

# Transforming Communities of Learners

## Summary

This lesson plan is designed to be used with two groups of sixth graders, from separate schools. Ideally, one school has a small minority population of students, and the second school has a larger minority population of students.

## Time Frame

5 class periods of 60 minutes each

## Group Size

Small Groups

## Life Skills

Thinking & Reasoning, Communication, Character, Social & Civic Responsibility, Systems Thinking

## Materials

### Activity One

- Missing Stories: An Oral History of Ethnic and Minority Groups in Utah

### Activity Two

Clear cellophane masks

### Activity Three

Orange (gym) cones

### Activity Four

Clear plastic cups

8 Water buckets (large)

### Activity Five

small box or shoe box

mirror

## Background for Teachers

Teachers should have knowledge of methods of conflict resolution, especially at the grade school/middle school level. Teachers should be aware of the complex nature of discrimination and prejudice and how interactions and exposure to various groups/individuals may help address the causes and perpetuation of discrimination.

## Student Prior Knowledge

none

## Intended Learning Outcomes

Students will see how negative judgments and feelings of ourselves and others affect how we treat each other as human beings.

Students will gain an increased knowledge of what discrimination is and how it has affected communities throughout the past and in the present.

Students will gain strategies to solve disagreements and conflicts in a peaceful way.

Students will develop a more evolved understanding and empathy for others with different ideas, values, and life experiences.

Students will develop a more developed understanding of themselves and empathy for others.

## Instructional Procedures

### Prior to Activity Day

Students from both schools will be transported to a "neutral" location which has a variety of facilities that will enhance students interactions (swimming pool, gymnasium, and climbing wall). These areas will allow for a variety of interactive lessons.

Before the activities begin both groups of students will meet in a large group. Teachers should review the objectives for the day with the group and answer any questions that come up.

### Activity One

Students are divided into eight groups (mixing students from both schools into the groups). Groups will first be given the terms "discrimination" and "racism" and asked to define each term. Discuss the answers as one group (after each group has had time to discuss their thoughts).

Each group is given one story from Missing Stories and asked to read the story silently. The group will discuss the story and answer the following questions:

When did the narrator experience discrimination?

When did the narrator experience prejudice?

What historical struggles did the narrator experience? How are these similar and different than other groups you might know?

Discuss the findings from each group as a class. Each group should present their findings and report on the details of their specific story.

### Activity Two

Students should individually brainstorm and write down all the negative thoughts they have about other students.

Students should individually brainstorm all the negative thoughts they have about themselves.

Students will write their negative thoughts about themselves on a clear plastic cellophane mask (or piece of paper). Students will walk around the room and introduce themselves to each other (ex. hello, I am stupid; hello, I hate my body).

Students brainstorm positive statements that counter the negative statements just brainstormed and shared.

Students write new positive statements onto a different mask and introduce themselves as their new identity.

Discuss with the group how they react to themselves and others when they think and/or hear negative thoughts. Also discuss how the introduction of positive thoughts changed their perspectives of themselves and others.

### Activity Three

Prior to activity: Place cones around the room.

Divide the group into two teams. One of the teams will be "builders" and the other "busters."

The busters will run around the room knocking down the cones while the builders must follow behind putting the cones back up. Play 5 minute rounds. When the time has expired, a winner will be declared. Switch the teams and play again.

At the conclusion of the game (4 rounds) discuss with the class how they felt in each role (builders or busters). Try to relate the experience of "building" and "busting" to their everyday lives. How do they either build each other and themselves up or tear them down. Focus on the positive aspects of building up instead of tearing down.

### Activity Four

Divide students into four equal groups. Give each student a clear plastic cup. Each cup will be the same except that it may have a hole or holes punched in the bottom. Some cups will have a black ring indicating the level to fill the cup and some cups will have none.

Students will fill their cups to the top or to the fill-line on their cup and will run their water to the other side of the room (gym) and dump their water in a large bucket.

Each student will fill their cup once and run it to the other side. Then team members should switch cups and play again, so that each student can feel what it is like to have a hole in the cup or a fill line drawn on their cup, preventing them from filling it to the top.

Once the game is played twice a winning group is declared.

Discuss with the group how difficult it was to keep water in their cups (especially cups with holes) and how they felt this game related to their own lives/experiences. What did it feel like when they could only fill their cup halfway? What did it feel like to have a hole in the bottom of the cup? How do they relate this game to their own life experiences?

Ask the students to think about how this game relates to the idea of loving yourself and others. This game shows that love from others (just like water in a cup) can drain out or run-off if you do not love yourself.

As a class, brainstorm ways that each individual student can learn to love themselves more. Discuss how doing this will help eliminate pain and unhappiness in life.

#### Activity Five

Brainstorm (individually) what it means to love and care for someone and the ways you do that each day.

Tell the students that they are now going to meet the love of their life. One by one have each student come up and look into a box (with a mirror at the bottom). Have each student silently return to their seat and sit quietly until each student has had a turn.

Discuss with the students how they felt when they saw themselves in the mirror. Discuss how each student can show themselves love and caring, even if they do not receive it from those around them. Discuss how they can ensure that they love and care for the people around them. Discuss how each of the activities in this day has provided them ways to love and care for themselves and those around them.

A follow up discussions should happen once a month at each individual school. Students should be prompted to talk about issues that have been ongoing at their school or home. Take time to allow all students to share and to give their classmates feedback.

#### Extensions

This lesson is designed to be completed in one day with students from two different schools. If it is not possible to do this lesson plan with two schools of students, it can work as a set of activities for one class. If it is not possible to do this lesson in one day, it can be divided into five days of activities.

#### Bibliography

Kelen, L.G, & Stone, E.H. (2000). Missing Stories: An Oral History of Ethnic Minority Groups in Utah. Utah State University Press. Logan, UT.

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