

ACTIVITY EXCHANGE



'I Am Special'

I BEGIN MY LESSON BY TELLING STUDENTS THAT WE'RE GOING to have a guessing game with only two hints. They are to guess what subject we're going to be discussing by first listening to two stories. The subject we're going to discuss is "I am unique and special."

The first story is *Fish is Fish*, by Leo Lionni, about two friends, a minnow and tadpole, who believe they are the same until they grow up and minnow becomes a large fish and tadpole becomes a big frog. After frog crawls on land and comes back to tell fish the amazing sights he has seen, fish decides to jump out and see the land for himself. He quickly discovers that there is a reason "frog is frog" and "fish is fish."

Hint #1: Say to students, "Fish is fish" and then name each child in the room using this strategy. For instance, "Olivia is Olivia. Michael is Michael."

The second story, Chisato Tashiro's *Chameleon's Colors*, is about a chameleon who grows weary of blending in because nobody can ever see him. All the other animals long to be able to change like he does, so he helps them to learn this ability. The animals, however, learn that changing their appearance

causes all kinds of new problems.

Hint #2: Ask the students, "What do you think is the message of these two books?"

In each of my 2nd-grade classrooms, there always are four or five students who point out the message of "being yourself." Others say the theme is being good friends, or they describe the use of similar colors in the illustrations of each book.

I always am moved by children's responses to the stories and to the power of being true to yourself.

Kitty Sanderson
Haywood County Schools
Waynesville, N.C.

You can order *Fish is Fish* (\$3.95) by Leo Lionni at Scholastic, www.scholastic.com. Purchase Chisato Tashiro's *Chameleon's Colors* (\$15.95) at www.chroniclebooks.com.

GRADES
PreK-3



TEACHING TOLERANCE RECOMMENDS Couple this activity with a science lesson on tadpoles, frogs and chameleons and their special features.

The Geography of Diversity

TO RAISE GEOGRAPHIC AWARENESS, I ASKED MY 4TH-GRADE STUDENTS TO RESEARCH THEIR ancestry. As students identified various countries of origin, we placed colored stickers with their names on a large map. We displayed the map in the hallway.

Drawing from that, students wrote essays on why the diversity of America remains important.

We discussed what the Native Americans gave us, the gifts our families brought to the country, and what we individually bring to it today. We discussed our commonalities and our differences, coming to realize that we are different, yet the same.

The message displayed on the class project was, "Diversity is a gift from our country to us." Student essays were completed on paper with a special border depicting gift boxes. Each student colored the border differently; two could be somewhat alike, but there had to be a noticeable difference, as there is in each of us.

We placed the diversity essays in the hallway near our map. The display drew the attention of many as they passed by — students, staff and parents. We noticed many people stopping to examine and discuss the map and its message.

Barbara Schlemmer
McKinley Primary Center
South Bend, Ind.

GRADES
3-6



TEACHING TOLERANCE RECOMMENDS National Geographic's *Geography Action!*, an annual K-12 education initiative, provides numerous multi-disciplinary resources for educators and students to help deepen the sense of our global community. To learn more, visit www.nationalgeographic.com/geographyaction.

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.



Anonymous Writing Partners



GRADES
7-9

SIGNS OF BULLYING ARE SOMETIMES DIFFICULT for teachers to catch — someone “accidentally” tripping someone in the hall, someone whispering cruel comments to belittle and embarrass another student. As a 7th-grade English teacher in a predominantly white community, I do see the results of this behavior, students being bullied over being “different” from the accepted norms.

Some argue that this kind of thing isn’t a big deal, that targeted students just need to buck up and not let it bother them. But when a student is subjected to 70 or more of these “little” moments in a single day, it becomes more than any ordinary middle school student can endure. The result often is that the academic performances of these students plummet, along with their sense of self-worth.

That’s where my journal project comes in.

To begin, I assign every one of my 124 students a number and a shape — 11-star, 23-triangle, 43-circle, etc. I then tell the kids that this is their journal identification. As far as

our journals go, the students no longer have a name; all they have is a number and a shape. I then pair the students as anonymous writing partners.

Each student writes on assigned topics, with the journal entry addressed to another 7th-grade student — not to oneself or a teacher. Students must keep their identities secret, not disclosing personal details — attending volleyball practice, singing in the choir, etc. — or names of friends.

Students are intrigued by the activity, knowing their writing partners are real people with real stories and real feelings — including feelings of anger or sadness over being bullied. Through the activity, my students come to realize that people are more than they appear on the outside and that not everyone has to fit into a certain group to be acceptable.

By the end of the year, a lot of the pairs figure out who their partners are. Those who do not already know each other’s identities write to each other and introduce themselves. By the end, cliques fade, and students build bridges with individuals they once may have mistreated or harassed.

Hollie Noah
Brookville Middle School
Brookville, Ind.

✱ TEACHING TOLERANCE RECOMMENDS There are many fine pen-pal programs out there. One we recommend is The Student Letter Exchange (www.pen-pal.com), which for more than 60 years has matched students, ages 9-18, across the U.S. and around the world.

What do your students have to say?

Teaching Tolerance is issuing an open call for **essays and poetry** by student writers. We're looking for submissions that delve deep into the divides of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, language and other lines of difference.

GUIDELINES

Submissions should be under 750 words. Words should be chosen wisely. Slurs and profanity aren't necessary in most stories.

>> **SUBMIT ONLINE** <<

www.tolerance.org/teens/win.jsp

>> **OR MAIL TO** <<

Teaching Tolerance
Student Essays and Poetry
400 Washington Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36104

STUDENT AUTHORS WILL BE COMPENSATED FOR PUBLISHED WORK.

Submissions from all age groups are welcomed. Currently, Teaching Tolerance can only review English- and Spanish-language submissions.

Readers' Theater

AS A JUNIOR HIGH COUNSELOR WITH A background in theater, I always am searching for new ways to incorporate performance-related activities into my curriculum. Last year, after having read Dr. Seuss' *Green Eggs and Ham* to an 8th-grade class, I decided to form a readers' theater group. My goal was twofold. I wanted to instill a love of literature in my junior high students, and I wanted to

use my readers' theater group as a teaching tool for elementary students.

As a counselor, I see students in our building bullying other students without realizing what they are doing — how much their words or actions hurt other students. It became the goal of my readers' theater group to address that problem. Our objectives were to catch this behavior early, teaching elementary students what it means to be a bully and how to avoid being one.

My 12 readers' theater students met before school once a week to rehearse. Once we mastered our material, we visited local elementary schools and performed for the students. Before each 20-minute performance, the junior high students talk to the elementary students about bullying. A short question-and-answer session is used to introduce the topic. We have yet to experience a group that didn't have stories of witnessing or being involved in bullying. Following the performance, we ask the students to take a pledge not to be a bully. Then we present them with certificates.

While our intention was to educate elementary students, we have discovered that students within the junior high group also have rethought their ideas about what it means to be a bully.
Judy Schallhorn
Byng Junior High School
Ada, Okla.

EXCERPTS FROM "YOU AND ME," A READERS' THEATER PLAY

by Judy Schallhorn

SPEAKER 1 My eyes are green.

SPEAKER 2 My eyes are blue.

SPEAKER 1 I'm six foot one.

SPEAKER 2 I'm four foot two.

SPEAKER 1 My hair is blond.

SPEAKER 2 My hair is black.

SPEAKER 1 I'm a good singer.

SPEAKER 2 I can dance great.

SPEAKER 1 I'm always early.

SPEAKER 2 I'm always late.

SPEAKER 1 I like to skate.

SPEAKER 2 (Turning toward speaker 1)
Hey so do I!

SPEAKER 1 I like chocolate ice cream.

BOTH On blueberry pie!
(High five each other)

ALL Do you hear what's happened?

SPEAKER 3 Wait! Can this be?

SPEAKER 4 You two who are different
Might suddenly see

SPEAKER 5 That's sometimes it's nice
To be you and be me.

SPEAKER 6 We all can be different
And still can be friends.

SPEAKER 7 And peace in this big world,
Will always depend

ALL On people like us seeing others as
good. On people like us being kind
when we should.

GRADES
7-9



TEACHING TOLERANCE RECOMMENDS *Acting Cool: Using Reader's Theater to Teach Language Arts and Social Studies in Your Classroom* (\$15.95), by Chris Gustafson, gives teachers many ways to use readers' theater in all content areas. Order at www.linworth.com.

A Timeline for Change

“It is that long-term change that I think we must see if we are not to lose hope.”

— HOWARD ZINN



IN AN EFFORT TO PROMOTE AN UNDERSTANDING OF ZINN’S quote, I assign a positive-negative timeline as a culminating activity in my United States History or Social Psychology classes. The theme of the timeline is a history of tolerance and intolerance in the United States.

I ask students to narrow their focus to one group, otherwise the project could be potentially overwhelming. For example, students may focus their research on the poor, racial or ethnic groups, religious groups or women.

Using notes and other resources such as books, videos and the Internet, students brainstorm a list of events to include in their timelines. Students then rank their timeline events according to their perceived historical significance. The most significant positive ranking would be a +5, and the most significant negative ranking would be a -5. For example,

if a student chooses to focus on African Americans, she may include the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., ranking it as a -5.

These positive and negative events rise and fall above a horizontal line, which represents zero.

I generally require at least 30 events to be included in the timeline, with a relatively even distribution between positive and negative. On the back of the timeline, students create a key that includes all 30 numbered items, with brief explanations of each.

Timelines are made of various materials — graph paper, construction paper or tag board, for example. Some students complete the entire project on the computer. I also encourage students to include visuals in their timeline.

When the timelines are complete, I display them on walls throughout the high school.

My primary objective in assigning this project is to foster a spirit of activism within students. I would hope that students, equipped with knowledge and understanding, would take what they learned in the classroom, and move beyond it in an effort to make the world a better place — just as some of the figures on their timelines did.

Lea Hansen-George
Richland Center High School
Soldiers Grove, Wis.

TEACHING TOLERANCE RECOMMENDS A useful resource for this project is Howard Zinn’s *You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train* (\$16). It can be ordered at www.beacon.org.



Defining Multicultural Terminology

AS A VETERAN TEACHER OF ENGLISH, LITERATURE AND history, I have employed many different lessons to encourage my students to seek understanding of other cultures. To this end, I designed an introductory lesson that focuses on identifying, defining and applying multicultural terms. I have discovered over the years that students think they know what a word means, only to discover their application of it might be flawed.

To begin, I make up a list of multicultural terms. The students are broken into groups of four to six. Each group is given the list of terms and asked to use teamwork to define the words. This activity typically takes about 30 minutes. I then reconvene the class while they are still in groups, and we share our definitions and come to a consensus for each definition. This actively involves everyone in the process.

After we have agreed on the definitions, students are given situations that involve one or more of the terms — a situation that illustrates

both prejudice and xenophobia, for example, compared with another that illustrates discrimination. These are real-life situations, and students love to “solve” the answer for each one. This typically takes up to 20 minutes. We then reconvene as a class and go over each situation to reach a consensus.

At this point, the students begin to feel more confident in their understanding and application of these terms. I then send them home to search out examples in the newspaper, television or online. The students are required to find at least two articles and defend their choice, in writing, of the terms they applied.

To fully assess the students’ understanding of these terms, I give them a quick quiz in which they must match the terms to the definitions that we all agreed upon.

Susan C. Hunt
Hampton Public School District
Hampton, N.J.

GRADES
9-12

TERMS USED:

- Bias
- Discrimination
- Stereotype
- Prejudice
- Ethnocentrism
- Nationality
- Race
- Diversity
- Ethnicity
- Xenophobia
- Culture



TEACHING TOLERANCE RECOMMENDS *The Power of Words* curriculum, free online at www.teachingtolerance.org/web, explores words used in the United States to label ethnic groups, women and sexual minorities.