

I-5: Create a welcoming environment

Draw Welcoming Values out of Your Curriculum

Teach tolerance so students appreciate diversity outside their classroom

Find natural opportunities within your curriculum to discuss and reinforce tolerance (in choosing texts for read-alouds, in reading and discussing books about the diversity of cultures, traditions, and lifestyles in our society, in discussing historical events, etc). Books help children to develop empathy by helping them to understand the points of view of other people.

History lessons provide rich opportunities to help students recognize the impact of a lack of tolerance in contemporary society. By studying the various manifestations of hate throughout our nation's history, regardless of the specific identity or characteristics of the victims or perpetrators, students will come to understand elements common to all forms of intolerance and persecution. (For example, you might challenge the traditional notion that Columbus "discovered" America by noting that indigenous people had lived in this hemisphere for centuries.)

Deepen understanding of students' backgrounds and enrich your curriculum with diverse cultures both represented and (unrepresented) by you and your students

Create a culturally rich curriculum where students gain:

- an awareness of their own cultural backgrounds
- an understanding of different perspectives on life in the U.S.
- an understanding of the cultures of specific groups
- knowledge on how to reduce stereotyping, prejudice, and racism within themselves and within society
- a recognition and understanding of global issues

| Goals for a Culturally Rich Curriculum | Lesson Ideas/Examples |
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| <p>Students will gain an awareness of their own cultural backgrounds</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have students create "cultural background pies" which represent different aspects of their identities (or, as CMs did, life maps) • Have students create "cultural silhouettes" where they create a physical representation of themselves with a paper cutout and write about where they are from, their favorite activities, and perhaps what world issues they want to improve. • Create a class quilt that depicts something from each student's home. Tap students' funds of knowledge – what they know about particular topics and where they learned it (could be done at the beginning of a new unit). • Create "I Am From" poems – where students describe where they are from with sentence starters. • Have students research/write about their own background and culture. |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with family members to create family history. • Discuss with students the strengths of their cultural group historically (e.g., study the Black American leaders of the Underground Railroad, or the migrant farm workers' fight for their rights with Cesar Chavez). |
| <p>Students will gain an understanding of different perspectives on life in the United States</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create units on, or integrate literature about, immigration. • Examine one issue or one group by looking at various newspapers/sources (from different parts of the world or country, e.g.). • Look at statistics for different populations in the US or world (perhaps related to education?). • Inviting family/community members to come and speak about their lives. • Interview family/community members about why they (or their ancestors) came to the US. Turn these interviews into diaries, poems, reports; couple this with reading immigrant diaries/narratives. • Read about Thanksgiving or westward expansion from different perspectives. Discuss explicitly the difference in perspectives and why we usually hear only one version. • Study different perspectives on the same events (historical or current). • Have students write to pen pals in another city, state, country. • Study the ways in which different cultures treat disease/illness (science – using plants vs. chemicals vs. antibiotics, etc. for medicines). |
| <p>Students will gain an understanding of the cultures of specific groups</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparative studies of folk tales or fairy tales, or of math/science methods and ideas (through history or across cultures). • Focus on a single culture through a collection of stories from that culture. • Study themes or topics of particular importance to a specific culture. |
| <p>Students will learn how to reduce stereotyping, prejudice, and racism within themselves and within society</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical analysis of media representations of different cultural and racial groups (perhaps a table detailing how often various types of people are included in the media). • Discuss explicitly the language we use in the classroom. Have students act as peer mentors and educate their peers on the playground about the language they use. • History study – Study the history of a minority group (e.g., African-Americans from slavery – segregation –civil rights, Jewish people in Europe, etc.) from the perspective of that group. Show students the robust and strong history of the group and the way in which racism arose and how that group has experienced racism. • Read books like <i>The Jacket</i> about a boy who confronts his own racism |
| <p>Students will gain a recognition and understanding of global issues</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students could study particular issues faced by a given country or people. • Study slavery throughout history (e.g., Egypt, Jewish, African-America) |

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Deepen understanding of students' backgrounds and enrich your curriculum with diverse cultures both represented and (unrepresented) by you and your students (continued)

Don't know much about history? Do your research. Share what you learn with your students, and not just on Black History or Hispanic Heritage Month, but throughout your curriculum. Highlight the ways in which the past is laden with multicultural stories of intellectual curiosity and resistance through education. Create a counter-narrative to the messages your students may receive from other sources. Build a classroom library that includes books and materials involving multiple cultures, backgrounds and identities (especially those represented by your students). Highlight the contributions of individuals with whom students identify. (To read more about using role models, visit the I-3 page.)

By acknowledging who your students are and where they come from—not denying or ignoring it—and by incorporating those backgrounds into your classroom, you genuinely validate both your students' heritage, and your intentions of honoring them.

You will also assure your students, their families, and your colleagues that you are aware and respectful of the unique nature of your students' backgrounds, especially if yours differs from theirs. Find a balance between the urge to build on and validate the students' background and culture, and preparing students to live in a world where their background and culture may not be dominant.

It became apparent that most teacher supply stores did not sell pictures or posters with kids who looked like my students. So we postered the walls with pictures of them doing their work, with their parents, at their sports events. I also put books with characters that resembled them all around the room. It was more original and a more fun room to be in. – a Washington, DC teacher

Middle School Example of using real-world assignments that relate to your students' backgrounds (a strategy with benefits for both I-2 and I-5):

Ms. Teguis teaches 6th grade in New York City. For a unit on environmental science, covering the effects of environmental pollution, she decided to focus on a current tragedy that directly affected her student population: the epidemic rates of childhood asthma in inner city America. She gathered articles about the phenomenon, rewriting the ones that were too advanced for her students, and distributing those written at an appropriate level. (To differentiate, she gave the original, more complex articles to her more advanced readers.) She ran several video clips from national news broadcasts highlighting the problem. She invited a local public health official to come speak to her students about the medical causes, symptoms, and treatments of the disease. She planned several lessons around the proposed explanations for the asthma rate increases in inner cities, including changes in the types of molds spurred by global warming, asbestos and building-related environmental hazards in urban homes, and unhealthy urban air masses caused by the burning of fossil fuel by cars, trucks and buses. To help her students understand the scope of the problem, she had them graph a comparison of asthma rates for the overall U.S. population and those of inner city minority children (who suffer from asthma at twice the rate). Finally, she let each student choose a final product from the following list:

- Write a letter to a local councilperson alerting them to the class' findings (include detailed scientific explanations of the causes), and request a response that will detail what is being done, or will be done, to address the problem.
- Write an article for the school newspaper about the issue, including interviews with local students who suffer from asthma, and at least one interview with a public official.

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- Compile data from the school nurse about the statistics of asthma sufferers in the school, and do the same for a Long Island suburban school. Compare the stats and include theories on why the rates differ.
- Draw up a list of widespread recommendations on what inner city families can do to protect their children from asthma, and brainstorm the most effective way of distributing the list throughout the community.

High School Example: Mr. Archer's 10th grade social studies students are of predominantly Latin American heritage. Since many of them are recent immigrants to America, he decided to teach a unit exploring historic immigration patterns in the U.S., emphasizing both the commonalities and the differences between their own experiences, and those of earlier immigrants to America. Over the course of several weeks his students will examine the various reasons people migrate, including economic opportunity and political freedom, and they will consider the different ramifications of voluntary and forced immigration. Topics to be addressed include the following issues:

- Isolation: separation from family, religious or language differences
- Cooperation: neighborhoods against crime, political mobilization, unions
- Marginalization: poverty, ghettos, minority status, ethnic/religious "otherness"
- Participation: church, sports, politics, school, etc.
- Assimilation: clothing and food style, music preferences, housing traditions, adoption of dominant language, religion, etc.
- Identity Issues
- Economic Impact: the role immigrants play in both the American economy, and in the economies of their home countries

Integrate current events about your students' communities and cultures into your curriculum to acknowledge their lives and realities

Societal events will often present valuable opportunities to point out behaviors or norms that conflict with the ideals of your classroom community. Seize these opportunities (in the media, in film, in politics and government, etc.) for classroom discussion to highlight our own cultural shortcomings and challenge your students to brainstorm solutions for ways to help improve our society. Constantly collect and periodically share news about current events in the communities where your students live, or discuss the implications of national events on local populations.

Search for opportunities in the curriculum to emphasize and reinforce the value of teamwork and interdependence

To reinforce the idea that student inter-dependence will lead to greater achievement for everyone, you might have students work in collaborative groups where everyone is responsible for one piece of a complete project.

If you want to demonstrate how each student can contribute to a collective goal, consider doing some sort of play or performance as a class. Debrief afterward, highlighting the importance of each character and stagehand.