

Sneetches Teacher

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Grade Level: Third Grade

Subject Area: Theater Arts, Visual Arts, Social Studies

School: Derby Academy [Private Pk-8th grade school in Hingham MA.]

Lessons/Classes: 5 class meetings 45 min. each in the Third Grade classroom consisting of 16 students.

Objectives:

Students will learn what it is like to experience privilege, social power and discrimination.

- a. Development of a sense of fairness for students.
- b. Application of story/script to real life experience.
- c. Students develop a more solid sense of self within the larger group.

Learning Standards:

The educational goal and mission statement of Derby Academy is to improve both mind and heart in every student that attends. This lesson is structured to teach the students valuable skills in theater and visual arts while simultaneously educating them about discrimination and fair social interaction.

Materials:

- Copies of “The Sneetches” by Dr. Seuss
- 2 T-Shirts for each student in class. 1 (yellow) for costume and 1 for identity art.
- Green stars with Velcro or tape on the back to adhere to T-Shirts.
- Art Supplies- paint, glue, glitter, construction paper, etc.
- “The Sneetches” cartoon Video

<http://www.schooltube.com/video/c8dd2e4979d02f1daa56/Dr-Seuss-Sneetches-Part-I>

<http://www.schooltube.com/video/575a718bb0333b34db85/Dr-Seuss-The-Sneetches-Part-II>

Suggested Procedures:

1. The weekend before the unit assign students to read “The Sneetches” with a family member and discuss together. The adults will be given a word list to use in discussion including terms such as privilege, fairness and discrimination.
2. **Class 1**
 - a. Watch “The Sneetches” video
 - b. Discuss the video and what students talked about during the pre-assignment
 - c. Discuss the meaning of privilege, social power and discrimination.

3. Class 2

- a. Through class discussion develop a list of school privileges. For example: recess, homework passes, being first in line, etc.
- b. Divide the class into 'Star Bellied Sneetches' and 'Plain Bellied Sneetches'
- c. For this day in all classes assign the listed privileges to the 'Star Bellied Sneetches.'
- d. Read "The Sneetches" out loud while the students act out the roles they are assigned to by their yellow T-Shirts and Velcro paper stars.

4. Class 3

- a. Reverse the students' roles. Now the starless have stars and privileges for the day.
- b. Again; read "The Sneetches" out loud while the students act out the parts. The students will take their stars on and off in accordance with the story/script.
- c. Class discussion about what it feels like to have privilege and social power versus not having them.

5. Class 4

- a. Watch the video 'A Class Divided'
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/divided/>
- b. Discuss the similarities and differences in student's personal experiences with "The Sneetches" and what they saw in the video.

6. Class 5

- a. Engage students in team building theater games such as trust circle and human knot.
- b. Using the second T-Shirt and art supplies, have the students create a 'costume' that shows and celebrates their identity. If the student should choose they may extend their 'identity art' into the creation of a cover for their art notebook/journal. Follow-up with discussion and show and tell.

Evaluation/Follow up: During the following week students will be put in groups of two. Each pair should contain a student from each "Sneetch" group. They will have access to all the class art supplies and art notebooks/journals. This team will work together daily to create two pages in their journal that express their feelings about the past week, what they have learned about privilege, social power and discrimination. At the end of the week the students will all be given the chance to see each other's art work and discuss what they learned.

Lesson Rationale for ‘Sneetches Teaches’

The goal of this lesson plan is to look at the concepts of privilege, social power and discrimination with students through theater, visual and written arts. By creating situations in which the students can experience both sides of the proverbial coin they can come to a real life understanding of what it is like to be discriminated against and create personal meaning. Discrimination, DeRosa and Johnson (2002) said:

“is a term that can mean everything and nothing. Yet, the current attention being given to the issue of diversity is an attempt to answer some fundamental about human identity and experience: Who are we? Why is there such division among people? How can we come together?” (p.2).

It is my belief that by enacting ‘Sneetches Teaches’ with students we create the opportunity for them to begin the process of answering these questions for themselves and in answering these questions begin to develop the “... expression of empathy that is the kernel of change.” (Salas, 2005, p. 79)

By engaging the students in theater exercises through the lens of Dr. Seuss’ story “The Sneetches” we are creating a forum for students to develop an understanding of diversity at a young age incorporating a familiar author’s work as a reader’s theater script. Cooper (2004) found that:

“The arts, and in particular theater and drama, are ideally equipped for learning because they engage children as individual, social and cultural beings. Dramatic situation gives learning a context. Like all stories, it gives them something, someone, a dilemma to care about; it matters and it resonates with their lives. To be human, young people must create

themselves through the imagination in order to have self-ownership. Through responsibility for ourselves, we become socially responsible” (p.4).

Theater’s specific ability to physically put students in a character’s shoes opens a window of opportunity missed by lessons that do not engage the arts. “I am not interested in people’s ability to generate a list of famous artists ... But to be able to experience works of art, to be able to move continually through process and understanding, through texture—the texture of memory, the texture of imagination, the texture of speculation—is to open up learning instead of closing it off” (Cahan & Zoya, 1996, p. 44). Through the tactile and emotional experiences of the theatrical exercises students’ minds will be opened more widely to develop empathy towards others who have experienced discrimination and to see where social privilege plays a role in real life. Theater specifically helps students to feel what it is like to be on both sides and come to understand in their own way what was expressed by Cahan and Zoya (1996) that:

“the kinds of people that we want to create are people who know how to negotiate, who value other people. I think we want people who are merciful towards others ... the kind of human being we are trying to create is not just an educated person ... There have to be certain humanistic values involved in that educational process ... We have to help them understand the nature of what it is that they are doing, why they are doing it, what sort of historical precedents it has, and what the consequences are”(p. 12).

The next step in the process, the identity art, created an opportunity for the students to reclaim their ‘non-Sneetch’ self, to allow the group as a whole to come back together and re-classify each other as individuals and not as ‘Sneetches.’ In celebrating what makes each student

an individual and giving time for quiet reflection the lessons of the week can really sink in. Cooper (2004) had the insight that:

“Young people are natural philosophers; they continually demand to know by constantly asking the most fundamental questions that the species has ever asked: 'Why am I here? Who am I? Where did I come from? Why are people as they are and the world as it is?' So why do we not make use of this potential for the benefits it would reap, not just for the child, but for the cohesion of society as a whole?” (p.3).

In this part of the lesson it is important to encourage the students to include whatever forms of art they choose into their ‘costume.’ They may choose to say something during show and tell, or build paper wings, or sing, or paint on themselves; the point is for the students to express themselves openly. “That is really what multiculturalism—or what I prefer to call diversity—is all about. It brings everyone in at the same level.” (Cahan & Zoya, 1996, p. 7).

Working with their art notebooks/journals, students will be able to express their learning and feelings about the lessons in a multitude of ways. The use of visual arts in this lesson is not to instill some greater meaning of ‘art’ but will allow them as many modalities as possible to process their learning. By not restricting the journals to writing or painting, by not making the lesson based solely on the theater components, there are opportunities for all learning styles and for each student to get the most out of the lesson. Cahan and Zoya (1996) found that the creation of this kind of leaning:

“is possible only if we are willing to have a curriculum that says everyone has the potential to understand, and everyone brings meaningful experiences to the classroom ...

I think that multicultural education means looking at the possibilities for locating identity and experience in different ways” (Cahan & Zoya, 1996, p. 40).

It is pointed out by Beverly Tatum (1992) that, “It is virtually impossible to live in the U.S. contemporary society and not be exposed to some aspect of the personal, cultural, and/or institutional manifestations of racism in our society”(pg 3). This is precisely why it is important to enact lessons such as this with students at a young age. Using diverse forms of art and learning styles, we make these very important lessons accessible to these students. Banks (1994) stated that:

“When content, concepts, and events are studied from many points of view, all of our students will be ready to play their roles in the life of the nation. They can help transform the United States from what it is to what it could and should be—many groups working together to build a strong nation that celebrates diversity” (p. 8).

In assessing the effectiveness of this lesson plan it is important to remember that it is not the kind of learning that is easily quantified, but educators will notice that learning through changes in students’ daily interaction. By looking at learning through a broader lens educational theories such as The 10 C’s according to DeRosa and Johnson (2002) “can help guide the way teachers present, teach, and evaluate the outcomes of their work, rather than measuring achievement simply through paper and pencil, win/lose tests. The framework opens up evaluation to more holistic and culturally-literate measures of change”(p.6). Through the lesson ‘Sneetches Teaches’ the development of tools for learning, the development of empathy for others and an ownership of self among the group can begin to develop. A focus on opportunities for open dialogue is very important. As Romney (2002) states:

“Dialogue is focused conversation, engaged in intentionally with the goal of increasing understanding, addressing problems, and questioning thoughts or actions. It engages the heart as well as the mind. It is different from ordinary, everyday conversation, in that dialogue has a focus and a purpose. Dialogue is different from debate, which offers two points of view with the goal of proving the legitimacy or correctness of one of the viewpoints over the other. Dialogue, unlike debate or even discussion, is as interested in the relationship(s) between the participants as it is in the topic or theme being explored. Ultimately, real dialogue presupposes an openness to modify deeply held convictions” (p.2).

It is my belief that through open dialogue, theater and visual arts we can truly benefit from what “Sneetches Teaches” and that is for students and faculty alike to show empathy towards others and embrace diversity. In the words of Dr. Seuss, “The Sneetches got really quite smart on that day. The day they decided that Sneetches are Sneetches and no kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches” (Seuss, 1989, p.65).

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