



GRADES
PreK-3

Puppets and Tolerance

ABBY'S EYES WIDEN IN FEAR AND AMAZEMENT AS SHE FREEZES in place. She grips her father's hand tightly. She is 5 years old, and I can see the gears in her mind spinning wildly as she gazes on the plush mouse I'm holding in my arms. The mouse slowly rises and falls with each breath. It quickly, and seamlessly, wipes his face clean and nestles itself in my arms. As I slowly and cautiously approach Abby and her father, Abby looks at me and says breathlessly, "Is it real?" I pull my hand away from the puppet mouse, breaking the connection. "No, it's just pretend," I reply, smiling, "but you can pet him if you would like!" Abby's eyes soften as her fear melts away and her curiosity increases. She gently tilts her head as a grin begins to spread across her face. "Hi, Mr. Mouse! Are you tired? Can I pet you?"

Blending literature and puppetry is an excellent medium to provide a safe and non-threatening environment for children to explore many life issues. Children feel secure talking and listening to puppets, connecting to them on many levels. I use the mouse puppet to tell the fable *The Lion and the Mouse*. Holding the mouse, I share the drama of how the lion and mouse befriended each other. This tale offers numerous teaching moments about unlikely friendships, helping hands, gender roles, ability concerns and ethnic and racial diversity.

We compare and contrast the characters' physical attributes and then define their skills or character strengths. Most of the time, the mouse is identified as a weak female, while the lion is identified as a strong male. However, this stereotype is challenged by the role reversal that takes place in the story. The lion is weakened when he is captured in the net, and the mouse is strong and frees the lion. The activity is usually followed by a visual art activity in which students depict their strengths and how everyone — no matter how small, or what gender or race — has attributes from which we can learn.

Mr. Mouse returns to our classroom from time to time to reinforce and expand on these ideas. And best of all, shy little Abby and Mr. Mouse have become good friends and go on many adventures together.

M. Vetere

**Illinois State University/Slippery Rock University
Bloomington, IL**



YOU CAN FIND A PUPPET to match almost any character in any story. Find inexpensive, good-quality puppets at www.shopbrodart.com.

An Exercise in Kindness

SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS FACE INTOLERANCE NEARLY every day. A three-week 3rd-grade assignment presented me with a unique challenge. The classroom environment was hostile toward one boy who had transferred from a neighboring district. By January, he hadn't been accepted by the class and had become an angry little boy who tested the limits. I was unprepared for student response to Bobby's misbehavior. By the end of my first day, it was clear that Bobby was the class scapegoat. The slightest infraction on Bobby's part sent the class into verbal attacks. The students' tone was condescending and cruel.

At the start of the second week, I read *Somebody Loves You, Mr. Hatch*, in which a dull, lonely man receives a box of chocolates in the mail with a note that reads, "Somebody loves you." Mr. Hatch comes out of his self-imposed shell to make friends with neighbors, coworkers, and local merchants, thinking he has a secret admirer. He becomes the life of the party with his newfound confidence. Eventually, the mail carrier

explains there has been a terrible mistake – he delivered the chocolates to the wrong address. Devastated, Mr. Hatch returns to his former depressed and lonely state. In the end, his new friends throw him a party with a huge banner that reads "Everybody Loves Mr. Hatch."

After reading the story, we discussed how it feels to have a secret admirer and how it feels to be a secret admirer. The kids agreed they would like to be a secret admirer to a classmate. I randomly passed out names. After checking that no one got their own name, I explained a few ground rules. First, you couldn't tell anyone whose name you picked – not even your best friend. Second, you didn't have to buy things for that person, but you could leave nice notes or do nice things for them without them knowing it was you. Third, you could try to trick your person by being especially nice to other people, too. And finally, we would reveal ourselves on Friday.

I saw an immediate change in the classroom climate. Kids became kind and polite. They complimented each other on their schoolwork and ideas. Throughout the week I reminded kids to do something for their secret friend. In our Friday morning Community Circle only a handful of students guessed their admirer. Then we went around the circle revealing who our secret friend was. Although Bobby was the biggest beneficiary of this exercise in kindness, all students learned a lesson in tolerance.

Mary Krakow
Substitute Teacher
Redmond, OR

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 \$250 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 A COPY** of *Somebody Loves You, Mr. Hatch* (\$4.99), by Eileen Spinelli, at www.SimonSaysKids.com or by calling (800) 331-6531.



Justice on the Bumper

ON A DAILY BASIS, WE ENCOUNTER DISTURBING, STARTLING, discomfoting, angering, humorous, ironic, sarcastic, irreverent, uplifting and insightful words and images related to social justice. Though one may be led to think I'm referring to the media as the source, I'm actually referring to cars and their bumper stickers.

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Once a year as a simple way to teach media literacy, I ask my students to pick a bumper sticker that has justice themes and share it with the class. One student chose the bumper sticker that spelled out the word "coexist" using the symbols of the various world religions. The student explained: "Obviously many of these ways of thinking are controversial and have caused much violence and pain in the world and between themselves. This bumper sticker pleads with various religions and beliefs present in the world to put aside differences and get along for a better way of living. It does not ask for full acceptance of other views, but it asks at least for respect and tolerance. To do this the holders of each of these beliefs do not need to give up their faith or way of life, but must be flexible in the ways they treat others unlike themselves."

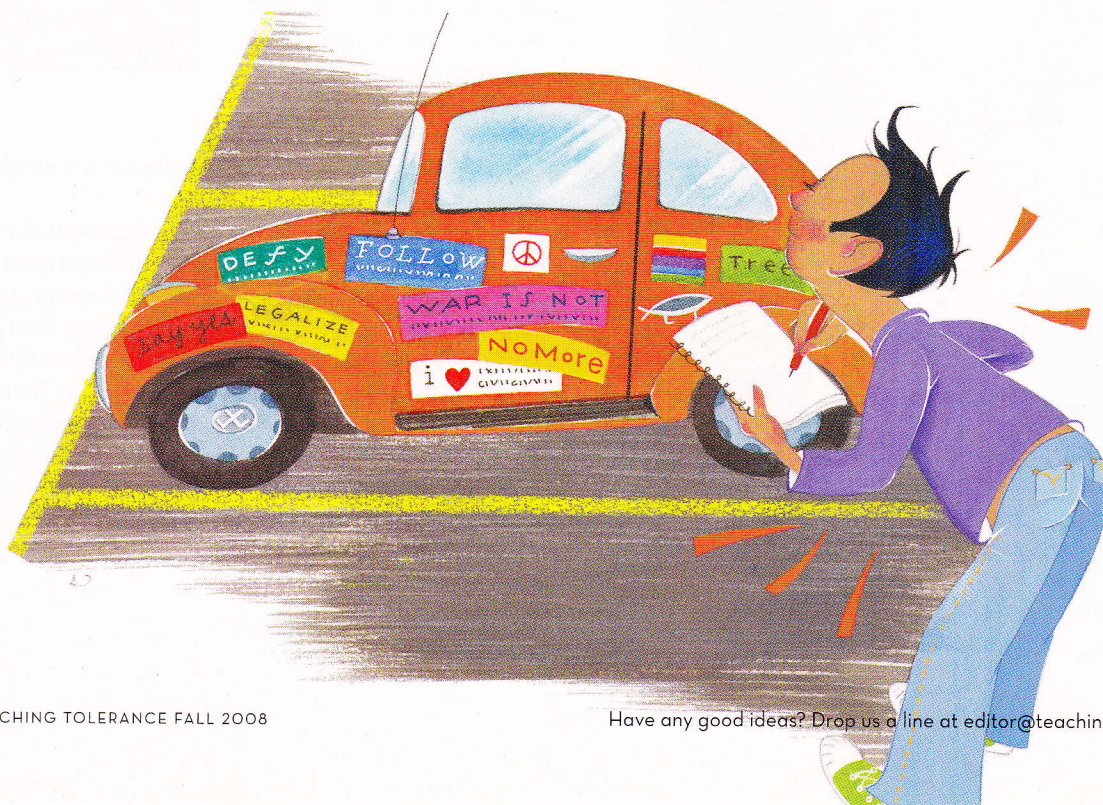
An important question that bumper stickers raise is whether they create dialogue for a culture in dire need of conversation or just allow someone another opportunity to put forth an unchallenged monologue? As one of my students, wrote:

"Bumper stickers are good communicators because they are catchy and capture people's interests. One person may be in agreement with the message and feel a communal bond toward the person in the car in front of him. Another may be insulted. Most bumper stickers that I have seen are more of an attempt at political humor that pokes fun at politicians than real stances on important issues. However, clever ones can impress people and get them thinking about the issue. Effective or not, a bumper sticker is a fun elaboration that can add character to an otherwise lackluster transportation vehicle."

In an America of increasing polarization, it is one thing to be able to get one's own views across. It's an entirely different undertaking to listen to the views of someone else. Bumper stickers, if taken seriously, can take someone beyond their own viewpoints.

Mike Daley
St. Xavier High School
Cincinnati, OH

 **FOR MORE ON MEDIA LITERACY**, order *Teaching Youth Media: A Critical Guide to Literacy, Video Production and Social Change* (\$18.95) by going to www.tcpres.com or calling (800) 575-6566.



CDs: Creating Direction

MY CLASSES HAD BEEN DISCUSSING PREJUDICE IN HISTORY and in literature throughout the year. My goal was to look at the broad implications of different types of prejudice so that we could come to some conclusions about prejudice and its implication to society. But two-thirds of the way through the year, I still felt like my students did not have a grasp on what prejudice is. My students did not seem to be taking lessons from the history and literature and applying them to their lives. They needed a fresh approach.

Since the world of my 8th-grade students is built around images and brief but powerful texts, I started to think about the visual essay — a form in which images are matched with five to seven words. A great example of a visual essay outside of the classroom occurs on CD album covers. The text, in the form of a title, matches an image, which in turn matches the songs, which match the text. All pieces contribute to send the user in the direction the artist intends. I decided that this same concept could be applied to prejudice. What if students had to articulate a “direction” or belief about prejudice through text and images?

My students and I took the word “prejudice” as a starting point. We looked at images that dealt with the issue of prejudice from different directions. We saw pictures of marches, racial profiling, migrant workers and Nazi propaganda. We discussed what was happening in each image and what the image might be saying. We also brainstormed words that would contribute to the meaning of the image. We looked for connections between the images.

Then the students began to design a CD cover. The students thought about what a message about prejudice would say. Some wanted to point out that prejudice was everywhere. Some wanted to say the prejudice was rooted in fear. The messages that the students came up with were dense and powerful. The title, image on the cover, and song selection had to show a unified message.

Students had to think about what their message looked like and sounded like. Along with teaching theme and unity of message, it led to some individual and collective realizations about prejudice.

This activity could fit in with almost any curriculum that



discusses prejudice. It was some of the most productive time spent in class all year because it created a multi-dimensional understanding of a very complicated topic, and I hope it gave my students a foundation for future thought about the nature of prejudice.

Kay Honeyman
Highland Park Middle School
Dallas, TX



HISTORICAL AND MODERN DAY images often contain hidden messages about us, about others and about our world. Go to www.tolerance.org/images_action to find out more.

The Race Card

MY FRESHMAN ENGLISH STUDENTS STRUGGLE TO CONNECT with the reality of legal segregation as an influential and tangible element of our country's historical past. While studying Ernest J. Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying*, for one class period students are thrown into a microcosm of segregation and are forced to endure an identity that is impartially given to them. Students are handed one playing card as they enter the room and instructed to find their seating area according to their suit. In four clearly separated sections of the room, their suit and rules are posted. Every student is instructed to write their suit and card number on a folded piece of paper serving as their identity for the period. Students are addressed by their suit and card number only. The two suits in the front of the room are given preferential rights, such as the option of working in pairs or as a group. The two suits in the back are limited to minimal if any freedoms and will be instructed to work on their own. Other regulations can be manipulated within the confines of one's own classroom rules.

Each suit is given a character. Their objective is to find specific examples in the novel where their character's identity determines the rights they have. For example, the main character Grant is reduced to waiting two and a half hours just to ask Sheriff Guidry's permission to visit an illiterate prisoner named Jefferson on Death Row. Sheriff Guidry's group would be seated in the front and have the most rights in the class, while the group analyzing Jefferson's identity would be in the back. Once settled in groups, this task takes about 30 minutes. The specific instances from the text should be labeled with page numbers for references and then collected. Every character sheet is then copied by the teacher for each member of class.

After these sheets are handed out in the following class period, each group is asked to briefly present the identity of their assigned character and how their classification affected the rights they had in the novel. A discussion follows to process the student's experience.

The objective of these lessons is to help foster a connection between the student and a fictional character through an activity a young learner can feel.

James M. Chesbro

**Fairfield College Preparatory School
Fairfield, CT**



WHY NOT TAKE CHESBRO'S card game one step further by purchasing playing cards with multicultural information on the faces? The set from the International Women's Air & Space Museum celebrates women of air and space (\$10). They can be ordered at www.womensairandspacemuseum.com.

Dinner for Two

AT THE BEGINNING OF EACH TERM, IN JUNIOR- AND senior-level courses, I have my students get to know each other. Every teacher in America does that, right? But what does it really mean to know someone? Students can't learn with one another if they are not first comfortable with one another.

On the first day of class, I ask students to find the person in the room who scares them the most, someone they might have known in grade school, but not anymore, someone they see in the halls, say "Hi" to, but whose last name they do not know, or someone who is a mystery to them. Afterward, I have them sit by one another.


"Swap phone numbers and return to your original seats," I say in a voice that clearly expresses my desire to have this done quickly. They act, but hesitantly, glancing nervously about. Their next assignment is to sit down and write a journal entry including everything they know, or think they know, about that person. What assumptions have they made? What did they decide they knew about this person before ever speaking a word to them?

I then proceed to tell them that their assignment for the coming Monday is to have dinner with this person. The school cafeteria is off limits as they are required to spend, at minimum, one hour in one another's company. Coffee is fine, if you don't

have the cash to eat a meal, but the minimum one-hour time limit isn't negotiable. It can go as long over that hour as you like, but not a minute under. Students are also required to have their waiter snap a photo of them together. When dinner is over and they've parted company, my students' last assignment is to do a post-encounter journal. In it they write about what they experienced, what they talked about and what they learned. A lead question is, "Who is this person really and, reflecting back on your original writing, are they who you thought they were?"

One week after the class begins, we share our journals, photos, memories and laughs. I've never had a student claim that it was a negative experience. They don't all become fast friends with one another, but at the very least the person who intimidated them the most in my class is no longer a threat and is possibly an ally.

Mark Gudgel
Lincoln Southwest High School
Lincoln, NE

 **FOR MORE WAYS** to encourage students to cross social boundaries in their schools, go to www.mixitup.org.

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