A WELCOMING CLASSROOM

Suggested Grade Level: K-2

Length of Time: Two 35-minute sessions or one one-hour session.

Goal

- To create a more welcoming classroom.
- To help students understand what makes them and other children feel welcome or unwelcome in school.

Objectives

- Students will listen to the story *The New Girl…and Me*, and talk about feelings.
- Students will apply that discussion to their own experiences.
- Students will be able to name examples of what makes them feel welcome or unwelcome in school.

Academic Standards

- Reading: Ask and answer questions about key details, events or information in a text.
- Writing: Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose opinions.
- Social Studies: Provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship.

Educators' Notes

This lesson is designed not only to look at what makes students feel welcome or not but also to help students understand their feelings and how these feelings connect to hurtful teasing, name-calling and exclusion.

Materials

Chart paper, markets for charts, drawing paper, markers or crayons for drawing, pencils, and the handout "I can help other feel welcome by…"

Required Book

The New Girl…and Me, Jacqui Robbins

During discussion make sure you include welcoming families with two moms or two dads, boys or girls who wear gender different clothing (ex: boys who wear pink or have pig tails, girls who wear "boy" clothing). The classroom should be a place where you feel welcome to be the person you feel on the

inside. For additional resources see handouts: Teasing or Bullying? What Do You Say to "That's so gay", and Take a Stand, Lend a Hand.

Activity 1

- Talk with your students about what the words *welcome* and *unwelcome* mean. You may choose to ask the students what they think *welcome* and *unwelcome* mean, or you may give the students a definition of the words.

  Welcome: When you feel good/comfortable about where you are and the people you are with.

  Unwelcome: When you do not feel good/comfortable about where you are or the people you are with.

- The teacher in the book The New Girl…and Me uses the phrase, "Make her feel at home." You may want to say that the phrase "Make her feel at home" means the same thing as "Make her feel welcome."

- Read the book *The New Girl…and Me*.

- After reading the book initiate a discussion by asking your students:
  - Has anyone ever seen an iguana? What did it look like? What did it eat?
  - What did D.L. do or way that made Shakeeta feel unwelcome or "not at home"?
  - When D.J. told Shakeeta that she looked like an iguana, what did other people in the class do?
  - How do you think Shakeeta felt when children in her class laughed at D.J.'s comment?
  - What did Mia do that helped Shakeeta feel welcome?
  - How do you think Mia felt after she talked to Shakeeta?

- Ask the students to give examples of when they feel unwelcome. Prompt them to include in their examples things that make them feel unwelcome at school. Prompt them to include name-calling and hurtful teasing if they do not bring it up. Record their responses on a chart entitled "I Feel Unwelcome When…"

- Then, look at this chart, review/read some of the responses, and ask your students, "What does it feel like when you feel unwelcome?" You can prompt them to think more about how it feels by using some of the examples that are on the chart. For example, you can say, "How does it feel when someone calls you a name?"

- Next, ask the students to give examples of when they feel welcome. Prompt them to include what other students, teachers and administrators can do that helps them feel welcome. Record their responses on a chart entitled "I Feel Welcome When…"

- Then, look at this chart, review/read some of the responses and ask your students, "What does it feel like when you feel welcome?"

Activity 2

- Have students draw a welcoming picture and write using the writing prompt: "I can help others feel welcome by…"
- Display the pictures around the room or in the hall near your classroom.

Modifications

- If needed, arrange to take dictation from individual students.
- Read Chrysanthemum by Kevin Henkes, *Oliver Button Is a Sissy"* by Tomie dePaola or *The Sissy Duckling* by Harvey Fierstein.

Extensions

- *Community-Building Activity:* Brainstorm with your students what could make their classroom and the school feel more welcoming. From this list, have the students pick an action that they could take. Make a plan and carry it out.
- *Welcoming Chart:* Label a piece of chart paper "Our Welcoming Classroom" and post it on the wall. When you notice students doing something to make a more welcoming classroom, add their names and what they did to the chart.

Assessment and Evaluation

- Can students list examples of feeling welcome and unwelcome?
- Can students identify/list examples of what makes other children feel welcome and unwelcome?

Suggested Books for Students

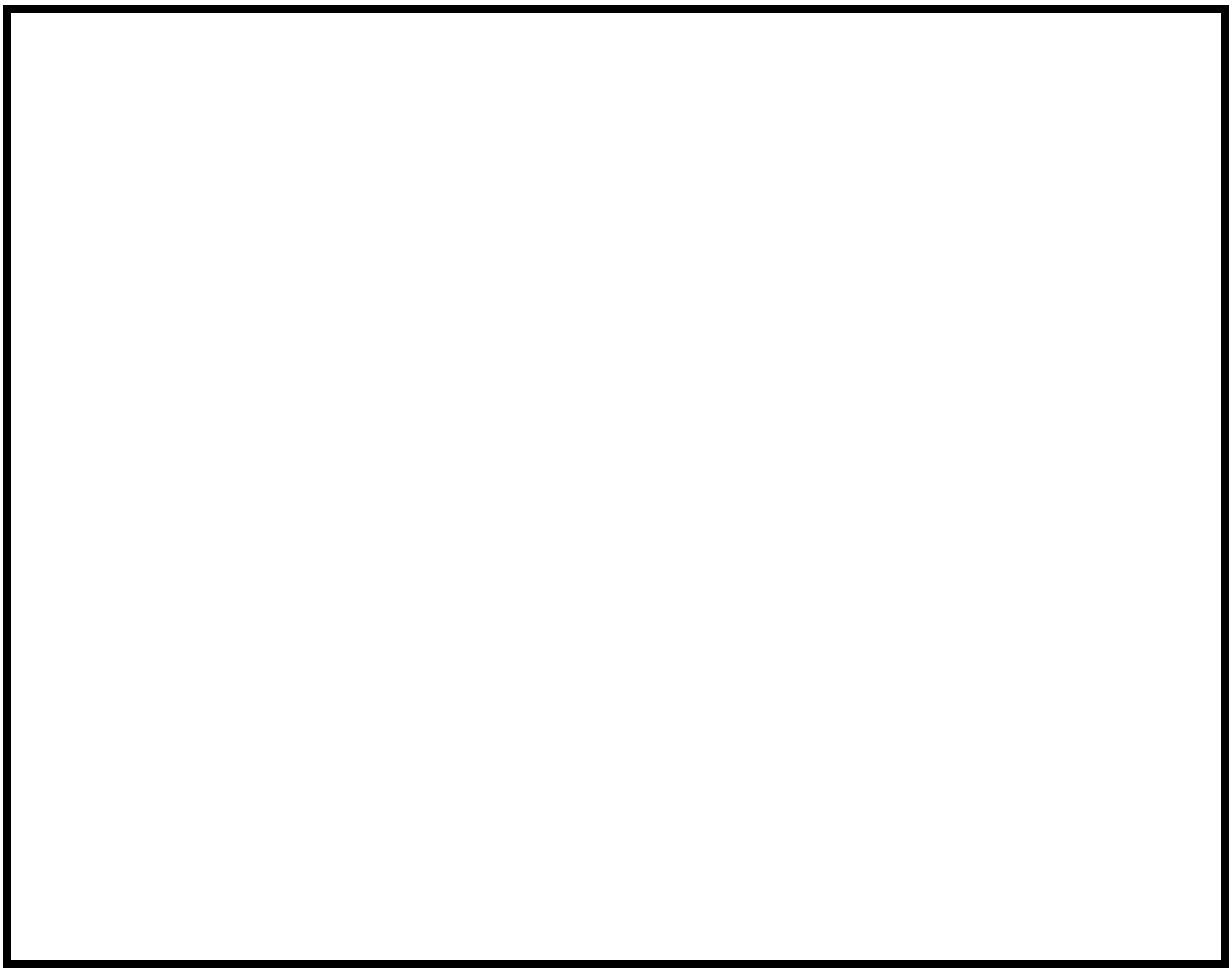
Chrysanthemum, Kevin Henkes
Crow Boy¸ Taro Yashima
Oliver Button Is a Sissy, Tomie dePaola
One, Katherine Otoshi
Say Something, Peggy Moss

Handouts from Welcoming Schools

- Teasing or Bullying?
- Think Before You Act
- Take a Stand and Lend a Hand
- What Do You Say to "That's So Gay!"

Additional Resources from Welcoming Schools

- Creating Welcoming Schools: Getting Started
- What You Can Do As an Educator to Create a Welcoming Elementary School
- Family Education and Community Building Forums
- Connecting with Colleagues
- Bibliography for Elementary Age Children on Hurtful Teasing, Name-Calling and Bullying:
  - Our Favorites (A one page listing) or the Annotated Bibliography
- Books for Educators and Adults:
  - Our Favorites (A one page listing) or the Annotated Bibliography
- Look at Research on Prejudice and Stereotypes
- Gender Identity and Stereotypes: Impact on Children
- Resources on Bullying
- Creating Community: Social and Emotional Learning Resources



I can help others feel welcome by

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