



racebridges
for schools

CLASSROOM RESOURCES

CREATE A WELCOMING SCHOOL

A WELCOMING SCHOOL: Improving and Enhancing the Corporate Climate of Your School Community.

BACKGROUND

Teachers can do a great deal to make classrooms more welcoming, but it is also important that schools as institutions are inclusive at the “macro” level. This resource offers suggestions to make the entire school a more “accessible” and welcoming place to all students.

You might use some of the suggestions below in your classroom, but many of the suggestions are meant to be used at the institutional level. Try getting some teachers together for the larger-scale changes and/or sharing some of these with your administration.

For ideas just for individual classrooms see *Including Everyone: Small Changes to Create a Welcoming Classroom*
<http://www.racebridgesforschools.com/wp/?p=66>

In this *RaceBridges Resource*, you’ll find some classroom activities and “lesson plan starters,” further resources, and some ideas and thoughts to help inspire you on the journey. It takes committed teachers to encourage and shape our schools to be welcoming and open.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

This is a brief lesson that suggests an activity without being overly prescriptive so that you can adapt the activity to your classroom. A suggested action item is included at the end.

Who feels welcomed at your school?

Assign students to go on a “scavenger hunt” around the school (if possible, during class time; otherwise, as they change classes and before and after school. Ask them to find images, words, and references to a variety of groups (male and female; a variety of races and ethnicities; students of different socio-economic classes, physical and intellectual abilities, and language groups, and so on).

For ease of record keeping, you may want to create a chart that lists different groups, locations, type of media, and a way to track how often different groups are represented. When students return with their records, share them with the classroom. Discuss who gets represented and why and what that might say about the culture of the school.

Then facilitate a discussion with students about what else they might examine in the school to see **who** is welcomed at the school. They could include such measures as the school budget, the calendar, how the building gets used, what visitors/speakers are invited to the school, the books assigned in English, what plays are performed, who is elected to various positions in the school, how music is chosen for dances, and so on. Are all represented? Who is left out?

Finally, lead a discussion about what it might be like never to see “yourself” (in gender, race, class, and so forth) represented at school. What message does that send? Which students are more likely to succeed?

Action: Collate all the data the class collected, submit a report to the school administration, and then make suggestions about how to make the school more inclusive and welcoming.

LESSON PLAN IDEAS

Some ideas to get started in the classroom around the theme of “welcome”.

- Have students read one of the stories listed below on the RaceBridges for Schools page. Use those stories (or stories found elsewhere) to discuss how important schools and their environment are to people’s self understanding and image. Many stories are about the damage done by insensitive school environments; spend time in discussion with students about the good that sensitive school environments might do!
- Often we assume we know which groups feel like *insiders* and which ones feel like *outsiders* at schools, but it is true that schools might be marginalizing groups of which they are unaware. Have students in your class create a survey to administer to a sample of the student body asking about which groups are considered *insiders* and *outsiders*, who feels overlooked and underrepresented. After studying the results, have students interview one another about how to address feelings of exclusion. Create a proposal for the administration.

A CHECKLIST FOR TEACHERS

Check these out before diving into the topic.

- Take a look around your school: what images are there around the school in posters and pictures, fliers for activities, in the library, and so on? Do these images represent the student body?
- Talk to one of your administrators about the position of the school on diversity and inclusion. Ask about how inclusion and diversity are represented in the budget, calendar, and staffing.
- Take some time to write down what you think the percentages of different groups in the school are; include lots of types of groups—race, class, sexual orientation, nationality/immigrant status, and so on. Once you write down those percentages, ask your administration for the official statistics of the school. Compare the two lists—if you were off-base in some categories, why do you think that is? How might you become more aware of the groups you overlooked?

RESOURCES

Suggested RaceBridges Lesson Plans on this Site

Here are a selection of links to lesson plans and resources on this web site that address the topic of creating a climate of welcome in schools.

- Including Everyone: Small Changes to Create a Welcoming Classroom
<http://www.racebridgesforschools.com/wp/?p=66>
- Sticking Together: Sharing our Stories, Our Differences, Our Similarities
<http://www.racebridgesforschools.com/wp/?p=129>
- Claim It! Differences and Similarities: Creating a Climate of Inclusion
<http://www.racebridgesforschools.com/wp/?p=156>
- Keep the Peace! Preparing for Conflict, Dealing with Anger, and Creating Communities of Harmony
<http://www.racebridgesforschools.com/wp/?p=118>
- Finding New Words: A Resources for Addressing Bullying at School
<http://www.racebridgesforschools.com/wp/?p=80>
- Seeking Harmony: Starting and Sustaining a Diversity Club for High School Students.
<http://www.racebridgesforschools.com/wp/?p=48>

These stories and lesson plans address the intersection of race and education:

- The Spirit Survives: The American Indian Boarding School Experience
<http://www.racebridgesforschools.com/wp/?p=208>
- From Flint Michigan to Your Front Door: Tracing the Roots of Racism
<http://www.racebridgesforschools.com/wp/?p=180>
- Nepantla: Caught Between Two Worlds
 - Lesson Plan & Audios - <http://www.racebridgesforschools.com/?p=161>
 - Videos - <http://www.racebridgesforschools.com/videos/?cat=64>
- Connecting The Dots : Racism, Activism & Creating a Life.
 - Lesson Plan & Audios - <http://www.racebridgesforschools.com/wp/?p=236>
 - Videos - <http://www.racebridgesforschools.com/videos/?cat=37>

Other Recommended Resources

Resources to help you plan lessons about this topic.

Kivel, Paul. *Uprooting Racism: How White People can Work for Racial Justice.* <http://tinyurl.com/3ver5mg>

Lee, Enid, Deborah Menkart, and Margo Okazawa-Rey (eds.). *Beyond Heroes and Holidays: A Practical Guide to K-12 Anti-Racist, Multicultural Education and Staff Development.* <http://tinyurl.com/3ltk526>

Loewen, James W. *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong.*
<http://tinyurl.com/3kvpzlx>

WORDS TO REMEMBER

Use these quotations at the beginning of the lesson or unit to spark student interest. Try having students respond to them in writing or discuss them in small groups.

If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so we weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place.

Margaret Mead

It is never too late to give up your prejudices.

Henry David Thoreau

We all know we are unique individuals, but we tend to see others as representatives of groups.

Deborah Tannen

Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.

Leo Tolstoy

FINAL REFLECTIONS

Use these questions to inspire your own thinking and teaching about the topic.

- Do you feel welcome at your school? If so, what makes you feel included? If not, what prevents you from feeling welcomed?
- Who feels left out at your school? How do you know? How might you help change that?
- What role do you think schools should play in diversity education and creating a more just, inclusive society?

There are many lesson plans, stories and videos on our RaceBridges sites for teachers. We invite you to explore some of these units. Many of them have a connection to themes about Inclusion & Exclusion and the school climate.
www.RaceBridgesForSchools.com and www.RaceBridgesVideos.com