

Collier Educator Grant “Stand Up For Justice”

Sponsored by the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation of Collier County

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Describe the precipitating events that motivated you to initiate the lesson or activities.

It seems like you can't go a day without hearing a news story or reading an article about another young child or teen who acted drastically due to bullying or discrimination. Whether the outcome is personal harm or hard directed to others, I felt like I was just drowning in a sea of saddening stories. That is why this year I decided to create a different type of foundation for my class to sit upon—one that wasn't built on test scores or reading proficiency, but rather a foundation build out of love and respect for one another.

The @BluntEducator once said “Some teachers taught the curriculum today. Other teachers taught students today. And there's a big difference”. I remind myself of this quote often and I truly believe in the balance of educating students with the curriculum provided, as well as educating them with life lessons and skills that they will need when they are far beyond school aged. I told my class at the beginning of the year that they “create their own reputation” and I have been motivated to help them learn from the past to hopefully one day change the future.

Describe the lesson(s) or activity(s); and if adapted from another source please reference.

I have taught numerous lessons this year that have ranged in topic from bullying, to standing up for what's right, to segregation both past and in modern day events. In order, some of the lessons we did were:

International “Dot” Day- We read the book title The Dot and we all talked about ways we can make our mark in our school, in our community/town and in the world we live in. Every day before they leave I always tell them to be kind and to “make a mark” on

someone. We also read the book ONE and discussed the harsh realities of bullying and how it “only takes one” to stand up.

This fall, we did a unit of study where we learned all about the Native American tribes that were found in our area. The class began the unit by researching all of the tribes and becoming connected to their native ways. WE even did some lessons out in our authentic chickee hut on campus! After the students took the time to learn about the various tribes, we spent some time learning about how they were discriminated against and treated when the European explorers eventually arrived. We tied in various fictional stories like Cheyenne Again and Encounter to help the kids relate. We then finished the unit by reading about Jim Thorpe, a famous athlete—and a native Sac and Fox tribesman—who overcame the racial barriers in his life to accomplish many great things.

After winter break, we spent the entire month of January learning about civil rights and liberties. The class started with the most familiar face—Martin Luther King Jr. I used real sources like the March on Washington and his sister’s biography My Brother Martin to explore what the world was like in a time when all were not “equal”. We also included many classic picture books like The Other Side by Jacqueline Woodson. We then traveled even further back in time to learn how Martin Luther King Jr. was not the only person who stood up for equality. We discussed the roles of other famous historical figures and did various lessons on Harriet Tubman (read the wordless book Unspoken) , Rosa Parks, Ruby Bridges and JFK Jr. to name a few. We finished with Abraham Lincoln, and learned the basics of the Civil War. I feel like it is important for kids to have history as part of their education and we discussed things like The Emancipation Proclamation, slavery, black codes, and eventually tied it all back to segregation. We even did a really powerful lesson where we compared the treatment of the Native Americans to the treatment of African Americans so many years later. We discussed the power of our choices and how history can repeat itself if we are not careful.

We are finishing up this unit of study in this current month of February by related all we have learned to the county’s Kindness Month initiative. We are going to be reading books like Dear Mr. Faulker and Mr. Lincoln’s Class and be discussing ways that the kids may still see discrimination or bullying in today’s world. More importantly, we will be talking through how they can combat it and stand up for what is right. The class also recently participated in a writing contest that focused on Jackie Robinson and the barriers he overcame. It asked them to recall a time they overcame a barrier and to connect it to the nine values Robinson held dear—citizenship, commitment, courage, determination, excellence, integrity, justice, persistence, and teamwork.

Explain how the lesson(s) or activity(s) teach students the importance of respecting others no matter what religious, racial, cultural, or other difference exist.

My class has been close since the beginning of the year and despite the various ethnicities, races and cultural backgrounds, we have grown close. I have worked hard at developing a sense of trust and respect for others that the kids have really embraced. What

these past units of study did for my students is they have shown them that the way they think of equality has not always been. It has opened their eyes to the ways people have been treated in the past, and shown them that there was a time when someone might not like you based on the color of your hair, skin, or the way you spoke. This was a very eye opening experience for my class because they tend to think naively (like most children do) that the world is a good place and has always been. They have learned about the struggles of various groups throughout the years, and how the brave work of many helped changed the way people thought and acted. They have learned firsthand that it only takes one to stand up and start making change in a positive way.

Explain how it helped them counter bigotry and bullying and prepared them to stand up for justice.

My students have become aware that many people see differences even though they do not. They have learned how to stand up to discrimination based on differences and how to positively change situations. My class has also made the connection to how history can repeat itself, and they have made themselves aware of the fact that they get to decide how this next generation of Americans grow up and live out their beliefs. Compassion, justice, respect and responsibility are just a few of the traits I feel as if my students have gained from our long units of study and I feel excited for them as they go out in to the world each day ready to act in ways that elicit positive change.