which term they think is the best one to name the object and they must give the rationale behind their thoughts.

After this initial activity, I give students a handout with terms in English divided into two columns. They have to match the items in column A (the common terms they most likely know) with the items in column B (the same items named differently in places like the United Kingdom and Canada). This is the handout I use:



**MEXICAN AMERICAN**, Cuban American, Dominican American and Puerto Rican writers come together to create a collection of 17 stories in *Once Upon a Cuento* (\$15.95). The stories show the incredible diversity in Latino/a heritage. Order it at [www.curbstone.org](http://www.curbstone.org)

## REGIONALISMS

Draw a line from the regionalisms in column A to the corresponding words in column B.

A	B
Line	Lorry
Elevator	Underground
Subway	Queue
Truck	Lift

(You can deepen the list by adding English word pairs that are associated with different regions within the United States, such as Bag/Sack, Buggy/Cart or Soda/Pop.)

When students are done, we go over the information and we have a lively discussion about the different names for these common items. Next, I ask them to do the same thing with terms in Spanish. This is the handout I use:

## REGIONALISMOS

Ahora haz lo mismo, pero con los siguientes comestibles en español.

A	B
Judias verdes	Elote, Choclo
Jugo de naranja	Mani, cacahuates
Cacahuates	papas
Maiz	Jugo de china, zumo de nar
Patatas	habichuelas tiernas, vainitas,
	Ejotes, porotos

After the students are done, we all do the activity together on the board and have another lively discussion about how we say things in our different countries of origin. I also have students transfer their work onto posters with visuals so that they have cues for their vocabulary words. This is a fantastic way to begin discussions in a language class about the diversity of a seemingly homogeneous group.

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