



Optimistic Thinking

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Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility's evidence-validated programs engage young people in learning essential social and emotional skills and help educators build productive and respectful schools. The 4Rs Program combines superior children's books with engaging SEL activities that explore community, feelings, relationships, conflict, and problem-solving, adding depth to literacy instruction.

Envisioning a Respectful School Community

By: The 4Rs



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Note to the teacher:

This is Lesson 4 from The 4Rs™ [Reading, Writing, Respect & Resolution] *Teaching Guide for Middle School*, Unit 1, Building Community – Developing a Vision. Like all 4Rs Applied Learning lessons, this one follows the following structure: Gathering / Check agenda / Review community agreements / one or 2 skill-building activities / Evaluation / Closing.

Time: 45 minutes

Materials: Students will use art materials to create “quilt” panels with images of respect; full list below

Materials

- Charted agenda
- “Dreams” by Langston Hughes (on chart paper)
- Chart paper for the “Respect is _____” exercise (see below)
- Markers and masking tape
- Chart paper and markers for students to use in making their quilt panels (see below)
- Art materials such as magazines, scissors, pipe cleaners, yarn, cotton balls, glue, if possible.

(8) Gathering: “Dreams” by Langston Hughes

Explain that the topic for today is vision. We’re going to envision the way we’d like our classroom and school to be – productive, based on respect, free from bullying. A vision is important, even if at times it may seem like “pie in the sky.” A vision gives a goal to aim for. Sometimes people refer to visions as dreams. Ask if the students are familiar with Langston Hughes’ poem “Dreams.” Referring to the chart with the poem written on it, read the poem to them or ask a student to do so.



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Dreams by Langston Hughes

Hold fast to dreams
 For when dreams die
 Life is a broken-winged bird
 That cannot fly
 Hold fast to dreams
 For when dreams go
 Life is a barren field
 Frozen with snow.

Now lead the entire class in reading the poem together. You might select a student to lead the class in reading the poem through a second time.

Ask, what kind of dreams is the poet referring to? The kind of dreams we have when we sleep, or a different kind of dreams? What would he mean by “Hold fast to dreams”?

Explain that Langston Hughes was an American poet, novelist, playwright, short story writer, and columnist. He was born in 1902 in Missouri and died in 1967 in New York City.

(I) Check agenda

(I) Review community agreements

(10) Respect is _____.

Explain that poems often include words that bring images into our minds. Poets often use words that suggest pictures, concrete things we have seen



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or can imagine. Referring to your chart of the poem “Dreams” by Langston Hughes, ask the students to find the images the poet uses.

Say that now you’re going to ask the students to be poets. They’ve been exploring “respect” in a variety of ways. Today you want them to think of images that express respect in some way.

At the top of a piece of chart paper, write “Respect is _____.” Ask the students to close their eyes and think of an image that represents respect in some way. Ask them to open their eyes and give you a “thumbs-up” when they have an image in mind. When most of the students are ready, say “Respect is. . .” and call on a student whose thumb is up to complete the sentence with the word or words that express the image. Record the students’ image words on the chart.

Encourage your students to come up with their own fresh ideas. But if no one is able to come up with an image, prime the pump by giving them an idea or two, such as the following:

- the name of someone the student respects
- two people giving each other a high five
- a handshake
- a garden with a variety of beautiful flowers
- a person smiling

(20) Creating a “Respect” Quilt

Ask the students if they know what a quilt is. Explain or elicit that a quilt is a padded cover for a bed. Have any of the students seen a quilt? Quilts are often made up of patches stitched together and can be beautiful works of art.



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Today the students will design a quilt on the theme of respect. Each student will use construction paper, markers, and possibly other art materials to make a patch containing words or images about respect. Once the patches are completed, we'll put them on the bulletin board to make a "respect quilt." With all the patches displayed together, the quilt will express our collective vision or dream for our classroom and school. Students can draw an image that appeals to them from the previous exercise, draw a different image, or make something appealing with the letters of the word respect or other related words. When finished, collect the quilt "patches" and set a time for some students to arrange them on the bulletin board.

(1) Evaluation and Closing

Ask how today's activity went with a show of thumbs up / thumbs down. Close by giving yourselves a round of applause.

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