Middle School Lesson 3: Empathy and Shared Values through Art and Poetry

To have great discussions, it's important to understand not only our own ideas but also what others think. Understanding one another's experiences is the key to finding things we agree on. In this lesson, students will start by figuring out what's important to them and how they see the world. Then, students will make "I Am" poems that show their experiences and values. They'll perform these poems in a poetry slam, where they'll listen and make a list of shared class values. This list will help students remember that even though they think differently or have different opinions, they still care about similar things and can find common ground. After the poetry slam, students will display their self-portraits and poems on the walls, like in an art gallery.

Time required: 3 or more class periods (40–45 minutes each)

- Class period 1: Direct instruction; begin poetry writing (homework: poem rough draft, begin self-portrait)
- Class period 2: Finish poem final draft and work on self-portrait (homework: final draft of poem and self-portrait)
- Class period 3 and later: Poetry slam and shared values discussion

This project lends itself nicely to be used right before a parent night. The art and poems are good for parents to view as they circulate through the classrooms and hallways or parent visitation events.

Standards

Common Core State Standard (CCSS)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL 5.1, 6.1, 7.1, 8.1 (Grades 5–8)

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, group, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

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CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.6.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting, or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

National Council for Social Studies C3 Framework

D2.Civ.7.5-8

Apply civic virtues and democratic principles in school settings.

Learning Objectives

- Define and discuss perspectives, empathy, and values; find shared values and common ground.
- Students create a poem and a work of art representing themselves, their experiences, and their values.
- Students perform their poems in a poetry slam.
- Whole class explores shared values and common ground.

Essential Question

How can empathy and shared values be used to build common ground?

Materials Needed

- Bell Ringer Figjam: "Can People Who Disagree Find Common Ground?"
- Class Presentation: Empathy and Shared Values through Poetry and Art
- I Am Poem rough draft worksheets
- How to Write an I Am Poem
- Art Supplies for self-portraits
- Class Discussion Tally Grader to assist with audience behavior grades
- Large paper or poster to write shared values mentioned in poems during the poetry slam
- Class norms
- Sentence frames

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- Oral Performance and Class Discussion Rubric
- Self-Portrait Rubric

Class Period 1

Bell Ringer—Testing the Water (5 Minutes)

Ask students to participate in the "Can People Who Disagree Find Common Ground?" Bell Ringer Figjam. (Before class, this should be sent to students in the school learning management system.) Allow students to discuss their opinions.

Part I: Direct Instruction/Class Discussion

- Class Presentation: "Empathy and Shared Values through Poetry and Art"
- Turn and Talk Strategy

The class presentation guides the entire lesson for the first class period.

- Definitions (Slide 4): Allows for discussion and has students write definitions in their notebooks.
- Perspectives (Slides 5–14): Asks students to consider the importance of being able to see things from multiple perspectives.
- Empathy (Slides 15–17): Discusses the importance of being able to see situations from different perspectives in order to empathize with others.

Whole Class Mini-Discussion

- Shared Values (Slides 19–21): Helps students to get in touch with their values and discuss values that are shared by the class as a whole.
- Poetry and Art (Slides 22–29): Gives instructions and modeling on how the students will be crafting "I Am" poems and self-portraits. The purpose of these activities is to express experiences, beliefs, and values in art and to share and discuss them as a class. The poem and art will be used to find shared values. Explain that students will need to practice reading their poems at home so that they will be comfortable performing them at the poetry slam.

Grading (Slide 30 shows the rubrics)

- Explain that after the Poetry Slam and sharing of self-portraits, student work will be celebrated and displayed.

End of Class Period 1: Homework Assignment

- How to Write an "I Am" Poem

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- Student “I Am” poem rough draft worksheets
- Give students blank paper for portraits
- Share performance and self-portrait rubrics with students

Class Period 2

Work Period

This entire class period will allow students time to revise and type final drafts of their “I Am” poems and to continue working on their self-portraits. The teacher can walk around and help students as needed.

End of Class Period 2: Homework Assignment

Finish final draft of “I Am” poem, and finish self-portrait. Practice reading the poem aloud smoothly to be prepared for the next class period’s poetry slam performance.

Class Period 3 and After (as Long as It Takes for All Speakers to Perform)

Poetry Slam and Self-Portrait Presentation

The poetry slam is a friendly and noncompetitive event. Before you start, review the class norms and expectations. For students who might need extra support, have sentence frames available to help them join the group discussion.

During the poetry slam, students will take turns standing up and reading their poems. They can display their poems on the smartboard for the class to follow along. They can also display their self-portraits. After each speaker performs their poem, the class can show appreciation with snaps of applause. Then, as a class, discuss the values that are either directly stated or can be inferred from each speaker’s poetry and artwork. The teacher writes down class ideas on a big piece of paper.

Closure

After sharing all poems, the class will look at the big paper with everyone’s values and will mark the ones that many people have in common. The teacher will explain, “Remembering these shared values will help us find common ground when we have disagreements. Even when we don’t have the same values, it’s important to try and understand what’s important to others by putting ourselves in their shoes. Always remember that empathy and shared values are the foundation for finding common ground. We will use our empathy and shared values every time we practice civil discourse.”

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After the Lesson

Post the “shared values” paper on the classroom walls, along with the students’ poetry and self-portraits.

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