

TEACHER PREPARATION

KEY CONCEPTS

1. A true learning community requires an accurate understanding of interdependence.
2. Students and teachers derive benefits from a community in which members treat each other with extraordinary respect.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Experience structured small-group discussion and contribute to the development of the description of an ideal learning community.
2. Begin developing an understanding of how to contribute to the establishment of the responsibilities for a true learning community.

MATERIALS / PREPARATION

There is no Grandmothers' Letter for this lesson.

1. Review the section in the overall teacher introduction that explains the concept of the development of a true learning community.
2. A special piece of paper on which the elements of a true learning community will be recorded during the lesson.
3. List on the board before class and, if possible, cover with paper or cloth until revealed during the lesson. "One of my goals for us this year is to create a place where..."
 - Each of you is safe to be yourself the moment you walk through this door.
 - Each of you will be safe to offer your comments without the fear of being made to feel embarrassed or ashamed.
 - Individual differences are appreciated and valued.
 - Conflicts are resolved with respect and compassion.
 - Self-examination is encouraged.
 - Everyone is listened to attentively, and their needs are genuinely respected and understood.
 - Cooperation is encouraged more than competition.
 - We all agree to make our classroom a place where peace and compassion abide.

LESSON

BEGINNING THE LESSON



INTRODUCTION

ABOUT 1 MINUTE

In our sessions so far, we've been looking at things that can help us reach our dreams and things that might prevent us from reaching them. Today, we want to look at something that can be a huge help in reaching our dreams – the power of a true learning community. We will explore what a caring community might look like in this classroom.



DIVIDE INTO GROUPS AND SUGGEST RULES

ABOUT 9 MINUTES

Ask students to describe how a group discussion should be conducted.

[Arrange the class into small groups with four students in each group.]

As you have no doubt noticed, this year we'll be doing a lot of work arranged in large and small groups. In your small groups, I'd like you to talk with each other for the next few minutes about what rules a small group of students should follow to have a worthwhile discussion in class. How should a group discussion be conducted? I'll come around to hear what you are talking about, and in a few minutes you will get to tell the rest of class those things you have discussed.

[Be sure to affirm the responses that include such ideas as "Respect each other by listening politely." Be sure that each person is allowed to contribute and that all group members are made to feel that their appropriate contribution is acceptable.]



= 10 minutes



SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION

ABOUT 10 MINUTES

As you list these roles, write them on the board so students can choose them quickly:

- Leader
- Recorder
- Timekeeper
- Reporter

Move from group to group and facilitate group discussion. Be sure to acknowledge and affirm student responses with a variety of sincere phrases such as, "I can tell that you are thinking about this."

I'd like you to demonstrate that you have been listening by having a discussion about what you would want in an ideal classroom – not only the resources you would want, but also the ways we would learn together in an ideal classroom.

But before beginning, please choose a student in each group who will:

1. **Lead the discussion.**
2. **Be the recorder.**
3. **Keep time.**
4. **Report your ideas to the class.**

[After about 30 seconds, tell the group to begin discussing the ideal classroom.]



= 20 minutes

EXPLORING THE LESSON



FEEDBACK

ABOUT 5 MINUTES

Ask for contributions from each group and facilitate whole-group discussion. Be sure to acknowledge and affirm student responses with a variety of encouraging phrases such as, “Well done.”

[When you sense that the students are ready, say to the groups:]

As I visited with your groups, I listened to some of you talk about the ideal classroom. Now I would like the reporters in each group to share with all of us just one of the ideas you discussed. When all have shared one idea, I’ll give you an opportunity to share other ideas that have not yet been mentioned.

[Have each group reporter in turn share an idea discussed by his or her group; then ask for more ideas discussed that were not yet reported. As each reporter shares, write the group’s idea on the board.]



= 25 minutes



LECTURE AND LISTING

ABOUT 10 MINUTES

The teacher unveils the list on the board and reads each point to the students.

You discussed some creative ideas. Some were similar to what I have been thinking – but some were different and might not work well to achieve the goal of learning as much as possible.

One of my goals for us this year is to create a special community in our classroom where:

- Each of you is safe to be yourself the moment you walk through this door.
- Each of you may offer your comments without the fear of being made to feel embarrassed or ashamed.
- Individual differences are appreciated and valued.
- Conflicts are resolved with respect and compassion.
- Self-examination is encouraged.
- Everyone is listened to attentively, and their needs are genuinely respected and understood.
- Cooperation is encouraged more than competition.
- We all agree to make our classroom a place where peace and compassion abide.

You may be wondering why I have set a goal to develop a special community for our classroom this year. One of the most important reasons is that we will be discussing some very personal, and sometimes very difficult, issues raised by the grandmothers in their letters. We will need to be sensitive to each other because the letters may contain issues that relate to the circumstances

Write list for Mature Freedom on the board.

Ask for contributions from all students and facilitate whole-group discussion. Be sure to acknowledge and affirm student responses with a variety of encouraging phrases such as “You hit the mark!” or “That is a thoughtful response.”

of individuals in our class. We will need to practice respect and compassion toward each other, and this goal will help make that happen.

Let’s see whether we can integrate some of your ideas with mine. Which of your ideas on the board are the same as mine, but may be in different words? Which should be included in a combined list, and which should be discarded as unrealistic?

[Stand next to the list of characteristics of a special learning community and, pointing to it, ask:]

What will it take for us to accomplish these goals in our classroom? What will you all have to do to make our class work in the ways we have listed?

[As you write the students’ responses on the board, have one student write them on the special piece of paper.

Responses may include:

- *Treat everyone equally.*
- *Treat everyone kindly.*
- *Never judge others.*
- *Allow others to be themselves.*
- *Help others to feel safe and comfortable.*
- *Allow others to be different.*
- *Never laugh at someone if it will hurt their feelings. Allow others to make mistakes without being made to feel a failure.*
- *Encourage others.*
- *Respect others’ beliefs and opinions.*
- *Help people with their problems.*
- *Include everyone.*
- *Listen respectfully to others.*
- *Never humiliate anyone.*
- *Respect the privacy of others.*
- *Apologize when we have offended someone.]*

 = 35 minutes



VOTE ON GUIDELINES

ABOUT 5 MINUTES

Thank you for all of your efforts to put together this list. Now we will vote on the items you think would be the 10 most important guidelines for us to use for this class to be a true learning community. It may or may not be all of the ones we listed.

[After the class has selected the items, ask them:]

How should a person respond when someone else does not follow one of the guidelines?



= 40 minutes



SIGNING THE COMMITMENT

ABOUT 3 MINUTES

[Allow for students' responses and say:]

We need to be a good example to them and do the right thing – even if they do not.

As your teacher, I promise myself and each of you that I will strive to be a good role model and to maintain a classroom environment based on the goals I listed on the board. To signify this commitment to myself and to you, I will put my signature on this special piece of paper that lists the guidelines we developed together.

Now it is your turn to signify your promise by each of you signing the paper as a promise to strive to be a respectful and compassionate member of our true learning community.



= 43 minutes

ENDING THE LESSON



SIGNING THE AGREEMENT

2 MINUTES

Before dismissing your students, remember to dictate the Parent-Teacher questions to them.

[The teacher facilitates the signing and tells the students:]

This agreement will be posted in our classroom as visible evidence of our agreement to one another. This agreement will help us remember our commitment to ourselves and to each other.



= 45 minutes

RESOURCES

GOING DEEPER

Today we came up with 10 guidelines, which all of you copied into your notebooks. Let me ask you a question about that list.

Would you like it if everyone in the class, including me, your teacher, always treated you the way the list says we should? If any of you wouldn't honestly answer "yes", then maybe we have the wrong list! I think we all hope that others will treat us that way.

The Bible records a profound statement by Jesus. In fact, it may be the most well-known thing Jesus ever said. So many people have believed in it and tried to live by it, that over the centuries it has come to be called the "Golden Rule". Do any of you know what it is? Can any of you recite it from memory?

[Whether or not anyone can, read Matthew 7:12a (the first half of the verse) or read the following paraphrase:]

"Do for others what you would like them to do for you."

Can any of you see a connection between the Golden Rule and the list we just made up for our class?

[Let several respond. If the following is not stated by any of the students, explain the following:]

Jesus has given us a general principle or guideline for living that actually contains all the things we came up with and more. We've already said we'd all like to be treated the way the list suggests. If we all truly treated each other as we want to be treated, we would do all of those 10 things, wouldn't we?

POSTER CONTEST ACTIVITY

If you don't have access to art supplies, it is also possible for them to make posters from regular sheets of paper using pens or pencils.

When they are finished, you may either let the class members vote for their favorites (no group members are allowed to vote for their own creation) or you may choose the winners.

Because we are going to post this list as a reminder, I thought it would also be good to have one or more posters to hang up in the room. So, we are going to have a poster-making contest. **The winning poster(s) will be hung in the room for all to see.**

[Arrange your class into teams of not fewer than three and not more than eight. Give each team a poster board and colored paints, pencils, or crayons. Tell the students they may choose to make posters of one of the 10 points, several of them, or all 10. They may also include the Golden Rule if they wish. They can represent the ideas with pictures or symbols, or they can write the actual words – or a combination.]

[Note: There is no Focus Point Discussion Segment today.]

PARENT-TEACHER CONNECTION

For Family Discussion:

Discuss with your adolescent the guidelines agreed upon by the class that meant the most to you and then discuss which of them might be applied in your family.

