



Building Community, Day by Day

PRE-K-5

It's the start of the school day at Kensington Avenue School in Springfield, Mass. In a 1st-grade special-needs inclusion class, everyone partners up and exuberantly sings: "Hello, neighbor, what do you say, it's gonna be a wonderful day." They switch partners and continue singing until everyone in the class has been greeted.

Down the hall, a 5th-grade class has decided to greet each other in Spanish, accompanied by high-fives. Before they begin, the teacher asks, "What do we need to remember as we do this greeting?" The students respond: "We need to speak each other's names clearly." "We need to do a soft high-five instead of a slap." "We need to make eye contact." "OK!" the teacher says. "Who wants to begin?"

Welcome to Morning Meeting, a 15- to 30-minute gathering where teachers and students welcome each other, share news, have fun and prepare for the day

ahead. Over time, this daily routine can help transform a group of individuals into a caring community of learners.

Morning Meeting is part of the *Responsive Classroom*® approach to teaching, which helps teachers create environments where both social and academic learning thrive. Each meeting consists of four components:

Greeting: Students greet each other by name. There are many greeting activities, including handshaking, singing, clapping and greeting in different languages.

Sharing: Students share information about important events in their lives. Listeners offer empathic comments or ask clarifying questions.

Group activity: All participate in a brief, lively activity that fosters group cohesion, for example reciting a poem, dancing, playing a word game or singing.

News and announcements: Children read the news and announcements

chart their teacher has written. The chart often includes an activity that builds classroom community and reinforces academic skills.

The routines of Morning Meeting can have a powerful impact on classroom life. The sense of community and the habits of respectful interaction inform every conversation, every academic lesson, every conflict or hard moment throughout the day.

As Kensington teacher Tina Valentine notes, the social skills that children learn during Morning Meeting — caring, empathy, self-control, respectful communication — aren't just important classroom skills; they're also important life skills.

To learn more about *Morning Meeting* or the *Responsive Classroom*® approach to teaching, visit www.responsiveclassroom.org or call (800) 360-6332.

Lynn Bechtel
 Northeast Foundation for Children
 Greenfield, Mass.

Singing for Peace

GRADES K-6

When the daily newspaper depicted gruesome violence with horrifying headlines about the war in Iraq, my thoughts turned to school. Like every teacher in America, our staff would be called upon to answer difficult questions from students. Our approach involved using music and the arts as a way to bring people together.

In addition to being a special-education teacher, I also am a musician. Some friends and I wrote a song called "Reconciliation," which the school music teacher and I rewrote for elementary students. Two 4th-grade teachers wanted their classes involved, and thus the Ventura Park 4th-Grade Peace Project Choir was born.

Our school counselor organized a schoolwide art contest for the cover of our CD, which included a song by our 6th-grade choir as well. Students created powerful images, then had opportunities to discuss their art with each other, their teachers and the counselor.

The CD sold out in a matter of weeks. The artwork remained on display at school for many months. Parents and students danced together at a concert. "Reconciliation" could be heard playing from boom boxes in any given classroom the remainder of the year. We gave 50 percent of the proceeds to the American Red Cross and the other 50 percent to our own Positive School Climate Committee, which strives to create a peaceful school atmosphere.

Our resolve to not only teach peace but to have the students actively engaged in the spirit of community remains strong. We can only hope to give our children a more peaceful world when we give them the tools for creating and sustaining such a place.

Ben Sandler

Ventura Park Elementary School
Portland, Ore.

'Reconciliation'

Sandler/Meyer/Reeves

(Chorus)

The time has come
To reconcile our differences
Somehow

The time is now
To reconcile our differences
We have the power

The time is now
No excuses are worthwhile
It's time to reconcile our differences now

Our differences make us strong
Teach us how to get along
It's time to reconcile our differences now

Let's compromise
I'll tell you why
Everybody sleeping under the same blue sky
It's time to reconcile our differences now

(Chorus)

We can agree on what is right
We don't have to fuss and fight
It's time to reconcile our differences now

We are the future
We hold the key
To all people living free
It's time to reconcile our differences now

(Chorus)

For a copy of the CD (\$10),
contact ben_sandler@ddouglas.k12.or.us

From Chaos to Community

GRADES 6-8

I was hired to teach 6th grade three days before school started at such a large school that they had formed it into eight schools-within-a-school. I had missed the orientation and was disoriented. I couldn't even find the copy machine.

The last thing I wanted to do was model for students a chaotic beginning, so I decided to spend much of the first month on community building, using ideas from William Glasser's *The Quality School: Managing Students Without Coercion* (Harper-Collins, 1992, ISBN# 0-06-096955-5).

First, I asked my students to help me brainstorm about the worst possible classroom they could imagine. What would it look like, sound like and feel like? Then we brainstormed a second list about the best classroom they could imagine.

When these two lists were done, I slowly studied them in front of the students. Quietly, I mused, "So you think this is what a quality classroom would look like? Well, I know that I can give you everything that you have listed here." I signed the piece of paper, making it a contract. Next, I asked if they would like to come up and each sign it as well. The brainstormed list became an official document.

A few days later, we brainstormed another list: "What behaviors would hurt or help us maintain our quality classroom?" We categorized items as either "hurting" or "helping." From this, we did a writing assignment where they created a classroom mission statement and made posters for the room. Now, anytime a hurtful statement is made, I

stand by the two lists and ask, "Is this hurtful or helpful?"

To reinforce helpful qualities, I used the phrase "playing below the line." In one instance, I wrote the word "responsibility" – from the "helping" list – on the board and underlined it. Just under that, I wrote, "playing below the line," and we talked about aspects such as blaming, being inattentive, making excuses and gossiping. Above the word we listed qualities like paying attention, being helpful, cooperative and prepared. Now

when a child exhibits any quality I say, "Thank you for playing above the line." Or, "You are playing below the line." This language becomes their language, and I love it when I hear them use these terms outside the classroom.

To learn more about William Glasser's work go to www.wglasser.com. To order *The Quality School: Managing Students Without Coercion*, call (800) 899-0688. Lisa Anderson
Hull Elementary School
Livonia, Mich.



Write for Us!

If you're involved in a project that successfully promotes acceptance of diversity, community-building, peace and justice, tell us about it – and earn some extra money in the process.

Teacher essays (up to 1,000 words) describe effective classroom programs related to tolerance and diversity. Fees range from \$300 to \$800 per published essay.

Activity Exchange items (up to 400 words) should include concise information on specific classroom activities. A fee of \$100 to \$200 is paid for each Activity Exchange item published.

Longer lesson plans will be considered for inclusion on our website.

Fees for web activities range from \$200 to \$500.

Study previous issues of the magazine to see the style and content we're looking for, and send your manuscript to:

Teaching Tolerance

ATTN: Submissions
400 Washington Ave
Montgomery, AL 36104

We also welcome artwork or photography relating to the activity.



Traveling Trunk: The History of Hate

GRADES 6-9

Slave shackles, a mangled piece of the World Trade Center's south tower, a video of a contemporary Ku Klux Klan rally and some chunks of concrete from the Berlin Wall and Oklahoma City's Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. These items are part of a mobile hands-on exhibit known as the Traveling Trunk.

Holston Middle School 7th-graders squirmed or sat wide-eyed as presenter Gene Rosenberg displayed artifacts to recount stories of everything from the Holocaust to a recent cross-burning.

"What was weird about the video of the Klan was a little girl singing God's praises," said one student. "I don't think God would want them to do that, to hurt people."

Educators and citizens concerned about hate violence – both historic and recent – developed the tool kit, which features recognizable symbols of racial, ethnic and religious persecution and hatred. Members of the Hate Crimes Working Group, a partnership of Knoxville Project Change and the Knoxville division of the FBI, developed the teaching aid.

"Middle school is a time when bullying is a predominant kind of behavior," said Tim Wiegenstein, the guidance counselor who organized the sessions. "As educators, we have to socialize them to deal with each other in positive ways."

Wiegenstein said the next step at the school is bringing together peer mediators to discuss how young people can resolve their conflicts peacefully.

Rosenberg cautioned students about the recruitment efforts of gangs and hate groups that target minors. He also noted that bullying is a form of terrorism; taunts against children who are physically challenged or younger, smaller or less physically fit are not harmless. He also challenged each student to carry out acts of kindness – again and again – to understand how meaningful each person's actions are to others.

After the Traveling Trunk visit, Carlos, a 13-year-old Holston student, said he planned to "go around and try not to offend and make sure that when I do not understand something to ask about it instead of assuming."

For more information about Traveling Trunk, visit www.kornet.org/knohate/trunk.html or call (865) 522-3004

Jeannine F. Hunter
Holston Middle School
Knoxville, Tenn.

That's so gay.
That's so lame.
That's so ghetto.
How retarded!

SPEAK UP!

A GUIDE TO INTERRUPTING EVERYDAY BIAS AND BIGOTRY

They are the everyday moments that make us cringe, that leave us wondering what to do, what to say, how to respond...

The Southern Poverty Law Center asked hundreds of everyday people how they handled such situations. Their ideas can help you prepare for your next encounter with everyday bias and bigotry.

COMING OCTOBER 1ST
www.tolerance.org/speakup

ACTIVITY EXCHANGE

New Kids on the Block

GRADES 7-10

My 7th-grade students were studying teen immigrants and the difficulties they sometimes have transitioning into American culture.

We used a nonfiction book written by Janet Bode called *New Kids on the Block: Oral Histories of Immigrant Teens* (Scholastic, 1991, ISBN# 0-590-44144-2) as the groundwork to discussing what creates boundaries at our school. (Some of our students are from the cultures in Bode's book.)

First, each student worked with a partner and chose a short oral history of an immigrant teen from the book. In their presentations, one student was the interviewer, while the other played the part of the immigrant teen. This led to a discussion of what separates students at our middle school.

The students then worked in groups of three or four to write survey questions about our school's social boundaries. We discussed the survey questions and chose the ones that we thought would evoke the most honest answers from other students.

The students took copies of the survey to social studies teachers. The teachers allowed the students to explain the survey and then monitor the class or answer any questions while their peers completed the survey.

My students returned with the responses and proceeded to tally their group results. They combined all of the group results and created a bar graph on an Excel spreadsheet to show the information.

The students were surprised at the results, and they learned a great deal about the students who attend our school. Many observed that multiracial students are the most left-out group, which also helped to heighten awareness.

Through these activities, we were able to have a genuine discussion about prejudice, racism and discrimination.

This activity was designed in support of the Mix It Up program (see page 53). For additional activity ideas, visit www.mixitup.org/teachers.

Sally Butler
Memorial Middle School
Conyers, Ga.





Holocaust Education: Pink Triangles

GRADES 9-12

The guest speaker came to teach a lesson on World War II not found in our text. After introducing himself, he held up a pink triangle, and the class became silent.

"These were worn by homosexuals during the Nazi occupation of Europe," he explained. "Homosexuals were one of the first groups targeted for extermination as part of Hitler's grand scheme to purify the human race." My students had learned about the Holocaust, when Jews and others were forced to wear symbols identifying them for extermination. The pink triangle, however, was something new for them.

To quell a few predictably immature reactions, including a couple of young men who flashed contemptuous smiles at the word "homosexual," my guest identified himself as gay.

"I did not 'choose' to be homosexual any more than I chose to be right-handed or blue-eyed," he said. "I have chosen to be unashamed and unafraid to face the world and, more importantly, myself, with who I am. And now on to the lesson."

He had their attention.

The next day, I had to answer questions from a few angry parents who wanted to know why their children were "subjected to homosexual views in my classroom." One parent wanted to know if I was gay and what my "agenda" was. "No, I'm not, and I'm trying to promote tolerance," I answered. She used words like "pervert" and "abomination" to describe a man she had never met.

For my students, my guest speaker (who happens to be a respected professor at a local college) presented a different picture. By putting a human face and a personality on what was, for some, only a category, the prejudices they had faded. His homosexuality became a facet of his personhood rather than an all-consuming definition.

When the class stood and applauded at the end of his talk, there was a sense of triumph — one minor battle won in the war against intolerance.

I think I'll invite him back next year.

Daniel Kimber
Hoover High School
Glendale, Calif.

For more information about the Nazi persecution of homosexuals from 1933 through 1945, visit the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's website:

Exhibit (including 12 parts as well as resources and a bibliography): www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/online/hsx/

Press kit (including background and a timeline): www.ushmm.org/museum/press/kits/hsx/bgground.htm

Or contact the museum at:
United States Holocaust
Memorial Museum
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW
Washington, DC 20024-2126
(202) 488-0400