



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2014 Volume II: Exploring Community through Ethnographic Nonfiction, Fiction, and Film

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## **The Power of One: Exploring the Vital Role that the Individual Plays in a Community**

Curriculum Unit 14.02.02  
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### **Introduction**

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In American society today there is arguably too much emphasis placed on the rights of the individual. This pull of individualism has undoubtedly exacted a toll on the larger community—its cohesiveness, ability to work toward common goals and develop a shared vision. It is a complex issue, of course, and terminology is important. There is a difference, for example, between individuality and individualism. John Horvat II, a scholar and educator who has done considerable research on the subject of the socio-economic crisis in the United States, was interviewed on May 29, 2013 by a reporter from the Idaho Senior Independent and the ensuing discussion was entitled "Individuality vs. Individualism: Why the Differences Are Not Subtle." During this interview Horvat II maintains that individuality has a more positive connotation because it involves developing one's personality and abilities so that one can become a responsible contributing member of the community. He contrasts this concept with individualism in which a person only looks out for his/her own self-interest and is not interested in the common good nor does he/she feel any responsibility to the larger group.

From this perspective, we could say that the purpose of a community is to enable the individual and the purpose of the individual is to improve his/her community. As a first-grade teacher I try to help my young students realize their individual potential at the same time that I encourage them to develop a spirit of team-cooperation. In order for a classroom community to thrive, its members must agree to work together in both small groups and large so that an environment is created where everyone can learn.

For a community to develop and grow into a well-functioning unit, its members need to share a vision of it that they agree to work toward. I have a vision for my classroom of learners. Our classroom community would be a safe, happy place for children to learn and play together, a place where all individuals are encouraged to learn at their own pace. Together we would revel in our successes and encourage each other not to give up in his/her struggles. Each member would be recognized for his/her uniqueness and could contribute their talents to make the group stronger.

The primary goal of my unit is to help my students examine the valuable contributions of the individual to a community and to understand how the community can be strengthened and enriched by the actions of its individual members. I will accomplish this goal by using select children's literature which is accompanied by a

variety of reading, writing and art extension activities. I have found a number of picture-books that celebrate the value of individuality and of being "true to oneself" while also demonstrating the vital role that the individual plays in improving his/her community. My selection of books has been very deliberate as I seek to honor not only the gregarious individual with his/her highly persuasive ways of uniting a group but also the quiet introvert whose participation in and influence on a community more subtly serves to make it a better, richer one.

When we take a closer look at the story plots we will see that the main characters are so often ridiculed for their inability to conform and are initially excluded from the larger group or are forced to actually leave. Children can easily identify with these situations, recalling times when classmates have made fun of them or have excluded them from the larger group. What is so inspiring in these stories is the way that the main characters rise to the occasion, show empathy for their community members and employ their unique gifts to help them overcome danger or fragmentation or dissolution. They are the ones who have the power, the vision and the ability to think independently that pull the group together to become a stronger, well-functioning unit.

In examining the character traits of the main characters, as seen through their thoughts, words and actions, we will be able to see some similarities (empathy, self-reliance, a healthy stubbornness, strong sense of self, sense of humor) that govern their ability to confront challenges. Their contributions help the larger community realize their common interest and become more cohesive and tolerant of differences. A very positive result of their interactions with others is their ability to encourage other members to take risks and embark on self-realization ventures of their own.

I am a first-grade teacher at Davis Street Arts & Academics Interdistrict Magnet School. The self-contained class of 25 students in which I teach this unit are a heterogeneous group with varying abilities within the 6-to-7-year-old age range. Although I have designed this unit with them in mind, I am confident that it could easily be adapted for use by teachers in other primary and intermediate grades as well.

This curriculum unit is interdisciplinary in scope, incorporating reading, writing and art. My students work in both small- and large-group settings on the activities included in it. The unit lessons are taught four times a week for a period of 40 minutes over a 2-month period.

My curriculum unit is divided into three main sections:

Section 1: What is Community?

Section 2: Individuals Make Up a Community

Section 3: The Power of One

Through this unit I hope to create a stronger community of learners in my own classroom, a community that appreciates the individual gifts of its members, reflects on its actions and learns from its mistakes and works together to problem-solve challenges. Although the use of children's literature is my primary vehicle, I have also included some of the community-building activities created by proponents of The Responsive Classroom, a research- and evidence-based approach to elementary education that leads to greater teacher effectiveness, higher student achievement, and improved school climate. By using these practices a teacher can create a caring, positive community and expand students' learning potential.

## Content Objectives

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To compare and contrast two communities that we are a part of: family and classroom

To determine the author's message in a literature story

To become familiar with the terms community, diversity and tolerance

To participate in the classroom community to problem solve issues and make it stronger

To participate in team-building activities such as Morning Meeting with one's classmates to get to know each other better and make the group stronger

## Teaching Strategies

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To compare and contrast main characters and story plots in a number of literature stories by using a matrix

To identify a person's character traits by looking at their words and actions by using a T-chart

To respond to a story character's success in overcoming obstacles by creating a greeting card for him or her

To understand a character's point of view by participating in a newspaper interview role-play

To demonstrate your understanding of a character's experiences within a story by writing a letter to him or her

To sit with a buddy and compare the ways in which you are the same and different in terms of your appearance, experiences and skills by using a Venn diagram.

To demonstrate an understanding of what a story character might need as he/she confronts dilemmas within the story by creating a suitcase of useful items for him or her

## Section 1: What Is A Community?

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### Defining the Classroom Community that I Work In

A primary (K-2) classroom community is made up of a heterogeneous group of children of the same age-range gathered together in one locality—the classroom. Few changes, if any, occur in its membership during the 180 school days that they spend together. One to two adults work with and guide them during the daily 6-hour period they spend at school. Their common interest, whether they initially realize it or not, is to learn together. Such an aspiration, however, does not come automatically to a classroom of children. It has to be initiated,

modeled, explained, "sold" and nurtured by the teacher throughout the school year.

I have discovered an excellent teacher-resource book entitled *Interactive Modeling* by Margaret Berry Wilson. It offers a seven-step technique that the teacher can use to teach behaviors and routines as well as social and academic skills to children. The premise is that when students can see what is expected of them in repeated ways by the teacher and see individual classmates modeling it and being given immediate feedback on their approximations, they will have more success in actually incorporating it into their actions. Benefits include less time wasted on giving constant reminders of expectations and more time available in which students are on task. This technique includes the following steps:

1. Say what you will model and why.
2. Model the actual behavior.
3. Ask students what they noticed.
4. Invite a few students to model the behavior.
5. Ask students again what they have noticed.
6. Have the whole class practice it.
7. Provide your feedback being very specific like, "Everyone crossed their legs on the rug and looked at the teacher. Great job! Let's begin reading our poem."

To provide further clarity regarding what a public school classroom community is, it is helpful to determine what it is not by comparing it to a few other common types of communities. Compared to a family, the members of a classroom do not share in the exclusivity of being born into the group, of maintaining caring bonds to it over a lifetime, or of being obliged to follow particular traditions treasured by its members. Compared to a neighborhood, classroom members seldom have the option of either moving away or of 'keeping to oneself' as its members so often do in many neighborhood communities where there is no real need for interdependence. Religious schools (Jewish, Catholic, Evangelical, etc.) have the distinction of imposing certain shared values on the school community. All of its members voluntarily accept these values whether they believe in them or not. This can be either an advantage or a disadvantage. In contrast, the teacher in a public school has to supply social/ethical cohesiveness without resorting to dogmatic 'truths'. In effect, at least in theory, this can lead to a greater tolerance of differences, creativity and dissent.

### **Gaining Purpose From Vygotsky**

All of our learning takes place in a social context. We learn through communicating with others. The continuous interactions that we engage in with others serve to shape our understanding of the world. Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), an eminent Russian psychologist, maintained that children's development and learning occur as a result of the social interactions they have with their peers and other adults. It is through these interactions that children develop language which supports thinking. Vygotsky's theory promotes learning contexts where the students play a more active role in their learning, constructing knowledge, developing skills and attitudes through their interactions not only with people but also with significant objects (i.e., toys or books) and cultural practices.

Teaching young students to become active and responsible members within their community is no small task.

The teacher's role in creating a learning environment that fosters and manages communication among all members in the classroom is vital to its development into a cohesive group. She is not only a facilitator, but also a model and a guide as she works to create a positive interdependence among its members. Cooperative Learning (CL) is an educational approach where the teacher organizes classroom activities into academic and social learning experiences. She must help students learn to collaborate with one another, to share the workload of a given task, listen to each other and help each other. What is the value of learning together? Very simply put, cooperative learning helps students feel more connected to school and to each other.

The Responsive Classroom practices can help the teacher in this endeavor. Very briefly as outlined in the book, *Classroom Spaces That Work* by Marilyn K. Clayton and Mary Beth Forton there are 7 beliefs included in this approach:

1. The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.
2. How children learn is as important as what children learn.
3. The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
4. There is a set of social skills that children need in order to be successful academically and socially.
5. Knowing the children we teach is as important as knowing the content we teach.
6. Knowing the families of the children we teach is as important as knowing the children.
7. Teachers and administrators must model the social and academic skills which they wish to teach their students.

### **Building Community in My Classroom**

Let us now move to some specifics that I use to build community in my classroom revolving around the Morning Meeting using The Responsive Classroom approach.

Each morning we begin our day with Morning Meeting which involves students and adults gathering circle-style on the carpet for a 20- to 30-minute time span. During this time we greet each other, share news and ideas, participate in an activity together and read a Morning Message that the teacher has written. These class gatherings build a sense of community among its members and also help reinforce academics and social skills in fun ways.

Specific ideas for each of these four components (greeting, sharing, group activity and morning message) can be found in the many books published by the Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc., cited in my bibliography. For purposes of example I have used the book, *88 Morning Meeting Ideas* by Susan Lattanzi Roser as my resource.

*Greeting: We'll Cheer Hooray*

The following greeting (to be sung to the tune, Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star) is displayed on chart paper for all to see.

\_\_\_\_\_ came to school today. We're so glad, we'll cheer

(student's name)

Hooray!

Select one child in the circle to start with and have the whole class sing this chant to him/her raising their hands high when they sing "Hooray!" Continue in this fashion all around the circle. (p. 22)

*Sharing: You Like That Animal? Me, Too!*

Tell the class they are to share about an animal they like using up to two sentences of description. (i.e., I like cats. They purr when you pet them.) Allow students 'think time' and ask them to let you know when they are ready by putting their thumbs up. The teacher begins as the first sharer. If others share that same preference, they put up the Me, Too signal (with middle 3 fingers folded down and thumb and pinky extended, move your hand back and forth toward the speaker and yourself). Go around the circle in this fashion. (pp. 74-75)

*Group Activity: Jolly Jump Up*

Prepare a deck of flashcards using a variety of subject matter (i.e, sight words, math facts, letter cards, etc.). Include numerous cards that say 'Jolly Jump Up' and 'Slowly Sit Down'. Shuffle the deck and begin the game. Hold up each card and ask the class to call out what's on it. When you show a 'Jolly Jump Up' card, students immediately stand up and jump until you show them the 'Slowly Sit Down' card. Other movement cards can be added as desired. (pp. 114-115)

*Morning Message*

The teacher presents a prewritten brief note on chart paper that reinforces skills and pique's the children's interest in what they will be learning that day. Read the message together and then have a discussion about it. Here is an example:

**Dear Friends,**

Today is Tuesday, June 23, 2014. It is sunny and hot outside. Each group's bean plant is growing taller day by day. Can you estimate how many inches your plant is now? Write the number below.

In the ensuing discussion we can talk about June's weather, strategies we use to estimate, what plants need to grow and how to prove whether or not our estimate is close.

In summary, I envision that my daily use of Morning Meetings will be a comfortable yet engaging way for my young learners to make the often difficult transition from home to school each day. They will quickly see that we as a group value and encourage their contributions and that learning is fun.

**Taking a Closer Look at Our Classroom Community**

I begin this unit by reading the book, Investigate Communities, by Neil Morris. This informational text depicts various types of communities that children are familiar with: family, friends, neighbors and school. It also shows how people gather together into communities based on the religion they belong to. After reading the book's first sentence, "A community is a group of people with something in common" (p. 4), I will pause and ask the class what we all share in common. 'Why are we here together?' After writing their ideas on chart paper, I will emphasize the notion that we are all here to learn together but add: "So how can we do this?" I

envision the resulting discussion involving the need for some types of cooperative behavior in order for everyone to have the opportunity to learn.

Let's now take a more in-depth look at two types of communities that children are integrally a part of and in which its members share similar goals and responsibilities: family and school. It seems especially relevant to young children to begin a study of community with one's family. It is within this group that a child first learns how to interact with others. He/she develops his identity based on the relationships he/she has with other family members. I am the big brother in the family. I am an only child. My big sister always helps me with my homework. Daddy reads us a bedtime story every night. My job is to take out the trash. Mommy drops us off at school.

We can begin our exploration of the family community by acknowledging that families come in all sizes and honoring those differences. A hands-on activity that helps students conceptualize this idea involves using buttons. Each student is given a pile of assorted buttons and told to find buttons that match in some way, putting them together in one set. After gluing this set of buttons on a piece of construction paper, each student must describe how their grouping is the same in some way (such as color, material, or number of holes). I will point out to the students that the grouping still includes buttons with different shapes and sizes just as our families do. Some are tall while others are short. Some are heavy while others are thin. To make this more clear I give each student a rectangular piece of cardstock on which they draw all the family members who live in their home together. From this activity, which is shared with the larger group, we learn that there are many types of families that exist and that its members are there to help each other. We then move on to exploring the roles and responsibilities of each family member in a household.

Because my aim is to use their positive family experiences to build our classroom community, my instructional charts about family have two sections to allow for comparison between the two communities—family and classroom. Some charts are set up like this:

### Responsibilities

Family Jobs	Classroom Jobs
Mom does Dad does Brothers do Sisters do Grandmother does	Students do  Teacher does

### Shared Experiences

Family	Classroom
Holiday celebrations Reunions Vacations Meals together	Field trips Recess Learning center time Shared reading Class discussions Author's chair Lunch in the cafeteria

### Safe and Caring Places

Family	Classroom
When I am hurt I go to _____ When I am sad When I am afraid When I am excited When I am proud When I am discouraged	When I am hurt I go to _____ When I am sad When I am afraid When I am excited When I am proud When I am discouraged

I have chosen the award-winning picture book, *A Chair for My Mother*, written by Vera B. Williams to read aloud to my students at this juncture because it effectively depicts a loving family, Rosa, her mother and her grandmother, who lost their home in a fire. Both the family and the neighbors work toward a common goal of furnishing a new apartment for them to live in. In this story Rosa helps her mother and her grandmother save up enough money to eventually buy a big comfy chair for their living room. This chair is especially for her mom who works hard as a waitress every day but, in fact, they all enjoy it. This heart-warming story shows a family at its best, providing security and hope for its members and inspiring them to cooperate together to reach their goal.

For an extension activity I ask the students to consider ways that each of them could help this family and to write about it using the sentence starter: I would help Rosa and her family by \_\_\_\_\_. The purpose of this activity is to have the children put themselves in the shoes of people who are suffering and consider the talents or gifts they can contribute in such a situation.



## Section 2: Individuals Make Up a Community

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In this section we will identify our own strengths and 'struggles', recognize our similarities and appreciate our differences—learning about the vital role that tolerance and acceptance play in keeping a community strong. I begin with a question that promises to be relevant to many if not all of my students' early school experiences. "Has anyone ever made fun of you before?" It is a very hurtful experience that one doesn't easily forget. (I can still remember my classmates calling me 'four eyes' when I first began wearing glasses in third grade.) Where your family so often protects you from such ridicule, entering into a larger community such as a school you cannot easily escape from the intolerance bred there. But from hurt can come compassion and by sharing such experiences we can learn to be more tolerant of people's differences.

A perfect picture book entitled *Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon*, written by Patty Lovell, features a young girl empowered by her grandmother to treat another person's ridicule of her 'faults' as an opportunity to 'shine' and to demonstrate that teasing from others does not have to immobilize you. With every instance of teasing, Molly overcomes such obstacles. When teased about her buckteeth, she adeptly demonstrates how she can use them to balance a tower of coins. When teased about being short, she shows how her height allows her to run under another player's legs to score a touchdown. When teased about having the voice of a bullfrog, she sings out with both gusto and glee, unbridled and unashamed. This story creatively conveys the message to young readers to 'be yourself!' In first grade we analyze a person's character traits by looking at their words and their actions. Using a T-chart graphic organizer I ask the class to identify some of Molly's character traits (to be written on one side) and support their ideas (written on the other side) with 'evidence' from the text of what Molly said or did to support their ideas.

To prompt a thoughtful discussion of this book I include the following questions as part of our discussion:

Why do kids tease other kids?

How could you help a classmate who is being teased?

What important ideas did Molly learn from her grandmother? Name a person whom you have learned from. Explain.

What can we try to do that Molly did when we are teased?

Why did the author write this book? What is her message?

In an effort to cheer Molly Lou Melon on for her courageous actions taken in the face of adversity I ask my class to design greeting cards to 'send' to Molly that applaud her actions. See Lesson Plan 1 for all the details.

Diversity is an important component of a classroom community and the purpose of teaching about it is to help children develop empathy for others. I begin this exploration by writing the following definition on the board: diversity: being different from each other. There are two books I plan to use that show how our differences make us unique. Todd Parr's book, *It's Okay To Be Different*, features simple colorful illustrations accompanied by single statements conveying the message that being different in various ways (how we look, how we act, what we have experienced) is something to be proud of and to accept in others. Two pages that I plan to highlight are:

It's okay to need some help.

It's okay to come in last.

I chose these examples because I want to encourage children to learn to develop and value their interdependence on others in the classroom and to consider that being competitive can be destructive and cause feelings of low self-esteem in yourself and others. To prompt reflection on similar experiences they may have had in these two areas, I ask students to sit in a circle and share instances they have experienced and describe how they felt and what they did about it. Mem Fox wrote a wonderful book that I use entitled, *Koala Lou, I Do Love You*. The main character, Koala Lou, sets her goal to win the tree-climbing event in the Bush Olympics in order to capture her mother's attention once again. Despite putting in endless hours of practice to build her stamina and skill, Koala Lou only comes in second place. Initially ashamed she wanders off to be by herself until her mother comes to reassure her that she has always and will always love her just the way she is. I plan to focus our discussion on how we set our goals and practice hard to accomplish them but that winning is not the only benefit of our efforts.

We notice our differences in a very basic way just by looking at our appearance: our skin color, our hair, our eyes, our height and so we begin with this aspect and then go deeper. There is a book entitled *Hairs/Pelitos* by Sandra Cisneros that celebrates the diversity within an Hispanic family, describing the ways that each member's hair is different. What a wonderful springboard to use in discovering the differences in our classroom community. After reading the book I have my class make self-portraits in which various types of yarn, different in color, thickness and texture are laid out for them to choose from for their hair. Not only do they try to imitate their hair-type but also their skin color (using special crayons), and their facial features, using small mirrors to study from before trying to draw them. I have used this activity with my young learners before and have found that they are often amazingly accurate in their portrayals of themselves. Through this artwork we proudly show the diversity that exists in our classroom community.

Following this I ask the students to think of one way that they are different from others and complete a page that has the sentence starter: It's okay to \_\_\_\_\_. They will imitate Parr's artistic style in illustrating their page and all pages will be bound together to become a class book for everyone to share. See Lesson Plan 2 for further details.

Sitting once again in that circle arrangement I use the following movement activity.

Stand up if you:

are 6 years old

have lost a tooth this year

live in Hamden

like to play with Legos

have a birthday in the winter

have fallen off your bike before

sing at church

This activity brings to light the diversity that is not readily apparent within our classroom community and so it adds another dimension to diversity to be aware of beyond what's visible.

To bring more meaning to this notion of similarities and differences that exist in a community I pair up my students and ask them to interview each other. I include such questions as:

What is something that you remember about kindergarten?

What do you like about school?

Name some things you like to do on Saturdays.

What is your favorite food? Color? Sport?

After an adequate amount of time has passed allowing for all to finish, each pair comes up to the front of the room to introduce each other and mention the ways they are similar and different.

To end with this section I read the book, *I'm Like You, You're Like Me*, written by Cindy Gainer. Its pages are filled with childhood experiences that help young students appreciate diversity in their group and be proud of their individual differences.

### **Section 3: The Power of One**

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In this section we learn about the many ways in which an individual helps his/her community. This is the largest section of the unit and incorporates the following themes:

Encouraging the community members to try new things

Encouraging the community members to be nonconforming and to think independently

Helping the community members to achieve their goal

Protecting the community members from harm

Encouraging the community members to value the 'gifts' its members have to offer

Each of the selected picture-books falls under one or more of these categories and is used to exemplify the role that the individual plays in enhancing his/her community. What we also discover as we read and reflect on these themes is how a community can help its members realize their unique gifts. It works both ways!

To provide a visual of our character studies in this section, I create a matrix that is displayed on a bulletin board in the classroom. I have filled in the first two columns.

Title	Theme	Main Character Name /Traits	Main Character's actions	Impact on community
Giraffes can't dance	Try new things			
Stephanie's Ponytail	Think independently			
Bea Rocks the Flock	Think independently			
Calvin Can't Fly	Protect other members from harm			
Tacky goes to Camp	Protect other members from harm			
The Sheep in Wolf's Clothing	Protect other members from harm			
Score One for the Sloths	Helps group achieve goal			
Cock-a doodle-hooooo!	Group members learn to value another member's gifts			
Frederick	Group members learn to value another member's gifts			
Not Your Typical Dragon	Group members learn to value another member's gifts			
Hooway for Wodney Wat	Group members learn to value another member's gifts			

As we discuss each book that is read aloud we fill in the chart with our ideas. This provides an effective framework by which we can compare and contrast story characters and plots.

One way to learn about a character's perspective is to do a role-play where one student plays the story character while the rest of the class are newspaper reporters who come up, microphone in hand (a marker serves this purpose well) and ask him/her questions about his/her life, feelings, story experiences. At the same time that it is fun for the children, it provides feedback to the teacher about the extent to which kids understood the story and can view the world from another's perspective.

Another activity that helps children to 'connect' with a story character is to have them write a letter to the story character where they are to include questions they have, shared experiences they can describe and advice they can give. As with all new writing experiences I first model the writing of a letter to a story character and identify the different types of content I have included. Students then try their hand at it. What is a letter if there is no one to reply back to it? To make this a more meaningful activity, I also have each student select one of the completed letters, pretend they are that character and write back to that classmate. Once

again this type of exercise provides the teacher with lots of feedback on students' understanding of the story character and his/her experiences.

A third writing activity that I have had great success with in the past is one where the students create a suitcase for the main character and include items inside that he/she will need to face the challenges encountered. Lesson Plan 3 offers full details on this activity using Helen Lester's *Score One for the Sloths* as the chosen book.

I leave it to the reader to discover the story plots of most of the aforementioned books in the above matrix but I would like to mention a few because they exemplify the power that an individual can have in his/her community.

Helen Lester's *Tacky* is a most unlikely leader who actually fumbles his way to become savior of his group, protecting them from a mean-tempered monster who ends up running away. Tacky earns the devotion of his friends but not only this. The small community of penguins becomes much more tolerant of the lack of skills he shows in other areas. Robert Munsch's *Stephanie*, an outspoken, self-proclaimed nonconformist leads her school community to a greater understanding of the value of independent thinking as they attempt to outdo themselves in their imitation of fashion that she initiates. Leo Lionni's *Frederick* is an artistic-minded, highly imaginative mouse who appears never to do anything practical. He is tolerated but not much appreciated by the rest of the mouse community for a long time. Then the day arrives in the dead of winter when the food supply has been depleted and the cold temperatures are both numbing and unbearable. Frederick helps the other mice huddled together in their refuge keep their minds off their misery by imagining the glow of the sunrays and the glorious colors found in spring flowers. He further cheers them with his beautiful poetry which helps them endure until Spring finally arrives. What inspiration these characters give us as we reflect on ways that we might as individuals help our families and classmates.

Not everyone can imagine being a leader, a nonconformist or a change-agent within their community but we can envision ourselves helping others and this is the role that I emphasize in my community-building activities. The expression, 'power of one' in my unit relates to the idea that a single person, using his/her special traits and abilities, can make a strong impact on the larger community that he/she is a part of. That individual actually strengthens the community. In this age where so many of us feel powerless to effect change I think the powerful message that 'you can make a difference' is an important one to convey to my students. And we can start out small. On the website <http://ripplekindness.org> one suggestion given is to begin teaching about community building by remembering to smile at a classmate. I would add that a friendly pat on the back or the gesture of a 'thumbs up' sign can further cheer a classmate.

On the website [www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org) there are two relevant activities that I use. One is called 'Happy Faces' and encourages students to become sensitive to other's feelings. They make a number of happy faces to have on hand to give to a classmate who they see needs some cheering up. A second activity is called 'Everyone's a Helper' and in it students are led to discover their strengths and 'struggles'. In the ensuing discussion they are asked to reflect upon times when they can help or have helped and times when they need help in the classroom.

There is always room for renewal and improvement in a community's growth and development. I plan to borrow an idea given on the website [www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org) which involves critiquing our classroom community in order to make it better. I use a simple chart like this:

### In My Classroom

Good	Improve or Change

I ask my class to think about what is going well in our classroom (i.e, partners taking turns during 'buddy reading') and what needs to be improved or changed (i.e, lowering the noise level during center time so that everyone can hear each other and focus on their work). Such an activity increases my students' awareness of their role as a member in the community and of the need for teamwork in order to bring about change. In order for a community to be a source of solidarity to its members, all members must agree to actively participate in it. If something isn't working well, it is our responsibility as a group to come up with better ways to employ. Another school setting that often becomes highly charged with conflict is the recess field and so I use this same chart to initiate their working together to problem-solve for solutions.

## Lesson Plan 1

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Materials: Stand Tall Molly Lou Melon by Patty Lovell, lined chart paper, 9" x 12" white construction paper, pencils, colored pencils, crayons, 'draw and write' sheets, samples of store-bought greeting cards.

Objective: To create a greeting card of encouragement for the main character, Molly Lou Melon, selecting a story event and writing words of encouragement to her.

Procedure:

1. Ask the class "Why do people send greeting cards to each other?" Record their ideas on chart paper (expecting such responses as: to celebrate birthdays, holidays, weddings, births, to say thank you, to show sympathy, to send 'get well' wishes, to encourage or congratulate someone, to let someone know that you are thinking of them).
2. Inform the class that we will be focusing on the last two ideas of encouragement and circle them on the chart.
3. Read the book aloud to the class and together discuss the times when Molly Lou showed she was brave. Then ask the students to choose one of Molly Lou's brave moments and use the 'draw and write' paper to illustrate and write about it, describing what she did. Once the large piece of white construction paper is folded this descriptive page will be stapled to the inside left section.
4. Hold up some samples of greeting cards to familiarize students with the format. Call their attention to the 'snappy one-liners' found on the front of each card and then ask the class to come up with some one-liners that we could say to Molly Lou. Some examples that you could guide them to include are: You did it! I am

proud of you! You go, girl! Hooray for Molly! I knew you could do it! List student responses on a piece of chart paper.

5. Instruct the students to select one of the one-liners and write it in fancy letters on the front cover of the folded construction paper. Encourage them to decorate the front to make it eye-catching.
6. Explain to the students that the final section of the card (the inside right section) is to be devoted to words that you write to Molly Lou to tell her why you are so proud of her. At the bottom, you sign your name.
7. Each student will have the opportunity to present their card to the rest of the class and then all of them will be displayed on a bulletin board outside the classroom.

## Lesson Plan 2

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Materials: It's Okay To Be Different by Todd Parr, lined chart paper, a template for each student of a lined Venn Diagram labeled same and different, various colors of poster paint and paint brushes, 8 ½' x 11' white cardstock, pencils, black sharpie markers

Objective: To identify ways that you are different from others and then select one to write out in sentence form and to illustrate using Todd Parr's style of drawing.

Procedure:

1. Read the book and then ask the class, "What were some examples of ways people are different in this book?" List student responses on chart paper.
2. Then say, "We want to see if we can add to this list so we are going to work with a buddy to discover the ways we are different and the same in how we look, what we like, and what we can do."
3. Review how to use the Venn diagram listing ways that you and your buddy are different and the same. Then send each pair of buddies off to begin the task. Teacher circulates and assists when asked.
4. Gather together once again and ask buddies to share differences they have discovered about each other. List them on the chart paper.
5. Refer to this chart and direct the students to select one difference that is true about them and write it out in sentence form using the sentence starter, It's okay to \_\_\_\_\_. To further clarify use the following example. Elissa still uses training wheels when she rides her bike. So the sentence would read: It's okay to ride your bike using training wheels.
6. Show samples again from the book and instruct the students to write their chosen sentence at the top of the cardstock paper and then trace over it in black marker.
7. Now explain, "The next step is to draw the picture that will match with the words of your sentence." Use the whiteboard to show some examples of Todd Parr's illustrations that you have found using Google, noting the following:

Use big drawings

Use bold colors

Outline everything in black marker

Use one color for the entire background of the picture.

8. Compile the finished pages into a class book for the students to enjoy.

## Lesson Plan 3

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Materials: Score One for the Sloths by Helen Lester, large template of a suitcase (2 per student), letter-size manila folders (one for each student), small index cards, pencils, crayons, glue sticks, scissors, markers, lined chart paper

Objective: To create a suitcase for Sparky that includes items she will need once she arrives at Sleepy Valley Sloth School. Each item needs to be explained in terms of their relevance to the story.

Procedure:

1. Read the book and discuss the ways that Sparky was able to help the larger group of sloths in their time of need. List these ways on chart paper.
2. Hold up the manila folder with the suitcase template glued to both sides and then open it and ask, "What kinds of things will Sparky need to take in her suitcase on her trip to her new school?"
3. Help the students recall that the antagonist in the story, who wanted to close the school, was looking for the lack of acceptable student performance in the following areas: reading, music, block building, math, poetry and add gymnastics to the list. Display on chart paper and ask the students to come up with items that Sparky could use to help her classmates pass the test.
4. Each item needs to be drawn and its usage described. Here are some examples you might help your students with:

Hardcover books that sloths could not easily chew

A surround-sound system that plays classical music in the classrooms that they could hum to

Large pieces of twine strung from the classroom ceilings for them to practice their hanging skills

Sturdy large wooden block sets for making towers that sloths could hang from

Addition flash cards for all sloths to use for practice

CD book-sets of nursery rhymes for the sloths to listen to in order to memorize



Tooth picks to help keep the sloths' eyes open when the supervisor is around

Brewed coffee on hand to help keep the sloths awake.

5. Each item is to be drawn and written about on small index cards that are later glued inside the 'suitcase' folder. On the front of the folder students will also draw an identification tag with Sparky's name on it as well as travel tags showing other places she has been.

6. Students will have the opportunity to share their finished work 'gallery'-style in the classroom.

## Appendix

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Implementing District Standards

ELA Common Core Standards for Grade 1

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.1

Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.2

Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3

Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.7

Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.9

Compare and contrast the adventures and experiences of characters in stories.

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