



Sticking Together: Sharing Our Stories, Our Differences, and Our Similarities

Description

While it is vitally important to recognize and honor the differences within your classroom, it is just as important to bring your diverse group of students together as a community. As all teachers know, developing a healthy sense of community in which all students are respected and even like one another is crucial to having a successful learning community. Sometimes schools, and society in general, develop that sense of community by denying differences within the group or by finding a “common enemy”—think about how united your school is when preparing for a big game against your rival school!

The goal of this lesson is to bring together students around their stories of differences *and* similarities. The most authentic community is one in which people can find common ground while still retaining what is distinct about themselves.

This lesson concludes our 2006-2007 Racebridges for Schools series (www.racebridges.net/schools) but can be taught on its own. In fact, this activity can also be a very effective ice-breaker and/or team builder; however, choose the less personal story prompts if you are using this activity with students who don't know one another very well or who don't have well-established relationships. A prompt is simply a way to encourage remembering and to help stories flow.

Purpose

- To create a sense of community in the classroom
- To use storytelling as a way for students to learn about one another's differences
- To use storytelling as a way for students to discover their similarities

Outcomes

By the end of this lesson, each student will

- Tell at least one of his or her own stories
- Listen to the stories of some classmates
- Identify the similarities and differences among a group of students
- Help create an action plan for the classroom

Materials

- Teacher Instructions
- Handout #1: Storytelling Instructions for Students

Lesson Plan

Outline of Activities

1. Introduction (10 minutes)
2. Storytelling in Groups (15 minutes)
3. Sharing Stories with the Class (5-10 minutes)
4. Class Action Plan (5-10 minutes)



Teacher Instructions

1. Introduction

If you used the other lesson plans in this series, begin here:

We've taken time this year to explore what we have in common and how we differ, to examine times we have felt included and excluded, and to learn about racism and how to be allies to people who are different from ourselves. During our first diversity activity, we learned about our differences and similarities by playing "Claim It!" Today, I'd like for us to take the time to build community by going in-depth with one another. During "Claim It!" we watched as people moved from one side of the room to the other in answer to the questions being posed. Now, we're going to listen to one another's stories so that we can learn the "how" and the "why" behind others' identities. [Continue below.]

If you are using this lesson on its own, begin here:

Today, I would like for us to focus on creating an even stronger sense of community than we have right now. What are some ways to build community?

Take answers, such as "team work" "working together on a project," "sharing information about ourselves," working towards the same goal," etc.

Yes, those are some great ways to build community! Do we all have to be the same in order to create a community together? Why or why not? [Take a few responses.] What's the basis of real community? [Take answers, such as "trust," "respect," "liking one another," etc.] Yes! And we can have those things, even if we differ from one another. In fact, I think a real community honors differences while also seeking common ground among its members. [Continue Below.]

Continued from Above:

You all are probably thinking that we already have a pretty strong community, and I agree, but there is always room to improve! What are some of the advantages of making our community stronger in this classroom and in the school as a whole? [Take answers, such as "we feel better," "we'll work together better," "we'll want to be here," "we'll learn how to work with people who are both like us and different from us," "this will help us create communities in the future, at college and in the workplace," etc.]

Great! So, let's get going! You're going to tell one another a couple of brief stories in your group, then you'll choose one story from your group to share with the classroom. After that, we'll talk about what we learned and come up with a list of action ideas for how our school can create a stronger community. If our list is really good, it will get posted on the web site Racebridges for Schools (www.racebridges.net/schools), which focuses on helping schools, teachers, and students become bridgebuilders among all kinds of people.



I'm going to place you into small groups and give you a list of storytelling prompts. A prompt is meant to get you thinking and talking. You'll begin with each person choosing a "warm-up" prompt and then you will each answer the longer prompt. Please choose a facilitator, a timekeeper, and a recorder for this activity. When you finish, choose one of the longer stories from your group that you would be willing to share with the class. If you don't want to tell your own story in front of the class, you can ask someone else from the group to do it.

2. Storytelling in Groups

Create groups of 3-4 students and pass out Hand Out #1: Storytelling Instructions. Circulate while students are telling stories to help keep them on track. Sit down and listen to a couple of the stories. Be sure to stop groups after 15 minutes so that you have time to hear some of the stories in the large group.

3. Sharing Stories with the Class

Okay! Great, wrap up your storytelling and decide which story to share with the class! Remember, someone other than the original storyteller can tell it this time. Who wants to go first?

Choose someone to tell a story. When the story is finished, ask the class what they learned from that story. Take all reasonable responses. Listen to as many stories as time allows.

Great! What was it like sharing stories with one another? What were the effects?

Take all reasonable responses. Look for answers like "we got to know one another better," "we found we had something in common," "I feel closer to the people in my group," etc.

4. Class Action Plan

So, now we've told some stories and listened to some stories, mostly about being involved in community. What did the stories have in common? What did you learn about community, both from the stories themselves and from the process of sharing stories?

Take all reasonable responses. You may want to have a student record the answers on the chalkboard for all to see.

Now, given what we learned today, can we come up with a list of recommendations for other classrooms that want to increase their sense of community? Once we come up with a list, I'll submit it to the Racebridges website, and our ideas will become a resource for other schools.

Have students brainstorm their ideas and list them on the board.



Great! I hope you all feel closer after today's activities. I'll send your ideas in and let you know when they get posted!

Notes to Teachers:

The bolded text can be read out aloud and followed word for word; however, you may want to read over the material a few times so that you are comfortable putting these ideas into your own words, in the way in which you normally talk to your students.

Why Stories and Storytelling Matters:

"Storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it." Hannah Arendt

"There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories." Ursula Le Guin

"The very act of storytelling, of arranging memory and invention according to the structure of narrative is, by definition, holy. . . . Telling our stories is what saves us. The story is enough." James Carroll

*Please share the ideas for creating strong classroom communities with us. We'll post your ideas on our website so that we create a resource for others to use. As a "thank you" for participating, once you submit your ideas to you'll receive the free resource **10 WAYS TO EDUCATE FOR ANTI-RACISM AND TO CELEBRATE DIVERSITY: IDEAS FOR TEACHERS!***

Go to www.racebridges.net/schools to submit your ideas to our web site. You will receive **10 WAYS TO EDUCATE FOR ANTI-RACISM AND TO CELEBRATE DIVERSITY: IDEAS FOR TEACHERS** right away.

We hope to post your ideas on our website. Check back for updates!





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Handout #1: Storytelling Instructions for Students

Directions: Once you are in your group, choose a facilitator, a timekeeper, and a recorder. The facilitator helps the group follow the directions, the timekeeper keeps the group moving, and the recorder jots down notes about each person's story. There are two rounds of storytelling. During the first round, take one minute to respond to one of the warm-up prompts; during the second round, tell a story in response to one of the story prompts. When you are finished, choose one story to share with the class.

Warm-up Prompts

Read the following prompts out loud; choose one that everyone in the group will answer. Each person should take no longer than one minute to respond to that prompt.

1. Briefly describe the happiest moment you remember from your childhood.
2. Briefly describe an embarrassing moment from grade school.
3. Briefly describe what you find most important in life.

Storytelling Prompts

Read the following prompts out loud; each person may choose his or her own prompt. Each person should take 3-4 minutes to tell his or her story.

1. Tell about a time when you made a sacrifice for a community to which you belong. (The community could be a team, your family, your group of friends, a club activity, your place of worship, etc.)
2. Tell about a time when someone surprised you by going out of his or her way to help you.
3. Tell about a time when something you thought was going to be awful turned out to be great.
4. Tell about a time when you felt most included in a group.

Recorder: Fill in the following table with a brief description of each person's story.

Storyteller	Story Details

Choose one of the stories from your group to share with the class and someone to tell the story.

