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**Classroom Law Project presents**

***Getting Along with our***

***Neighbors:***

a Townhall Simulation

for elementary students

*How do we get along together when*

*we are different from each other?*

**In this packet:**

* How to run a Town Hall Simulation
* The ‘Getting Along’ Town Hall set up
* Town Hall Simulation Role Sheets
* Appendix:
  + - * + Supplemental Literacy Lesson for older students:

*You have to Live in Somebody Else’s Country to Understand*

****Classroom Law Project Presents

**Getting Along with our Neighbors:**

**A Town Hall Simulation**

**Introduction:**

This town hall simulation gives elementary students the opportunity to learn an inquiry-based process that teaches empathy and collaboration. Students take on roles of different kinds of kids who might be in a class together. By taking on the perspective of those they might not necessarily relate to, children can gain a deeper understanding and ability to critically think through how to talk with each other. For the culminating act of the town hall, invite guests into your classroom to serve as the simulated “town council” or “school council” who can listen to the students’ testimony and ask questions. This will provide a truly authentic experience for the students and make their ultimate conclusions more relevant and memorable.

This method of active learning teaches students about civil discourse, respecting each other, collaboration, and developing a deeper understanding of an issue. This simulation lesson plan provides all the components needed by teachers and students.

**Objectives of a Town Hall Simulation:**

Students will:

* Analyze and articulate various perspectives of different kinds of kids that might be in a class together
* Develop and hone listening skills to better understand contradictory views
* Identify ways to compromise and collaborate around a shared goal
* Understand that their voices matter in decision making

**Explaining a Town Hall to Young Students:**

A town hall is an event where a community gets together to hear each other’s points of view and make a decision together. This town hall is about deciding a rule (or policy) about how we deal with situations in class when we disagree with each other so we can resolve conflicts even when have different opinions.

Our classroom is our town. A panel of visitors (or adults, or whomever you choose to be your panel) will act as our town council and listen to us testify about what we have learned from each other and what we decide together. Before we testify, we are going to talk together and learn new things so that we can understand each other better. Then we will think of solutions together and share them with the town council. After the town hall, we will have heard different opinions and ideas and we can talk about what kind of neighbors we want to be to each other.

**Part 1: Whole Class Brainstorming**

1. Brainstorm with the students around this question & write students’ responses up on the board or screen:

**“what reason might we get in a disagreement or fight with someone?”**

1. Next ask this question and do a new brainstorm:

**“what are ways we sometimes respond when someone says or does something we don’t like?”**

1. Third brainstorm:

**“What is a neighbor?”**

1. Finally, write this Main Question on the board/screen (this time leave the question open - no brainstorm):

**What fair rule or guideline can we make for our classroom**

**to help us get along when we disagree?**

***Vocabulary Note:*** A good idea may be to define “Fair” and “rule” and “guideline” so that everyone is working from the same idea and meaning. This could be another brainstorm activity to see what the students think these words mean.

**Part 2: The Town Hall Simulation:**

These steps can be done quickly all in one session or be paced out over several sessions in order to give students long enough to get a handle on their roles and have productive discussions.

**1. Explain students’ Goal:**

We will be proposing a rule or guideline about resolving conflicts to a panel acting as our town council. First you will take on a role of someone who might be in a classroom. Then you will talk with others like you. Then you will talk with others not like you. Finally, you will think about your answer to our big question.

**2. Distribute student roles & assemble in role groups to read roles:**

Students read and prepare for their part (can be done ahead of time). Divide students into role groups (in groups of the same role) to read and help each other understand the role.

Give each student a profile of the role that they will be playing and make time to review each role with the entire class. This allows for class discussion and deliberation on the varying perspectives.

Discuss with the class that their primary duty is to articulate the specific viewpoint of the role they are playing, and that it is their job as an engaged citizen to collaborate with those that share similar viewpoints, and to negotiate compromises with those that possess different perspectives.

**3. Discuss your role:**

Discuss who you are, what your experiences are, and how you might handle a situation when someone disagrees with you or maybe hurts your feelings. Students become the character in these discussions with their group. Everyone has a chance to speak their ideas and everyone listens. Students can also talk about what it means to become a role of someone who is not them.

**4. Assemble in jigsaw groups with one role from each group:**

Once the same-role groups have talked through who they are and how they might answer questions or act with other people, move students into new small groups with one of each role in a group. Students should share with others in the group who they are, describe themselves, and how they feel or respond when someone hurts their feelings or disagrees with them. Each student speaks and listens and determines the most important point from the other members.

**5. Collaborate on a Solution:**

In their mixed-role groups, students discuss their ideas for an answer to the Main Question. They should write down their ideas and talk about what they can all agree on while staying in their roles. Teacher can determine how long they need for their discussions and to write down any solutions they come up with together.

**6. Return to Role Groups to share:**

Students return to groups of all the same role. They each share with their group what they learned about the other kids in the class (the other roles), and what ideas and solutions they reached in their conversations together. Each student gets a chance to share what they learned and talked about in their other groups.

**7. Plan Testimony for each Role:**

In their role groups, students should plan a 1-minute testimony or statement that gives their perspective (in that role) and offers an idea or solution for how to deal with conflicts in the classroom that would be fair to everyone. Each group should pick one member to represent and play that role to testify at the town hall. (outline for statement attached)

**8. Town Hall Hearing:**

Arrange a table at the front of the classroom where the “town council” members will sit. The panel members can be adults in the community, other teachers, administrators, or other groups of students. The panel members should be prepared prior to hearing testimony.

Explain the ground rules for the meeting:

* Each role group should have 1-2 students act as the speaker(s) (if having 2 helps students present the testimony, then choose what works best for them)
* Be courteous to others even when your character disagrees with someone
* Listen without interrupting while others are speaking
* Be open-minded; try to understand an issue from other points of view
* Write questions down rather than asking them during testimony
* Council panel can ask 1-2 questions of each character (max 4 minutes)

It is recommended that students not on the panel do not ask questions—when questions are opened up to the full class, the Town Hall can easily turn into a debate, which is a different activity with different objectives. Leave the questioning to the panel.

Panel members need to be conscious of allowing all parties to speak and articulate their perspectives. Students should listen to each testimony and write down any questions they have and what they think about the testimony, using the Testimony graphic organizer.

Ask the Panel Members to give quick feedback after all the testimony has been taken. They do not need to announce a conclusion or decision, but rather commend the students on what they learned from the students and what they have achieved through this process of listening to each other.

**Part 3: Debrief with the Class:**

Begin the class debrief by facilitating discussion on the town hall simulation. Ask question that address how each student felt while playing their role. Let the students express their thoughts and encourage them to ask each other questions. Points of discussion may include topics such as:

* Challenge of taking a position other than your own
* Challenge of persuading others to your position
* Process of town halls and local government
* How youth can be involved in local government
* Have their views or perspectives on conflict or disagreements changed after completing this exercise

You can follow through with collaboration on a rule or guide for the class to make the process truly authentic for them and give them a sense of democratic participation in deciding their own environment. The empowering nature of this is that students have more buy-in to resolving conflicts, civil discourse, and listening to each other while the teacher has a policy that has power because of who shaped it.

**Note:** Town Hall lessons are extremely modifiable. Teacher should consider how to best use this framework with their students.

Possible modifications include:

* Reducing the number of witnesses—pick the roles you believe will have the most impact on your students’ understanding of the issues involved
* Providing more or less information about the various roles depending on how much your students need their talking points scripted vs. their ability to be extemporaneous
* Providing less information about the various roles so as to have students perform individual or group research on their positions
* Inviting professionals in the community to visit the classroom to talk about these issues
* Extending the lesson based on particular areas of interest to the students—these often emerge during the exercise

Getting Along with our Neighbors Role

**New Student**

I just moved to this area after my mom got a new job. She said it would be better for all of us because we could have our own house and yard. She said we might even get a dog. But I’ve only ever lived in one city until now. I had to say goodbye to all my friends and my teachers from my old school. I was kind of sad to move. I like this school and my teachers, but I am shy and don’t really know how to make friends. Sometimes I don’t really know what to say and people think I am being rude because I don’t talk. A lot of people don’t seem to like me and I haven’t really been able to make friends yet. I don’t know how to tell people that I’m sad leaving my old school because I don’t want them to think I don’t like this school. But not talking to people makes it seem like I don’t like them. So I’m not sure how to get along with people.

Getting Along with our Neighbors Role

**Immigrant Student**

Two years ago, my family had to run away from our country because of all the fighting there. It was very scary, and we had to make a long journey. I did not know where we were going but I tried to help my mother and father by taking care of my younger sister. We traveled many miles and had to stay in camps with many other people who were trying to be safe from all the fighting and dangers. At one of the camps, a person helped us apply to come to this country and be safe. We had to wait over a year and my parents had to work very hard to show we would be good members of our new community. Finally, we flew on an airplane and arrived here late at night. We were each given a plastic bag with a toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, and bar of soap. Our family stayed in one room in a motel for a few weeks.

But now my mom and dad have jobs and I have my own bedroom. I am trying very hard to learn to speak English, but sometimes I forget words. Kids make fun of me for not knowing the right words to speak or for eating the food my mother makes me for lunch. I got into a fight last week on the playground because a kid laughed at how I spoke. I want to fit in and make friends, but I also don’t like when people make fun of me. I left my country because of fighting so I don’t want to fight, but sometimes I don’t know what else to do.

Getting Along with our Neighbors Role

**Student in a Wheelchair**

I have been going to this school all my school years and so I know a lot of people. I try to be really friendly but sometimes it’s hard because I can’t do everything the other kids do. I get around in a wheelchair, and I’m really good at it. I can go super fast, and I can even go down stairs if I need to! I’m really smart and my favorite subject is math. I like to help my friends get their math homework right and lots of times they ask me for help too. But sometimes I accidentally knock things over or I can’t get to a table or desk in a room filled with other kids. I don’t like to ask people to move out of my way, so I try to make jokes about it. But because I make a lot of jokes, people sometimes don’t realize that it hurts my feelings when they block my way or throw things down on the ground that cause my wheelchair to get stuck. I guess I make jokes because I don’t want people to know I’m sad but making jokes doesn’t keep it from happening, so I’m not sure how to tell people what it really feels like.

Getting Along with our Neighbors Role

**Student Who Has to Work Hard to Keep Up**

I don’t really like school very much because sometimes I read slower than other kids. I have to work extra hard and spend extra time at home so I can keep up with everything we are learning. It really makes me mad a lot because I get really frustrated trying to figure out stuff and sometimes kids laugh at me because I can’t read as fast as they can. I get in a lot of fights because I don’t want people to think I’m not smart, so want to show them that I’m strong and I can beat them at something. I don’t think my teachers like me because I argue a lot and get in fights. It’s not that I don’t like people, I just get so mad and frustrated, it’s easier to get into fights. I don’t really WANT to fight but sometimes I feel like no one listens to me and people will just make fun of me because I read slowly.

Getting Along with our Neighbors Role

**Student feels left out**

My favorite subject in school is science. I want to grow up to be a botanist and work with all kinds of plants. I’ve lived on a farm my whole life and so I’ve grown up with all kinds of crops and plants. I like thinking about how seeds grow and how to help seeds be stronger in case it doesn’t rain enough. But even though I like science and school, a lot of times I would rather just think about experiments and being a scientist than pay attention to other subjects. I get left out of a lot of things other kids do together. I don’t know why they leave me out except that I talk a lot about science and plants and other kids don’t like those things as much as I do. So maybe that means they don’t like me either. I don’t really get in fights, but I don’t really have a very good time because I don’t have good friends. I wish I had more friends, but it’s hard to be nice when people tease me for liking science. I would rather just day dream about what I will do when I grow up instead of being a part of the class. I’d like to figure out how to make friends, but it seems too hard sometimes.

Getting Along with our Neighbors Role

**Everybody’s Friend**

I love school and have lots of friends. I’ve been going here for all my school years and I get along with pretty much everyone. Well at least I try to. I am a pretty happy person and like to make jokes and have fun. I think most people like me. But I don’t like arguments or disagreeing with people. So a lot of times when someone disagrees with me, I just stay quiet and try to avoid an argument. I just don’t like uncomfortable conversations, and I don’t want to be blamed for anything. I’d rather just be happy. I know that by avoiding talking with people I disagree with that I might not solve any problems, but I just feel like if I ignore the disagreement it might go away. I prefer to crack a joke or be funny and try to make people laugh instead. I guess some people who I disagree with might want to talk about it but I don’t know what to say and being serious sometimes feel weird, so I try not to talk about stuff.

**Describing My Role**

How I am like my character:

Three or four main things I notice about “me” (my character):

How I am different from my character:

What the class could do to help “me” (my character) feel more like I belong and help me solve disagreements:

**Learning From Each other**

How I feel as the other kids in my group describe themselves:

Things that surprised me as I listened to the other kids’ stories:

**Testimony Plan**

1. Describe yourself (your role) in your own words:

1. After talking with my classmates and listening to their perspectives, I think the best guideline or rule for our class to help us get along together is:
2. I think this is the best solution because:

***Supplemental Activity for older students:***

**Supplemental Literacy Lesson:**

*You Have to Live in Somebody Else’s Country to Understand*

*Source: PBS.org*

**Objectives:**

Students will:

* Reflect on personal emotions associated with being an outsider
* Recognize newly-arrived Americans' feelings and experiences
* Empathize with new immigrants who encounter alienation and isolation living in a new land
* Analyze a poem about immigration

**Materials:**

* Chalk and chalkboard, or chart paper and markers
* The poem "You Have to Live in Somebody Else's Country to Understand"

**Procedure:**

Preparation: Invite an adult or student literate in a second language who will read the poem in his or her language to the class. Most students should not be familiar with the language. If there are several who do speak the language, it will offer interesting contrast to the majority's interaction with the reading.

1. Tell the class that a guest speaker has volunteered to read them the poem "You Have to Live in Somebody Else's Country to Understand,” written in 1984 by Noy Chou, a ninth-grade student from a high school in suburban Boston who was born in Cambodia. Have the reader introduce himself or herself in the second language. Expect students to express discomfort, surprise, confusion, etc.
2. Request that students close their eyes as they listen to the poem to remain free of distractions. Remind them to listen without talking. Invite the guest to read.
3. After the poem is read, instruct the guest to give students these instructions in the second language: "Please take out a piece of paper and complete this journal assignment in five minutes. Describe a time when you felt like an outsider, or when someone made judged you without knowing you and/or being aware of your circumstances.”
4. Repeat the instructions in English, indicating that this is for the benefit of those who are non-native speakers of the guest's second language.
5. Ask students to describe their reactions during the first reading of the poem. Cluster student responses as they speak. Sample discussion questions include:

* How did you feel when they did not understand the language?
* What did you want to do when the reader begin to recite in a language with which you were unfamiliar?
* Were you able to pick up on any aspect of the poem—cadence, emotion—despite not knowing the language?
* For those who might have understood the language, how did the poem make you feel?
* What was your thought about classmates who could not understand the poem? How might you have helped them?
* How might the teacher and the reader have helped you to understand the poem?

1. Have students review the clustered responses. Ask them to consider more broadly how the feelings they experienced related to those of new immigrants. Based on this activity, what are some of the issues immigrant students might face when they arrive somewhere new?
2. If the guest has remained, students can engage in discussion with him or her about personal immigrant experiences, if the speaker is a foreign-born American.
3. Hand out copies of the poem in English. Have either the guest or you read it aloud or have students read it. Have students analyze and discuss the poem. Ask them to review it again to select phrases, lines, or passages that strike them. Ask students to write a corresponding personal experience that reflects the essence of the selected sections. Allow five to ten minutes for this activity. Invite students to share their thoughts.
4. Have students relate their experiences to those of immigrants. Some discussion questions include:

* What groups and individuals are treated like outsiders in America?
* What are the possible results or consequences when people feel like outsiders in their surroundings?
* What did you learn from this experience and the poem that might help you to better understand the feelings of outsiders in the future?
* How might you act differently toward someone when you recognize that s/he might be feeling like an outsider?

(Poem handout on next page)

**Author of this lesson:** Patty Litwin taught social studies for 16 years in the Los Angeles Unified School District. She is now assigned to the Collective Bargaining Educational Project, which delivers lessons on labor studies throughout the district. She is the winner of the Perryman Award for Outstanding Social Studies Teaching in Multicultural Education. Her paternal grandparents were from Poland and her maternal great-grandparents were from Ireland.

***You Have to Live in Somebody Else’s Country to Understand***

By Noy Chou

1986

What is it like to be an outsider?   
What is it like to sit in the class where everyone has blond hair and you have black hair?   
What is it like when the teacher says, "Whoever wasn't born here raise your hand."   
And you are the only one.   
Then, when you raise your hand, everybody looks at you and makes fun of you.   
You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.   
What is it like when the teacher treats you like you've been here all your life?   
What is it like when the teacher speaks too fast and you are the only one who can't understand what he or she is saving, and you try to tell him or her to slow down.   
Then when you do, everybody says, "If you don't understand, go to a lower class or get lost."   
You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.   
What is it like when you are an opposite?   
When you wear the clothes of your country and they think you are crazy to wear these clothes and you think they are pretty.   
You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.   
What is it like when you are always a loser.   
What is it like when somebody bothers you when you do nothing to them?   
You tell them to stop but they tell you that they didn't do anything to you.   
Then, when they keep doing it until you can't stand it any longer, you go up to the teacher and tell him or her to tell them to stop bothering you.   
They say that they didn't do anything to bother you.   
Then the teacher asks the person sitting next to you.   
He says, "Yes, she didn't do anything to her" and you have no witness to turn to.   
So the teacher thinks you are a liar.   
You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.   
What is it like when you try to talk and you don't pronounce the words right?   
They don't understand you.   
They laugh at you but you don't know that they are laughing at you, and you start to laugh with them.   
They say, "Are you crazy, laughing at yourself? Go get lost, girl."   
You have to live in somebody else's country without a language to understand.   
What is it like when you walk in the street and everybody turns around to look at you and you don't know that they are looking at you.   
Then, when you find out, you want to hide your face but you don't know where to hide because they are everywhere.   
You have to live in somebody else's country to feel it.