

**SCHOOL RIVALRIES**

Don't have to be ugly

**DEFINING MOMENTS**

Rethinking dictionaries for kids

**LGBT TEACHERS**

In or out of the closet?

# TEACHING TOLERANCE

TOLERANCE.ORG



ISSUE 41 | SPRING 2012

**WHEN TEEN  
DATING  
BECOMES  
ABUSIVE**

LEARN TO SPOT THE SIGNS AND HELP  
STUDENTS AVOID—AND BREAK FREE FROM—  
ENTANGLING RELATIONSHIPS



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**FREE**  
TO TEACHERS  
GRADES 6-12

TEACHING TOLERANCE PRESENTS

# A Time *for* Justice

AMERICA'S CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

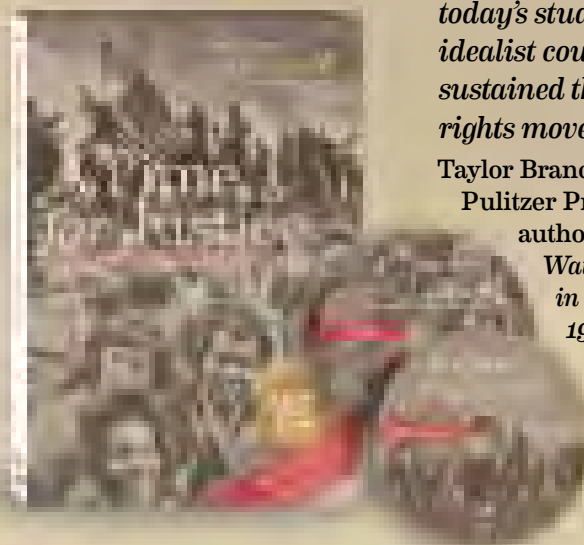


**“It wasn’t no Civil War.  
Wasn’t no world war.  
Just people in the  
same country, fighting  
each other.”**

In *A Time for Justice*, four-time Academy Award®-winning filmmaker Charles Guggenheim captured the spirit of the civil rights movement through historical footage and the voices of those who participated in the struggle. Narrated by Julian Bond and featuring Rep. John Lewis, the 38-minute film allows today's generation of students to witness firsthand the movement's most dramatic moments—the bus boycott in Montgomery, the school crisis in Little Rock, the violence in Birmingham and the triumphant 1965 march for voting rights.

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# TEACHING TOLERANCE

ISSUE 41 | SPRING 2012

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ILLUSTRATION BY **VALERIE DOWNES**



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African Americans traveled an extraordinary path to equality in the 1950s and 1960s. Have your students revisit some of the key moments with this civil rights poster and timeline. (see page 32)



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**Teaching Tolerance**  
now available online



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# TEACHING TOLERANCE

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*tolerance.org*

- A place to get the Teaching Tolerance perspective on a wide variety of social justice topics that matter to you and your students
- A host of teachers' voices from inside the classroom
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TO TEACHERS  
GRADES 6 & UP

THE

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"I WAS IN TEARS AT THE END, ALONG WITH SOME OF THE STUDENTS. ... THIS IS THE BEST CIVIL RIGHTS DOCUMENTARY I'VE EVER USED."

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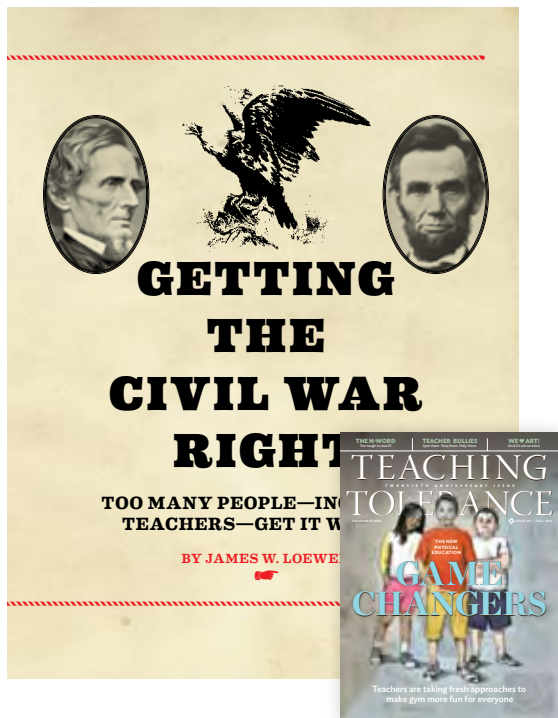


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# FIRST BELL

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## Reader Exchange

“Getting the Civil War Right” sparked this online exchange:

The fact that many teachers in your poll believe that there were other issues besides slavery [that caused the war] should not make you think that all of these teachers got it wrong and that you must now set them straight. To me it shows that there were numerous issues which led to the differing opinions between the federal and state leaders. ... I have subscribed to *Teaching Tolerance* magazine for many years, and I was completely taken aback at an article that was this one-sided.

—SUBMITTED BY JACKSONSKIN

As a southerner, it has taken me most of my life to let go of the “Lost Cause” and “Noble, Christian South” mythology. I was even one of those who refused to call it the “Civil War,” choosing instead to refer to it as . . . “The War of Northern Aggression.” Over time, as I read and studied and learned the truth, I had to abandon the fairy tales and outright lies that were taught to me about the southern cause and southern leaders. I recognized that the Civil War was fought for no other reason than slavery, racism and white supremacy.

—SUBMITTED BY JAMES

Last issue’s story “Getting the Civil War Right” created a spirited online debate. Readers also told us they enjoyed new features like “Ask Teaching Tolerance” and “Down the Hall.” Be sure to check them out.

## THANKS FOR LAST FALL’S ISSUE

Please pass on my huge congratulations for an excellent edition of *Teaching Tolerance* this fall! Honestly, it’s one of the best ever and really invites participation. I usually find something to be inspired about in the magazine, but this time every article seems to be especially thought-provoking and informative! Well done!

LIZ SNELL  
VIA EMAIL

## COMING OUT AS AN ATHEIST

Re: Your article on secular student groups (“The Unaffiliated Unite,” Fall 2011). I can attest from personal experience to the mistrust and disapproval of atheism. I have much stronger reactions when I “come out” as an atheist than I do when I come out as a lesbian. I guess what always stuns me is how invested people seem in what other people believe. I can’t see how my personal theological

beliefs, regardless of what they are, have anything to do with anyone but me.

HEATHER  
VIA THE TEACHING TOLERANCE  
MAGAZINE WEBSITE

## CONFEDERATE FLAG: ‘HERITAGE, NOT HATE’

Oh, my. I am sure you will be getting responses besides mine regarding your advice on the Confederate flag (Ask *Teaching Tolerance*, Fall 2011). Your answer reflected a genuine lack of understanding when it comes to

students and schools in the South. A good many students in my school in Garner, N.C., and the surrounding area wear or display the flag. With few exceptions, no one particularly takes note or offense. It is part of the culture, and students on the whole accept it as such. By the way, the schools I have taught in have been and are very diverse.

If questioned, I've had more than one student say they'd be privileged and proud to take you to one of the many small cemeteries in the area and show you where their grandparents, great-grandparents, uncles and cousins from the past rest. The statues on the capitol building's square also feature southern heroes. Though, of course, there are always exceptions, for many folks here it really is "heritage, not hate." You need to be tolerant of them and their viewpoints.

SANDRA STILL  
Garner, N.C.

**THE WORST KIND OF BULLIES**

Re: Your story "Bully at the Blackboard" (Fall 2011)



about teachers and administrators who bully students. We have unfortunately seen this problem where a teacher actually encouraged the class to turn on a child in a very determined manner, including having the other children all write about the target child and their views of him (after the teacher taunted him). The principal at the school saw nothing wrong with that behavior by a teacher! Outrageous.

MARY HERNANDEZ  
CERIBELLO  
VIA FACEBOOK

**THANKS FOR 'TIME FOR JUSTICE'**

The 20th anniversary issue of *Teaching Tolerance* magazine is absolutely wonderful! I want to especially thank you for the "Teaching

the Movement" article on *A Time for Justice*. As a teacher whose graduate students often tell me that my courses are the first time they have been

exposed to American civil rights history, I appreciate more than I can say that today's public school students will be exposed to this aspect of American history.

I hope that our program of personally exposing our law students to this history, firsthand, each summer has been an effort which supports and advances your work with the Teaching Tolerance project and now this video. We value our relationship with you and have tried to make this history personal to law students who are inclined to public service.

BOB BICKEL  
Stetson University  
College of Law  
Gulfport, Fla.

Jim Melnyk  
We need more groups like Teaching Tolerance!

Susan Brindza Choplin  
Tolerance—teach it to children by living it.

Sarah Coleman  
This is a tool you can use if you're just starting to contemplate [teaching about diversity], and it's excellent for adding tools to your box if you've already been-there, done-that.

Sue Roosma  
I have used resources from these wonderful people for many years. Thank you for providing teachers with free materials to promote the cause.

Paul Houser  
If you ever consider a career in teaching, or want to become more involved with your child's education, this [Teaching Tolerance] page could provide invaluable information!



**TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!**  
Have an opinion about something you see in *Teaching Tolerance* magazine or on our website? Email us at [editor@tolerance.org](mailto:editor@tolerance.org). Please put "Letter to the Editor" in the subject line. Or mail a letter to 400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36104.



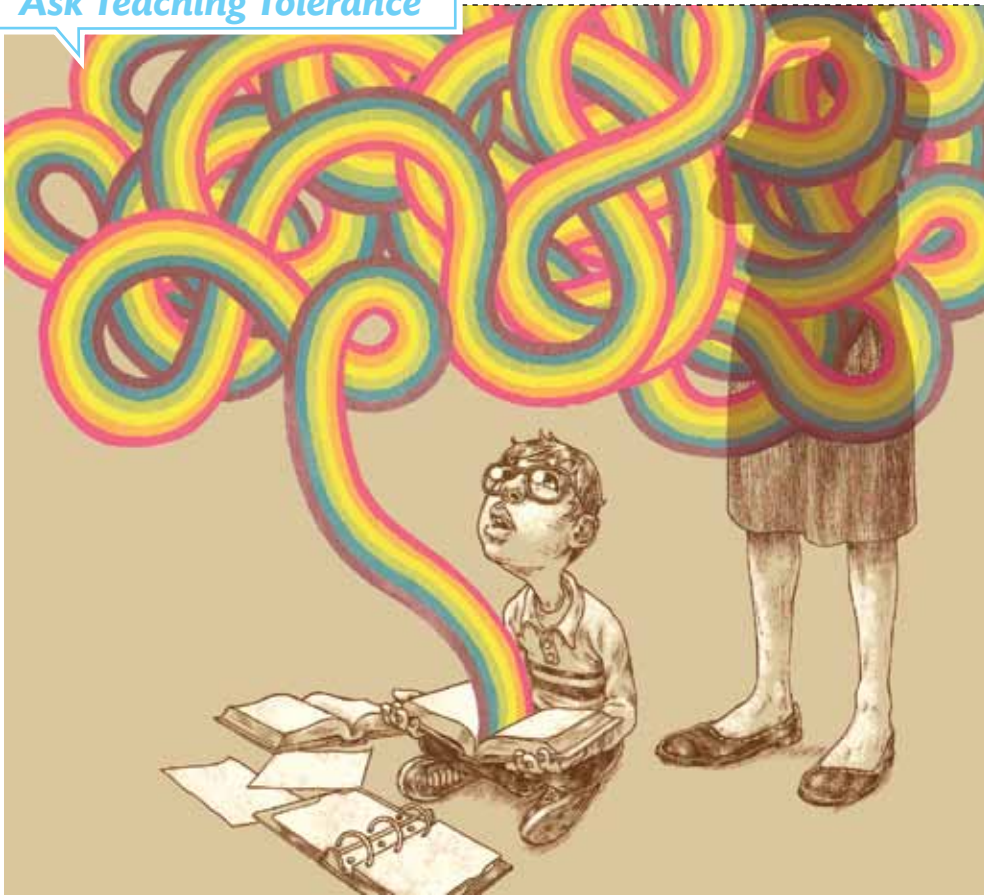
Tabitha Panariso  
@tpanariso  
@Tolerance\_org Our middle school students will be drawing parallels between the Holocaust and bullying in an assembly on Monday!!!  
#teachingtolerance

**DID YOU KNOW?**

*Odds of suspension in urban middle schools, 2006: African-American male—3 times as great as white male; African-American female—4 times as great as white female*  
—SOUTHERN POVERTY LAW CENTER AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS PROJECT AT UCLA



## Ask Teaching Tolerance



### Q. What can we tell parents who object to California's new law on gay history in textbooks?

First, find out what they're objecting to and whether they know what the law actually stipulates. Many people mistakenly think it's about sex education or that it indoctrinates kids. Then reassure them that it's part of an approach that recognizes that many different types of people participated in our history. The new law simply recognizes the contributions of those who have been traditionally overlooked—LGBT individuals, people with disabilities, people of color, etc.

**At my high school, black students from different cultures (Cape Verdeans, Haitians and African Americans) discriminate against each other and emphasize their differences rather than their similarities. How can this be countered?**

You might see the students as black, but they clearly hold some very different views. Like all people, they're jockeying for position socially and see the distinctions more than the similarities. As a school

community, learn as much as you can about each group to better understand how they perceive each other. Instead of demanding that the students just get along, ask how your school policies and culture encourage or discourage intergroup relationships. Finally, try to create opportunities for the various groups to learn about each other's experiences. You can also encourage solidarity by helping them see what they have in common—they are all part of the African diaspora.

**How can I teach anti-bullying to those who have a different definition of "bullying?" I'd like a concise definition at hand to challenge those who might say they're just "motivating" people.**

Experts (and most state anti-bullying laws) agree that bullying is aggressive behavior involving unwanted attention, negative words or actions, is repeated over time and features an imbalance of power. But don't count on a "concise definition" deterring your "motivator." Your school's anti-bullying policy should include an agreed-upon definition that can't be challenged. It sounds like the bullying you're concerned about is coming from an adult. Check out our Fall 2011 article on teachers who bully ("Bully at the Blackboard") and see our online guide about how to respond. Also, see this issue's article on size bias ("Weighing In: Healthy at Any Size?" p. 36).

**Should body shape or size be included within the protections of cultural sensitivity?**

Yes, all people should be treated with respect, regardless of their physical appearance.

#### ASK TEACHING TOLERANCE!

Need the kind of advice and expertise that only Teaching Tolerance can provide?

Email us at [editor@tolerance.org](mailto:editor@tolerance.org) with "Ask TT" in the subject line.

BLOG//ACTING “WHITE”

# It’s Time to Put Stereotype Threat to Rest

“The girls glared at me. ‘She’s just trying to act white,’ one said.

“I remember those piercing but confusing words cutting me like a knife,” says Marguerite Rucker. “I clinched my Super Reader certificate. My puzzled expression was taken as

bravado by the African-American girls, who responded with a threatening question, ‘Do you want us to fix your face?’

“I should have run, but my first 10 years were spent learning lessons from an outspoken, sometimes scary African-American father who believed in never backing down. As my hands tightened into hammer-like fists, a shoving match began. Ironically it would be the start of a new and lasting friendship with my accuser. But what caused these girls to look at me as someone who was trying to become another race? Thirty years later, I’ve found some answers through my own high school-aged children and 20 years of teaching. ...”



**... and readers replied:**

“I went to an economically, but not racially, diverse high school. The students who were smart or hard-working were frequently taunted by other students of the same white race for essentially placing themselves as being better than the low-achieving, low-motivated students.”

“My friend named her son Kyle and got tons of grief from the black community—even at her church—for giving her child a ‘white’ name. We laughed about it, but it clearly hurt her. Her comeback was, ‘It’s not a white name. It’s my child’s name, and he’s not white.’”

GET THE FULL DISCUSSION HERE

[tolerance.org/stereotype-threat](http://tolerance.org/stereotype-threat)



*Suburban poverty rose 53% from 2000 to 2011.* —THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

## Tell This Year’s Candidates Why Kids Matter

We’re inviting educators to send a message to this year’s presidential candidates. What do schools need? What do students need? How can we give all children an opportunity to learn?

*Teaching Tolerance* readers are uniquely qualified to send this message. The half-million educators who make up our audience include teachers of all grades and subjects. They represent widely different regions and neighborhoods. As part of the TT community, you are in solidarity with other administrators, counselors, librarians, college faculty and teachers who stand for children’s education. What do you want the next president to do to give all children the opportunity to learn?

Messages should be short (no more than 200 words), not directed at a specific candidate and focused on what’s needed to bring opportunities to students. Email your response to [editor@teachingtolerance.org](mailto:editor@teachingtolerance.org) with “Message to the Candidate” in the subject line. Be sure to include contact information.



## FREE STUFF!

These web resources offer diversity-rich information and materials for teachers.

**DonorsChoose.org** is a nonprofit that connects public school teachers with people who want to support classroom learning. Teachers submit a classroom project and the materials needed. Donors choose a project to sponsor, and students show what they learned.

[donorschoose.org](http://donorschoose.org)

**The Conflict Resolution Education Connection** lives up to its name by promoting this topic worldwide. The organization collects information on best practices, serves as a clearinghouse, provides instructional materials and links like-minded groups.

[creducation.org/cre/teachers](http://creducation.org/cre/teachers)

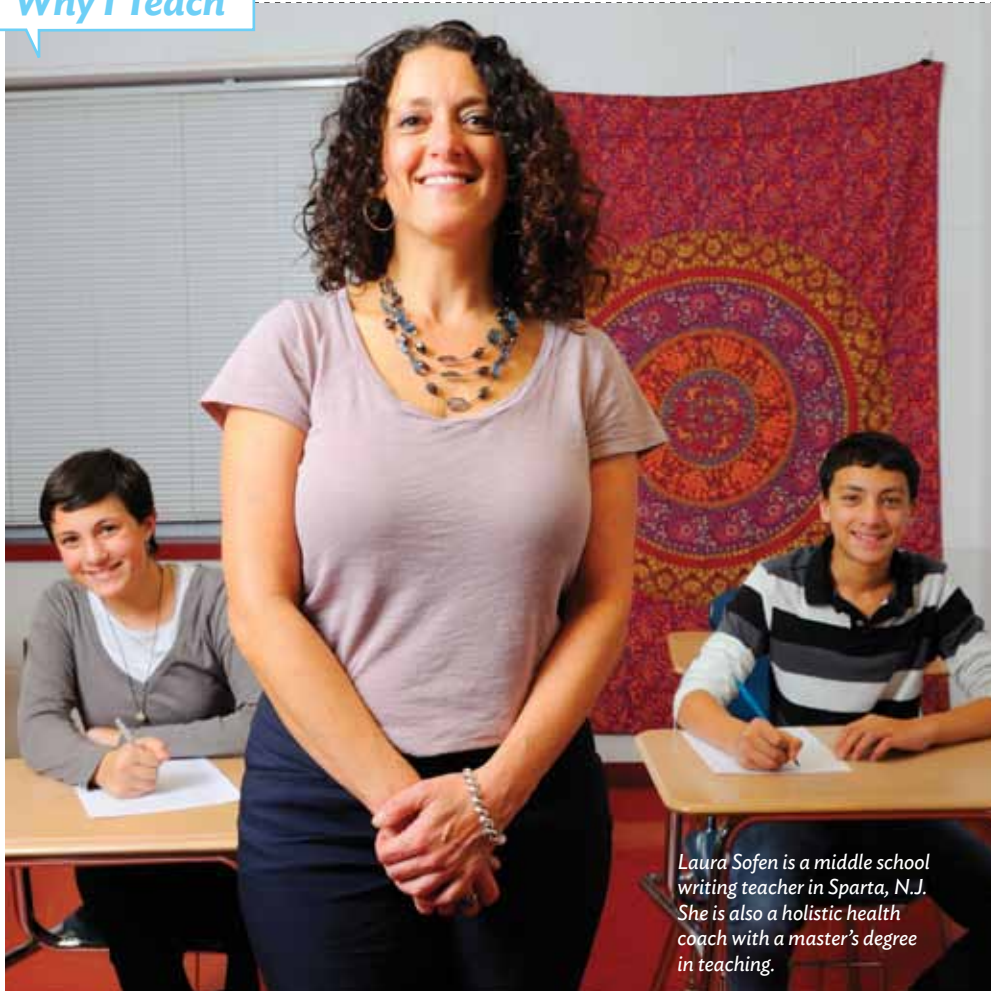
Although intended for teachers on New York’s Long Island, the **Teach Immigration** site is a great resource for anyone teaching about this topic. It includes videos, tool kits, readings and links to interactive activities.

[teachimmigration.org](http://teachimmigration.org)

**“Race: Are We So Different?”** is a project of the American Anthropological Association. Its website provides teaching guides, interactive time lines, games and other materials teachers will find valuable in starting discussions about race.

[understandingrace.org](http://understandingrace.org)





Laura Sofen is a middle school writing teacher in Sparta, N.J. She is also a holistic health coach with a master's degree in teaching.

biting wit was matched only by his expansive understanding of both literature and adolescence. After some time, instead of feeling like I was drowning, it started to feel like I was treading water, and that didn't feel so bad.

Most of the middle school students I teach today come from the same background I had. They have decent homes, food in the refrigerator and heat that works. On the surface, they shouldn't have any complaints. Their schools are safe, one or both parents are around and they've always got the latest gadgets. They don't have the kinds of challenges that kids in urban or rural areas face. Their lives, however, are not as charmed as they appear.

The despair, disgust and rage that plagued me as an adolescent comes in different forms in my school, but it's the same three-headed beast I used to know so well. While it makes me feel good to hear it, I'm not surprised when my students tell me I understand them, because I really do. Though it's been more years than I care to remember, the point is I do remember how wretched and lonely growing up can be, even in the best of circumstances. Whether it's feeling neglected by a busy parent or isolated by a group that used to be friendly, the discomfort of growing up still pinches kids in both large and small ways. I've lived long enough to know

## Catching Kids Before They Sink

**I USED TO BE A BAD GIRL.** I was self-destructive, angry and fearless. These traits, coupled with a decent amount of intelligence, took me to all the places bad girls go. For many years, I bounced from bad decisions to bad jobs to bad relationships. My life was a mess for a long time, and all I knew how to do was make it worse. I couldn't talk to my mother, my father wasn't around and my friends were either victims of their own circumstances or they were busy creating better lives for themselves. I was alone for a long time, and it felt like I would drown forever.

Lifeguards come in many guises, and it's only now that I realize most of mine were teachers. Mr. S in sixth grade was the first man who was nice to me. Looking back, I realize he was nice to everyone, but the point was he was nice to *me*. Mrs. Q was demanding and serious, but she yanked my latent public-speaking talents right out of me and then held me to a standard she had no doubt I could achieve. Mr. G was the curmudgeonly 10th-grade English teacher whose



**SHARE YOUR STORY** What motivates you to get up each morning and serve the children in our nation's schools? We want to hear from you. Send your submission for the "Why I Teach" column to [editor@teachingtolerance.org](mailto:editor@teachingtolerance.org).



that most of the things my students agonize over today will be long forgotten tomorrow. But they hurt like hell today, and tomorrow always looks impossibly far away.

So I look at them and really listen when they tell me some funny, sad or interesting stories from their lives. I let my stomach growl instead of going to lunch when a student asks my advice on some matter that may be trivial to me but is *everything* to her. I stop working when my current or former students come in during the only quiet time I have before or after school to tell me something they saw or read or heard about that reminded them of what we did in class. Because despite their outward appearance, a lot of these kids feel like they're drowning in pressure from their parents, their peers and their society.

Every day, my students get the benefit of an adult who is truly *there*—genuinely interested in them and committed to helping them grow. They stretch themselves to meet the rigorous academic standards I set and then beam with pride when I praise them for their above-grade-level efforts. They meet and exceed my challenges, even though they're in the foggy middle of middle school: too old to be a little kid, too young to be a full-blown teenager. So I do all I can for them—because I remember and I know. I'm the lifeguard now, and no one is going to drown on my watch.

—Laura Sofen

BLOG//STAYING IN THE CLASSROOM

## Helping Fellow Teachers Through the Hard Times

“‘I’m done,’ I could have said. ‘Finished.’”

That’s how blogger Trevor Barton felt early in his teaching career. He continued:

“I felt I had potential as a teacher during my master’s degree coursework. ‘You have the building blocks to make a difference in the lives of children,’ one of my professors wrote on an assignment.

“For two years, I have used the building blocks of compassion, courage and creativity to build my classroom.

“But there were moments of uncertainty when I thought I wasn’t meant to be a teacher. The first quake came on my first day in class. I gathered my second-graders on the reading rug around my rocking chair to read aloud to them. In the transition, one of my students climbed up on a desk, jumped on another student and wrestled him to the ground. I wrapped my arms around the attacker, pulled him over to the intercom button and called the office for help.

“‘How can I teach children who jump off of tables and attack other students?’ I asked myself.

“The second quake came during my first formal observation at the beginning of my second school year. ...”

**... and a reader replied:**

“I am 53 and in a few short weeks I will be student-teaching in a second-grade classroom. My professors have assured me that I have what it takes, but there are nights that I lie in bed and envision scenarios similar to the one you described with children jumping off desks! I wonder, ‘What was I thinking?’ and ‘How will I do this?’ My hope is that my cooperating teacher will be a true mentor. After staying home and caring for four of my own children, I desire to live up to another honorable vocation. Thank you for your honest sharing and encouragement.”

GET THE FULL DISCUSSION HERE

[tolerance.org/blog/hardtimes](http://tolerance.org/blog/hardtimes)



DID YOU KNOW?  
DID YOU KNOW?

11.2 million kids in the United States—more than 1 in 5—speak a language other than English at home.

—NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS, 2009

# Overcoming Cultural Gaps and Digital Divides

**EVERY SCHOOL LIBRARY NEEDS AN AMY Hamrick.** She works at Westerville Central High School in Westerville, Ohio. The educator who nominated this teacher-librarian as a “Down the Hall” candidate pointed out that she not only is an adept media specialist but also puts social-justice issues at the forefront of her work.

That’s important because the nearby city of Columbus has a large and growing population of both Somalis and Latinos. More and more, this trend has been reflected in Central High School’s student body of about 1,600. Hamrick’s library has become a gathering spot for diverse students and staff. In her spare time, Hamrick even bakes vegan cookies for her library helpers.

## **How do you make the library inviting to so many different types of people?**

Learning to say hello in Somali was the first step in identifying myself as someone who has an interest in connecting with our Somali population. ... I’ve learned that having a heart for ESL students is not the same as having sound pedagogy related to teaching students whose second language is English. And I took courses at an area university to move toward certification in teaching ESL.

*We interview your favorite school administrators in each issue of Teaching Tolerance magazine.*



*“I love the thrill of finding the right book for the right reader at the right time.”*

## **What else have you done to accommodate the different types of students at Central?**

I think I learned from the school of hard knocks to put real time in an academic setting to learn about cultural practices. When I became a librarian nearly a decade ago, I think I started off from a very different place, one that had me trying to help students adapt to mainstream academic culture but that made no demands on me to really learn about other cultures. ... My first day of teaching research and technology in my role as teacher-librarian, I needed to call a group of Somali students downstairs from a balcony level in the library. Not wanting to embarrass them by loudly calling out to them, I instead simply gestured by extending my index finger and curling it inward, palm up. The students were very offended, and I found out later that this gesture was considered to be

diminutive, a way of calling to farm animals. I felt awful and knew I needed to become much more culturally literate in order to serve the students well.

## **What did you do?**

Finally, I took an “occupational Somali” four-day workshop where I learned much more than saying hello—I learned about culture and communication practices. My earlier point about even learning to say hello in Somali is that that tiny action began to bridge a gap. It told students that I cared about them in a way that telling them directly couldn’t have.

## **Do you think that effort helps make the library a more welcoming place?**

I open the library before school, and many students gather there as a way to start their day. I have an open-access study hall policy and, when I am not teaching a class, I can spend time helping students with projects or technology. I’ve

*“I knew I needed to become much more culturally literate in order to serve the students well.”*

made sure to develop a collection of high-interest books that feature diverse main characters, and I display them alongside other books. This says, I hope, that we value diversity. So I rarely make displays of, say, LGBT books, but instead include them in displays or bibliographies for units of study along with other books, just as I think they should be. We have an area set up in the library for the ESL paraprofessional to tutor and help students with homework. The area affords students privacy and can be used by Muslim students for prayer, if they want. We're open at lunchtime, too, and many students prefer to work and read in the library instead of dealing with the noise and social structure of the lunchroom.

### Why did you become a librarian?

The best part about being a teacher-librarian is the fast-paced variety of each day. I collaboratively plan lessons with English, history, math, science and arts teachers, providing educational-technology instruction to students and staff. And I love the thrill of finding the right book for the right reader at the right time.

### What roles have literature and stories played in your life?

Before I even fed my children at the hospital, I read them a book. Yes, really! I think that probably gives you an idea of the significance I place on literacy and the love of learning. This is in large part thanks to my own mother. Through reading, I've discovered ways of seeing and understanding that I could never have imagined.

### What is the single largest challenge at your school library? How are you addressing it?

Without a doubt, it is the digital divide. As more and more information migrates

online and onto digital devices, students in poverty—already at a disadvantage—find themselves facing even more obstacles because they don't have after-hours access to technology. Our open-access policy allows students to use library resources before and after school, at lunchtime and during study halls. And my role as a teacher facilitates bridging that gap, student by student.

### What are your favorite books on social justice issues?

I really love *What Is the What* by Dave Eggers. The narrative format and writing style make the subject approachable for students. Students like Eggers. *Zeitoun*, his true story about social injustice in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, circulates really well—especially because our teachers here recommend it. High school students are very interested in what their teachers recommend. And the more we talk to students about books—books we loved, books we didn't, books we want to read next, books we think they'd love—the more they will read.

### What's the biggest compliment someone can pay you?

Usually, when I tell someone that I'm a librarian, they reply, “Oh ... You look like a librarian!” To protect my sense of self-esteem, I'll take that as a compliment! But I was born with glasses and sensible shoes and a strong sense of curiosity. Really, I most appreciate when someone tells me I'm the hardest worker they know.

#### DOWN THE HALL

Know an excellent administrator, librarian or counselor we should interview?

Email us at [editor@tolerance.org](mailto:editor@tolerance.org) and put “Down the Hall” in the subject line.

## Lessons Learned

We post new classroom lessons online each week. Activities are grade-specific, address a range of issues and align to standards. Here are four of the most-visited in recent months. Find them at [tolerance.org/activities](http://tolerance.org/activities).

### 1. A CONTRACT ON BULLYING

(Middle and High School)

The mini-unit involves four steps: 1) Identifying the types of bullying, 2) Defining the types of bullying, 3) Putting students' knowledge to the test and 4) Signing a contract.

### 2. BULLYING: TIPS FOR STUDENTS

(All Grades)

This checklist provides suggestions for what kids can do when bullying occurs. It is written for students being bullied, witnesses and the bullies themselves.

### 3. FIGHTING PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST PEOPLE WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

(Grade 3 and up)

In these lessons, students will work toward understanding what it means to have a learning disability.

### 4. USING PHOTOGRAPHS TO TEACH SOCIAL JUSTICE: EXPLORING IDENTITY

(Middle and High School)

How do people identify themselves and how do others identify them? The activities will help students recognize that a person's sense of identity has many components. Students will analyze two photographs, each dealing with a different element of identity.

### 5. WHAT'S FAIR?

(Early Grades)

This lesson explores the concept of fairness through questions such as: What is fair? Should all people be treated the same? What can you do if you see someone treated unfairly? Students are encouraged to reflect upon fairness in their own lives and communities.

#### DID YOU KNOW?

48% of 7th–12th graders experienced sexual harassment in the 2010–2011 school year.

—AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN





## What’s in a Name?

Among our Frequently Asked Questions, it is number one. Whether we’re on the road or here in Montgomery, the Teaching Tolerance staff can count on responding to it at least once a week. It comes during face-to-face conversations, via email, on Facebook, in letters and even—occasionally—in a phone call.

“You should change your name,” we’re told. “Tolerance isn’t enough.”

Almost invariably, this is followed by the vegetable example: “I tolerate broccoli (or Brussels sprouts or spinach), but I don’t like it.”

The question comes in so often—and has since Teaching Tolerance began 20 years ago—that we have a ready answer.\* We agree the word is imperfect and offer the UNESCO definition as the one that most closely matches our own:

*Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. Tolerance is harmony in difference.*

Sometimes it seems that this response doesn’t go far enough. The question is often a pained plea, and deep-felt, as when a lesbian teacher wrote, “I’m not interested in just being put up with. I want to be accepted.”

That’s what we want, too.

Tolerance *can* mean “to merely put up with,” it’s true. But—as the UNESCO statement above shows—it’s not the only way to define *tolerance*. More importantly, it’s not what we mean. A

quick look at the contents of this issue will show that. We advocate for classrooms and schools in which every student is welcome and valued, in the hope that this generation of students will grow into adults who reject intolerance.

That idea—rejecting intolerance—is also key to the acceptance we all strive for.

Sadly, we still see far too many episodes of intolerance in our public life and in our schools. In the last two months, two states have considered anti-bullying laws that would make an exception for taunts based on religious beliefs. Fortunately, Michigan rejected this attempt to legalize religious intolerance. Tennessee has yet to act on the proposed legislation.

Other states, including Alabama, have passed draconian anti-immigrant laws that unleashed a torrent of hateful abuse toward Latino students. In one

instance, students taunted a girl, a U.S. citizen born of Latino parents, telling her she didn’t belong in their school and needed to go back to Mexico. Since parents without documents are being denied entry to schools, they are powerless to act when they learn that their children have become pariahs.

*Intolerance* isn’t a word we hear much anymore, but the hate it describes is very much with us. Kids who look different, those with disabilities, the ones who follow a minority religion and the ones who follow no religion, the children whose parents don’t have the means to keep up with trends—all of them know it. They need to be held close by teachers who care that they experience the respect and attention we all want for our own children.

That’s what Teaching Tolerance means.

—Maureen Costello

\* [Read it at tolerance.org/about](http://tolerance.org/about)

# ACTIVITY EXCHANGE

HAVE YOU CREATED A CLASSROOM ACTIVITY TIED TO A SOCIAL JUSTICE TOPIC? THINK IT WOULD BE PERFECT FOR TEACHING TOLERANCE? WE'LL PAY \$250 FOR ACTIVITY EXCHANGE ITEMS WE PUBLISH. TO SEE [SUBMISSION GUIDELINES](#), GO TO [TOLERANCE.ORG/BLOG/TEACH-SOCIAL-JUSTICE](http://TOLERANCE.ORG/BLOG/TEACH-SOCIAL-JUSTICE).

GRADES PRE-K TO 1

## Toys and Clothes: Gender Expression

As part of a yearlong anti-bullying program, “Be a Buddy, Not a Bully,” I presented this lesson to the pre-K class midway through the year. I asked two parents each to read one of two books, *William’s Doll* and *My Princess Boy* (also consider other voices such as *The Paper Bag Princess* by Robert Munsch or *The Rough-Face Girl* by Rafe Martin). *William’s Doll*, written by Charlotte Zolotow in 1972, is a story about a little boy

who wants a doll but cannot get one because he is expected to play with toys that are traditionally for boys. Cheryl Kilodavis wrote *My Princess Boy* in 2011. It tells the story of a boy who wants to dress up in pretty things and gets teased for his choices. As each book was read, there was a discussion about the choices the characters had made regarding the toys they wanted or the clothes they wore.

Following the reading and discussion, we played a game

called, “What’s in the Bag?” I filled a bag with toys and clothes considered to be gender specific (e.g., doll, truck, baseball glove, princess accessories and cowboy hat). Each student picked one item without looking into the bag. Once something was pulled, the child was asked whether he would wear the item or if she would want to play with the chosen toy.

**We asked:**  
*Would you play with a doll? Why or why not?*

*Do you play dress up? What do you like to wear?*

*If you have a brother or sister, do you play with his or her toys?*

*Would you play with someone if they wanted to play with these toys or wear these clothes, even if you don’t wish to?*

*Do you like pink?*

*Why do you think people believe pink is just for girls?*

Answers to the questions varied, but most students said they would play with most of the toys or would wear the clothes. One boy did say he would not wear the hard hat because “I hate to build things.” Another girl said, “I would play with the boy even if he is wearing a dress.”

As a wrap-up, we commented that it is fine to choose a toy or clothes you want, and if you don’t want to play with a certain toy that’s OK, too. We just want to make certain that someone is not laughed at or teased because of the choice he or she has made.

Laraine Gaunt  
TOWER HILL SCHOOL  
RED BANK, N.J.

For support with discussing gender and gender identity in your classroom, visit [Gender Spectrum](http://GenderSpectrum.org) at [genderspectrum.org](http://genderspectrum.org).



GRADES K-2

## The People Puzzle

Each fall, I look forward to the joy and adventures of teaching new students. The more the students and I understand about one another, the richer their learning experiences.

In preparation for class, I tape together the edges of six sheets of white tagboard to make a large combined piece. This will be the “people puzzle.” Then

Have you created a classroom activity tied to a social justice topic? Think it would be perfect for *Teaching Tolerance*? We'll pay \$250 for Activity Exchange items we publish. To see submission guidelines, go to [tolerance.org/blog/teach-social-justice](http://tolerance.org/blog/teach-social-justice).

Send submissions to [editor@tolerance.org](mailto:editor@tolerance.org) with the subject line “Activity Exchange submission.” Or mail your activity to:

**Teaching Tolerance**  
Activity Exchange  
400 Washington Ave.  
Montgomery, AL 36104

*We reply only to submissions selected for publication.*

I draw enough random puzzle pieces to equal the number of students. I make sure to draw a few extras just in case some new students arrive during the year—and for me. I cut out the puzzle pieces and place them on a table near the classroom door. The puzzle pieces with straight edges make the puzzle’s frame.

As students enter the class, I greet them and ask them to make a circle. I explain the day’s activities as listed on the board, then introduce the people puzzle as a way to get to know each other.

I demonstrate the task for the students. With a marker I print my name on one puzzle piece. Students then write their names in bold letters on their puzzle pieces. I ask students to use only one color when writing their names; using a different color for each letter makes it difficult to read. Then I glue on a picture of my dog and print her name next to the picture. I draw other aspects about my life, including my favorite books and places where I have travelled. I let the students know they

need to bring pictures from home or pictures that they draw for us to complete our puzzle pieces.

At the end of the week, the students present their puzzle pieces and what each one means. Then, silently, we put the people puzzle together. It takes quite a while, but students begin to help each other by offering suggestions about where they think a puzzle piece belongs. When it’s finished, I ask: “What do you think this activity means?” Afterward, we tape the people puzzle together and hang it on the wall for a month.

In the late spring, I hang the people puzzle back up

on the wall. The students reflect on who they were at the beginning of the year. Then they write about what they have learned and how they have grown. In our last hours together, with parents present, we reflect on our special memories. Finally, again in silence, we cut the puzzle pieces apart and students take theirs home.

This is a rich experience—beginnings and endings. It is a very meaningful visual ritual that will be remembered for a long time.

*Launa Ellison*  
RETIRED FROM  
BARTON SCHOOL  
MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.





# ACTIVITY EXCHANGE

GRADES 3-5

## Family Spotlight

At the beginning of each school year I extend an invitation through a letter to all my students' families. I ask them to sign up for a 15- to 30-minute class visit to share a talent, hobby or anything else interesting about someone in their family. I call each of these a "Family Spotlight."

I like to highlight the value of family and how each one is unique. We talk about having parents or other family members as guardians. We also talk about having one—or more than one—mom or dad figure, living with other relatives and extended family members, and having small or large families.

I read aloud from *Family* by Isabell Monk. As a class, we talk about the talents of the family members in the story. We also discuss how getting together is always a big and special event. Students learn that the

individuality of our families is something to be proud of—something that deserves a special showcase.

I model the activity near the beginning of the school year to spark ideas and excitement among the students. They then encourage their families to sign up. I also send frequent reminders and suggest weeks that are open for Family Spotlights throughout the school year.

Families are very creative and often come up with their own spotlights. When they sign up, I contact them to get an idea about the activity or demonstration that they are going to share. I also offer to help get things ready.

Family Spotlights provide students with a host of experiences: seeing living hermit crabs, understanding traditional

Vietnamese dragons, dancing, fishing, listening to bilingual read-alouds of Dr. Seuss family favorites, watching home videos, looking at old photographs and playing "Lotería" (a Mexican board game) while they enjoy home-made "chocolate caliente."

At the end of each Family Spotlight, I print pictures to display outside our walls and write a caption to accompany the photos.

Family Spotlights bring families together, and they support the literacy and content curriculum. They also support our school community and empower families to feel welcome and respected at school.

*Rosa Kennedy*  
LA VISTA WEST  
ELEMENTARY  
LA VISTA, NEB.



Explore more strategies for encouraging family participation, especially when there are cultural differences, online at [tolerance.org/activity/inviting-engagement](https://tolerance.org/activity/inviting-engagement).

GRADES 3-5

## Using Tootsie Roll Pops to Teach Tolerance

This activity helps students increase respect for differences and gain a deeper understanding of universal similarities.

Draw two columns on the board, labeled “On the Outside” and “On the Inside.” Hold up a Tootsie Roll Pop. Ask students to describe the Tootsie Roll Pop, as you write, under the appropriate column, their comments: on the outside (hard, different-colored wrappers, different flavors, requires 600 to 800 licks to get to the center) and on the inside (soft, chewy, supported by a lollipop stick).

### Use these questions to lead a discussion:

*How are Tootsie Roll Pops like people—on the outside and on the inside?*

*How can you compare the different flavors of Tootsie Roll Pops with outer differences among people?*

*If you choose Tootsie Roll Pops by the wrapper color, do you also select friends by appearance (clothes, hairstyle)?*

*Why do Tootsie Roll Pops and people have a hard exterior?*

*Just as you look forward to reaching the Tootsie Roll Pop’s sweet center, what reward do you get from making the effort to get to know new people?*

*Talk about a time you judged someone from the outside, then later found that the person was different on the inside.*

*Just as the Tootsie Roll Pop gets “held up” by the lollipop stick, who are some people in your life you use for support?*

*Do you try different flavors of Tootsie Roll Pops? Do you always choose the same types of friends, or do you sometimes move outside of your comfort zone to get to know new people?*

Summarize the main concepts. Everyone has something valuable inside that we may not see at first. The “soft center” of people represents what we all have in common: feelings, hopes, dreams, fears

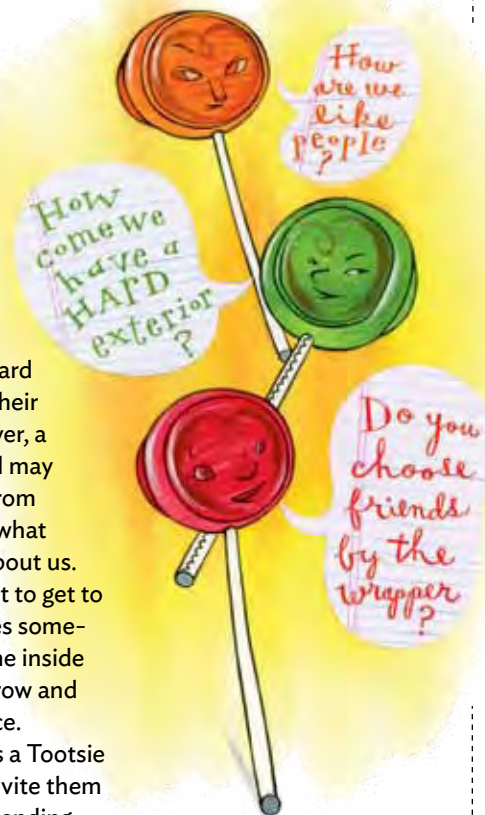
and insecurities. To feel safe and protected, people often use a hard outside to hide their soft core. However, a tough outer shell may prevent others from getting to know what is truly special about us. Making the effort to get to know what makes someone special on the inside helps us learn, grow and practice tolerance.

Give students a Tootsie Roll Pop each. Invite them to enjoy a sweet ending to the lesson!

This lesson enables students to look at themselves and others differently. One student commented that he wants to find “the soft center” of several of his classmates who seem unfriendly. Another student expressed a wish to melt her “hard shell” so that other students could

see that she is really sweet on the inside. Several other students shared how they usually hang out with people who are similar to them on the outside. They now want to find people who are like them on the inside.

*Lois Rothberg*  
RETIRED FROM PIKESVILLE  
MIDDLE SCHOOL  
PIKESVILLE, MD.



**For students with special dietary needs: Tootsie Roll Pops are gluten-free, peanut-free, nut-product-free and Kosher-certified. For more information go to [tootsie.com](http://tootsie.com).**

## ACTIVITY EXCHANGE



GRADES 6-8

### Create an Anti-Cyberbullying Sign Campaign

Cyberbullying is a serious concern in today's schools. Since it can happen to a student at home as well as in school, it can be more pervasive and traumatic for victims than traditional bullying. An anti-cyberbullying sign campaign is an effective way to fight cyberbullying through positive peer pressure.

To gain background and establish the context, hold a class discussion about cyberbullying. Contrast traditional bullying with cyberbullying. Encourage students to share their stories and experiences, without naming anyone. Next announce that the students have an opportunity to make a difference in their school by describing an overview of the project.

The project begins with students researching cyberbullying on websites. Students visit [www.portaportal.com/gcorder](http://www.portaportal.com/gcorder) and click on the Cyberbullying tab. At that site, there is a Google Doc with guiding questions that students use as they explore the cyberbullying sites. These sites offer a variety of ways to learn about cyberbullying: text, video, games and interactive tutorials. Students examine essential questions such as:

*What is cyberbullying and why do people do it?*

*What kind of harm do victims of cyberbullying suffer?*

*How can someone avoid being a victim of cyberbullying?*

*If someone has been a victim of cyberbullying, what should he or she do?*

Once students finish their research, they create a sign. The purpose of the sign is to inform others about cyberbullying. Spend some time discussing ways to make the signs effective. For instance, each sign should focus on one particular aspect of cyberbullying, its layout should be eye-catching, the text should be large enough to read and should avoid overwhelming the reader by communicating a concise message. If the sign is created with a word processor, print it in

color ink and laminate it. Discuss areas throughout the building where their peers are most likely to see and read signs. Finally, send students throughout the building to display their work.

As anti-cyberbullying signs blanket your school building, students receive constant reminders about the harmful effects of cyberbullying. They're also given strategies for dealing with it. What's more, the signs send a message to faculty members and visitors about the culture of the school.

Gregory W. Corder, Ed.D.  
THOMAS HARRISON  
MIDDLE SCHOOL  
HARRISONBURG, VA.

Explore more in the article [Cyberbullying at tolerance.org/magazine/number-38-fall-2010/cyberbullying](http://tolerance.org/magazine/number-38-fall-2010/cyberbullying).



# Our Groups of Friends

In this activity, students examine the diversity of their groups of friends.

First, on a labeled color-coded chart, students write under each of their names the name of an adult they live with, the names of five of their closest friends (using their own definitions of “close friend”) and five of the adult’s closest friends.

At the top of the red column, have students write “Race.” Then they place an S next to each friend who has the same race they identify with and a D for friends who are of a different race. They may not necessarily know how their friends identify

themselves; the point is how they perceive their friends. Then they should repeat for the adult and the adult’s friends: S for same race, D for different race.

In the orange column have students write “Age.” Then they place an S for each friend whose age is within one year of theirs and a D if the age difference is more than a year. For the adults, the age difference needs to be greater than five years to be marked as different. Again, they may base their S’s and D’s on their own perceptions.

Label the yellow column “Gender,” the green column “Social Class” and

the blue column “Religion.” Have the students continue to mark S and D, based on their perceptions. When they finish, hold a discussion using some of these guiding prompts:

*Count your S’s and D’s and the adults’ S’s and D’s. Whose friends are more diverse? Why might that be?*

*In what way are your friends most diverse? Least diverse? What about the adult? Why might this be?*

*Why is it valuable to have friends who share your identities? Why would you want to have friends who are of the same age or gender?*

*Why is it valuable to have friends who don’t share your identities? Why would you want a friend who’s older or who belongs to a different religion?*

*Do you talk about these aspects of identity with your family and friends? For example, do you discuss what it means to be*

*middle class or Muslim or 15 years old?*

Next give students 25 dot stickers, five in each of the colors from their charts. Looking at their own friend lists, have the students label their dots with S’s or D’s, by color. On the walls hang five large posters, each labeled with the appropriate color and identifier (Red = Race, Orange = Age, Yellow = Gender, Green = Social Class, Blue = Religion). Divide each poster in half, with the halves labeled “Same” and “Different.”

The students are to stick their dots on the appropriate halves of each poster, providing a visual display of how diverse friend-groups are in the grade as a whole. Encourage students to offer explanations for why some “D” posters and “S” posters are so full. Ask students if they are surprised. Do they see the value in a diverse group of friends?

*Lauren Porosoff*  
FIELDSTON MIDDLE SCHOOL  
BRONX, N.Y.



Download a sample grid to use with this activity at [tolerance.org/sample-grid](http://tolerance.org/sample-grid).

TEEN DATING ABUSE

# POSSESSION



BY MARILYN ELIAS  
ILLUSTRATION BY VALERIE DOWNES

ALMOST  
ONE-THIRD  
OF TEEN  
RELATIONSHIPS  
INVOLVE ABUSE.  
HELP STUDENTS  
LEARN TO  
AVOID  
—OR BREAK FREE FROM—  
UNHEALTHY  
ENTANGLEMENTS.

## POSSESSION OBSESSION

Lauren McBride grew up in suburban Milwaukee, the eldest of three kids of a teacher and a school social worker. They made lots of time for their children. The proverbial “good girl,” McBride says that more than anything she didn’t want to disappoint her parents.

She stumbled into a verbally abusive relationship her senior year of high school. It soon turned violent, but she used lots of makeup to cover the bruises and gave her parents plausible excuses for them.

McBride says she wanted to end the relationship, but the boy threatened to show her parents photos of her in underwear and let them know she’d “taken his virginity.” “I had this terrible fear of letting my parents down—it consumed me,” she recalls. Only a choking incident that felt truly life-threatening compelled the teenager to confide everything to her mom. And it took legal restraining orders to solve the abuse problem, says McBride, now 25.

McBride’s experience is far from rare. In one recent national survey of teenagers who had been in relationships, 29 percent reported experiencing sexual or physical abuse or receiving threats of physical violence from partners. About 10 percent of students in grades nine to 12 consistently say they’ve been physically hurt on purpose by a dating partner during the past year, according to the ongoing Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) youth risk surveys.

Kids who witness violence between their parents are at higher-than-average risk to be the abusers—and the abused. Perhaps surprisingly, girls and boys are equally



The barrage of digital media—texting, tweeting, instant-messaging, Facebook posting, Skyping—keeps kids on a shorter-than-ever leash to abusive partners.

“It keeps them connected 24/7—and controlled.”

likely to turn violent with dating partners. But girls suffer more severe injuries, says health scientist Andra Tharp of the CDC. Teens who use alcohol or drugs and have trouble managing anger are especially likely to strike out against boyfriends or girlfriends. “But dating violence can affect anyone at any time,” she says. “Nobody is exempt.”

The barrage of digital media—texting, tweeting, instant-messaging, Facebook posting, Skyping—keeps kids on a shorter-than-ever leash to abusive partners. “It keeps them connected 24/7—and controlled,” says Tammy Hall, a recently retired West Chester, Ohio, health teacher who taught dating-abuse prevention.

With awareness growing on many campuses, 11 states since 2007 have passed laws mandating that schools teach teens about partner abuse or at least draw greater attention to the problem. The new laws and increasing availability of curricula have prompted a surge in prevention programs over the past few years, mostly at middle schools and for the youngest high school students.

More than 11,000 schools and agencies (such as the Girl Scouts) have requested the free Love Is Not Abuse curriculum online in the past five years, says a Liz Claiborne Inc. spokesperson. The clothing company partnered with the Education Development Center to create the four-lesson program.

Love Is Not Abuse uses poetry, short stories, videos and student journaling to spark awareness of the differences between healthy and abusive dating. Kids discuss their own experiences of abuse and brainstorm how to help friends who may be in trouble. “It’s very engaging,” says Erin O’Malley, director of guidance at Park View High School in Sterling, Va. Digital abuse provokes the greatest passion—how to deal with girlfriends who text and demand answers at 4 a.m., or boyfriends who threaten to call you a slut on Facebook as a control tactic.

Students read aloud a “was it rape?” date scenario from the girl’s and the boy’s points of view in a different four-day program for ninth-grade students at Milford High School in Milford, Ohio. “Some say she asked

## PERSONAL STORIES

Anna Sanchez (not her real name), 19, wishes her school had taught that control can signal abuse rather than love. At age 13, she thought she’d fallen in love with a spirited, wonderful 16-year-old boy. But soon after they started dating, he lost his temper when he saw her at school in a low-cut blouse. He said she looked like a whore and ripped the blouse right down the middle. He insisted on driving her home from school, and that she stop spending time with friends.

Then the boy began to hit her, leaving ugly bruise marks, if he saw her conversing with boys. “He was always very remorseful afterward and begged me to forgive him.”

She decided to break up with her boyfriend after a violent encounter at his apartment. He was pushing her to have sex; she wanted to remain a virgin. “Suddenly, he smacked me so hard I fell down. He dragged me into the shower by my hair, turned on the hot water, threw me into the tub and

raped me,” says Sanchez. The boy also slashed her thighs with a razor, leaving scars that are still visible six years later, she says.

Sanchez’s parents were separated. Her mother was working two jobs to support the girl and a 2-year-old brother. Sanchez told her beleaguered mom nothing. When the young teenager tried to break up with her violent boyfriend, he said he’d kill her mother and little brother. “I knew he was in a position to do it because he was a gang member and sold drugs,” she says.

Control is often the hallmark of teen dating abuse, and fear is the deterrent to reporting violent partners, even if the surface details of young people’s lives look different.

Laura Hampikian was thrilled when a boy she met on MySpace wanted an exclusive relationship after they’d known each other for only a month. “My parents were going

for sex because she went back to his house and kissed him!” marvels teacher Kristi McKenney. The post-skit discussion sharpens awareness of the other gender’s perspective and ways to avoid sexual abuse, she says.

At the Bronx School of Science Inquiry and Investigation in New York City, games that cue students to move to one part of the room if they think varied behaviors are OK—for example, a boyfriend hitting a girl once in a while—provoke discussion and teachable moments, notes counselor Angelica Ferreras.

Widely publicized celebrity abuse cases also attract avid teen interest, providing the grist for real-life lessons on healthy dating, teachers say.

Gender stereotypes are another way to raise kids’ awareness about dating abuse, says Ann Burke, who taught health to middle schoolers for 29 years and now does free workshops on teen dating violence for Rhode Island schools. She draws two large boxes—labeled male and female—then asks students to blurt out adjectives describing each gender. Adjectives that aren’t stereotypes are listed

through a divorce, and I wanted to prove I could stick with someone,” she recalls.

Her emotionally volatile boyfriend felt unloved at home and soon was texting or phoning 14-year-old Laura all day and into the night. “I’d hide the phone under the covers at 3 a.m. so my parents wouldn’t see.”

Laura’s boyfriend pressured her to stop hanging out with friends, so she soon had none, and to go much further sexually than she wanted. The Boise, Idaho, teen, feeling stifled and isolated, tried several times to break up with the boy but always relented when he threatened to commit suicide. “I confided in nobody. I didn’t recognize it as abuse,” she says now, at age 19.

After a miserable year and a half of feeling as if this teenage boy’s life was in her hands, she did end the relationship—online. He wrote back that he would kill himself (but did not).

## LGBT Students

LGBT teenagers have the same vulnerabilities to abusive dating as straight kids—and then some.

“There’s an added layer for these kids—the fear of being outed if they report abuse, because they might not be out to their parents or friends,” says Tonya Turner, senior staff attorney at Break the Cycle, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit that assists young survivors of dating violence. Their need for secrecy could make them less likely than straight classmates to report an abusive situation, she adds.

Also, sometimes they’re in environments rife with the potential for abuse. For example, at schools with few out peers, LGBT teens may look for romantic partners in bars, where they can be easy targets for harassment by older, more savvy people, reports Connie Burk, executive director of the Seattle-based Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans, Lesbian and Gay Survivors of Abuse. They’re also more likely than straight kids to be thrown out if parents discover their sexual orientation. A disproportionate number of homeless teens are LGBT kids who must resort to “survival sex,” she adds.

And if they find partners at school, students sometimes stay in relationships with abusive classmates “because, they say, ‘I don’t know anybody else in my school who’s gay,’” Burk points out.

Kids who are willing to report abusers often fear they won’t be believed, notes Turner. “If it’s two boys, adults will say, ‘Oh, it’s just two guys fighting. What can you do?’ And if it’s girls, we’ve heard adults respond, ‘How can a girl hurt another girl?’”

Adults’ own stereotypes can throw doubt on credibility if the physically abused partner of two young lesbians looks more masculine. “The taller, bigger one may not fight back—she may be passive,” says Turner. “But adults just don’t believe what’s really happening with these young women.”

Anna Sanchez was less fortunate. Her ordeal continued for three years. She survived the incident of rape and severe violence. But her injuries just got worse and worse. They continued through the early stages of an accidental pregnancy that ended in abortion. Of course, she had to involve her mom eventually. And she wound up attending four different high schools in efforts to get away. “He stalked me for years.”

Eventually, she had moved so many times that the violent boy lost track of her. Now a college student and happily married, she volunteers at an agency that presents workshops in high schools on teen dating violence.

“Doing this has given me a chance to heal,” says Sanchez. “By getting my story out and helping others understand abuse, hopefully it will give them the confidence to leave before they’re seriously hurt or killed.”

“It’s a cry for help, and they really want protection; they want adults to know.”

under “outside the box.” Then a discussion explores how valid the macho guy-passive girl images are. “The kids brainstorm the harmful effects of these aggressor-victim ideas, and it’s an easy transition to teaching about dating violence,” says Burke.

In Austin, Texas, public schools, students seen as high-risk because they’ve already been involved in or exposed to violence—at home or through relationships—meet in small groups for 24 weekly support and education sessions. They create skits, draw cartoons about their feelings and make collages. Students learn how to ask for consent, how to handle jealousy and how to end a relationship.

In a powerful theater game, one student acts as puppeteer, another as puppet. “They learn and discuss what it feels like to have someone leading you around, then what it feels like to be in control, because control is so much at the heart of dating abuse,” says program director Barri Rosenbluth, who manages Expect Respect, a youth project based at the SafePlace agency in Austin.

Dating abuse can shatter a teen’s self-esteem, research suggests. Victims are also more prone to binge drinking, drug use and eating disorders. Harmful effects even reverberate into adulthood: Teens entangled in violent dating relationships are more likely than others to be involved

## Mentoring Abused Students

Teens opening the eyes of younger teens to dating abuse—through popular media they all relate to, using a shared colloquial tongue that’s full of drama but, thankfully, free of preaching:

That’s the novel idea behind abuse-prevention materials for middle schoolers recently dreamed up by trained high school “peer leaders” in 11 U.S. cities.

Start Strong: Building Healthy Teen Relationships, a program funded mostly by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, aims to prevent date violence and promote healthy relationships among 11- to 14-year-olds. Start Strong is testing innovative curricula in schools and investigating needed community policies. One unusual aspect of the program is a network of high school-age advisers, trained in the issue, who do workshops at middle schools and also develop creative teaching tools they believe will strike a responsive chord with younger teens.

“They’re the credible messengers. They’re the people a young teen is most likely to listen to,” insists Casey Corcoran, a former teacher who directs Start Strong in Boston.

How about using comic books, wildly popular with middle schoolers, to get the message across? In the Bronx, teen advisers wrote and drew their own, sharing it widely with younger kids. It has a day-in-the-life approach, following two young couples through a 24-hour period—one relationship is healthy, one is not. The cartoon-embellished comic shows healthy uses of texting, how a partner’s controlling behavior and guilt-tripping hurts kids, and the effects of physical aggression. It’s downloadable for free at [startstrongbronx.org](http://startstrongbronx.org).

The New York teen advisers also created a film called *Broken Harmonies*, which can be downloaded at the same website.

Music lyrics, whose unhealthy relationship messages can influence teenagers, are cleverly scrutinized in a “nutritional impact” label created by Boston teen advisers. Designed to look like the labels on food, it has columns on “amount per serving” and “intensity level.” The ingredients include healthy and unhealthy aspects of dating relationships. The healthy column includes items such as “trust” and “equality.” “Possession-obsession” and “relationship=sex” are among the unhealthy. There are numerical values on the charts, and a total at the bottom that reveals whether a song is encouraging healthy (or unhealthy) teen dating.

“Kids love music, and it’s not that we’re telling them not to listen, but to think critically about the songs. It’s a great touchstone for discussion about abuse,” says Corcoran. The label is downloadable without charge at [tinyurl.com/6gzjftz](http://tinyurl.com/6gzjftz).

in violent activities later on, notes Tharp of the CDC.

Last September, the CDC launched a \$7 million prevention program in Baltimore; Fort Lauderdale, Fla.; Chicago; and the Oakland-Hayward, Calif., metropolitan area. The five-year project includes teacher training and the testing of school curricula on dating violence. The CDC is

also testing the value of a bystander “helper” curriculum called Green Dot in 13 Kentucky high schools.

“There’s increased awareness that teen dating violence is a public-health issue,” says Tharp. “We want to learn more about what works in prevention, and the CDC wants to see schools doing prevention work, so that youth are safer.” ♦



# HOW TO HELP

Prompted by school prevention programs or just urgent, spontaneous discomfort, students sometimes confide their stories of dating abuse to teachers and counselors. Although this can be a tricky scenario for the listener, it also offers a chance to be of great help, say veteran educators.

Many times it's verbal abuse that can demolish a teen's self-esteem and precede violence or sexual assault. "I listen, I just listen," says Kristi McKenney, a ninth-grade health teacher in Milford, Ohio. "So many don't feel they have someone to talk to." Although she urges kids to see the school counselor, some resist. Often, though, they return and say, "I need help," because, she believes, they felt listened to earlier.

Students who have been sexually abused or beaten by partners "need to understand they're not at fault, they're not being judged. When they're confiding in you is not the time to say, 'Oh, you shouldn't have,' because it only makes them feel worse," notes Angelica Ferreras, counselor at the Bronx School of Science Inquiry and Investigation, a middle school in New York City.

Kids often think they're the only ones this has happened to and fear sticking out as a weirdo—anathema to adolescents. So it's good to let them know that other teens have been

through this experience, suggests Katie Eklund, a school psychologist in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Tammy Hall, a recently retired Ohio health teacher, has listened to boys who were physically assaulted by jealous girlfriends. "No matter what they say, you can't act shocked because then you've lost them," she says. "It's harder for guys to admit it because they're supposed to be macho."

In cases of potentially serious abuse, it's best to set the boundaries of confidentiality early on. Counselors typically offer students confidential support but let them know that if they're in danger of hurting themselves or others, or being hurt, there is a duty to report what students tell. Sometimes kids pull back if they hear their parents or even police will be told. But when teens reach the point of disclosure, many counselors agree with Eklund: "It's a cry for help, and they really want protection; they want adults to know."

Specific legal mandates on reporting abuse vary by state, so school employees should know how their state's laws apply to disclosures about dating abuse, suggests Tonya Turner, senior staff attorney at non-profit Break the Cycle in Los Angeles.

If teens make serious accusations against a classmate, counselors often call in the other student to gain his or her perspective. Parents are called in early too.

Some schools have "stay away" policies that require abusive students to keep a certain distance from victims—they're not put in the same classes or assigned nearby lockers, for example. "It can protect kids and help them move on from abusive relationships," says Barri Rosenbluth, program director at Expect Respect in Austin, Texas, which provides school prevention and counseling services on dating abuse.

## Who's Abused

One in 10 adolescents say they've been the victim of physical dating violence, according to the CDC.

## Discuss

Start talking about healthy relationships early. More than 70 percent of eighth- and ninth-graders say they are already dating.

**IN THE PORTFOLIO** *Tips for teaching students to recognize controlling behavior and abuse  
Ways educators can help student victims of dating violence  
Additional links and resources on preventing dating abuse*

[tolerance.org/possession-obsession](http://tolerance.org/possession-obsession)

# OUT BOUNDS

Sports rivalries can energize school spirit. But keeping events respectful takes a dynamic blend of foresight, leadership and buy-in from the community.

BY **SEAN MCCOLLUM** ILLUSTRATION BY **DANIEL FISHEL**

IN AUTUMN 2010, TWO NEW JERSEY high schools prepared to renew an old rivalry on the football field. Located in neighboring townships, Madison High School and Chatham High School have enjoyed a spirited competition for decades.

At times, though, the competition had threatened to get a bit out of hand. A few years earlier, says Madison High's athletic director, Sean Dowling, some Madison High "knuckleheads" had spray-painted graffiti on Chatham's buses and vandalized its football field. Dowling had always made a point of emphasizing sports ethics and was not overly worried about trouble in the lead-up to the big game now. Still, he and Harvey Cohen, Chatham High's athletic director and Dowling's good friend, recognized a teachable moment when they saw one.

The two schools organized a "Sportsmanship Summit"—a Friday morning conference at Chatham. The schools' student leaders—captains from the various sports plus student council representatives—shared breakfast and brainstormed ideas on energizing their fans but keeping the rivalry in bounds. "I think the kids probably thought [the summit] was overkill on our part," Dowling says. But from his years of experience, he knew it was always easier to stay out of trouble than get out of trouble.

The following Friday night, the two football teams lined up across the field from each other. The players then strode to the center and exchanged pre-game handshakes and "good game" fist

bumps. Fans of both teams cheered and clapped. "It looked awesome," Dowling says. "And it set the tone, not so much for the players, but for the students and the parents in the stands." And that tone has continued to this day.

For athletes and fans, great rivalries represent sports at their most dramatic. These contests and the histories behind them can inspire the best in athletes and teams, and bring together communities in shared enthusiasm like few other public events can. This is shown in venues large and small, from the national pride demonstrated during the Olympic Games to the community spirit on display when entire small towns turn out to see their high school teams compete.

But when fans lose perspective on the purpose and relative importance of sports, rivalries turn rotten. At the interscholastic level, that rot can spread into the school community itself. When marred by vandalism, insulting chants, threats and violence—in the name of team spirit—competition threatens to wreck the finest sports have to offer. It can take forms that poison the overall climate of a league or school, creating an atmosphere where harassment and bullying may be ignored or overlooked.

## **Sports and School Climate**

An example of the ugly side of high school sports occurred in fall 2010. Two rival Ohio high schools were filmed

exchanging chants of "Powder Blue Faggots" and "Halloween Homos"—referencing school colors—before a football game. The taunts, something of a tradition in the rivalry, overlapped with several teen suicides in the area, attributed by some to anti-gay attitudes at area schools.

"It goes on all the time," Jan Cline, then the executive director of the LGBT Community Center of Greater Cleveland, told *The Plain Dealer* after footage of the event appeared on YouTube. "As a teenager I heard it at school," he said. "The school has to be responsible for what happened on their grounds. I understand this has been part of a long tradition and that the kids don't even understand what they did wrong.

"It's bullying," Cline continued. "The unintended impact of this is that it drives young men and women to kill themselves. It sets them apart. What happened at the game tells people that it's OK to say anti-gay slurs because these people are not worth much."

How can schools keep such incidents from taking place? Or better yet, foster a culture where the community coaches itself into respecting the differences of others, including opponents?

There are no one-policy-fits-all answers to these questions, for better or worse. Creating a respectful community usually necessitates a vexing

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**Sportsmanship** \ˈspɔrts-mən-ship\ *n* Conduct becoming to one participating in a sport, e.g., fairness, respect for one's opponent, graciousness in winning or losing.







balancing act between cracking down on the worst behaviors and making efforts to raise awareness and promote more positive participation.

Kind of like tough, contentious issues in real life, suggests Jim Thompson. Thompson is the founder and president of Positive Coaching Alliance, a national nonprofit organization that works to improve sports culture among coaches and young athletes. “We need to see [poor sports ethics] not as a problem but as a challenge and part of the educational mission,” Thompson says. “There can be an incredible opportunity for a school community to redefine itself using sports as the vehicle. And it can be especially meaningful to the kids when

they are given a chance to take ownership of the process.”

### Youth Sports in a Sports-Obsessed World

Thompson puts much of the onus for bad behavior surrounding youth sports on our sports-obsessed culture. “The world has never been so saturated with sports as it is now,” he says. He cites the rise of ESPN and 24/7 sports coverage as both a symptom and a driver of that obsession, culminating in a culture that glorifies winning and laughs off coaches’ tantrums, players’ ugly behavior and fans’ misconduct. Vicious put-downs and “smack talk” are the language of message boards and sports radio talk shows. Thompson believes

these attitudes and behaviors inevitably trickle down to coaches, players and fans at the interscholastic level.

Sister Lynn Winsor agrees. Winsor serves as vice principal for activities and athletic director at Xavier College Preparatory, an all-girls school in Phoenix. A long-time coach and past president of the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association, she says she has observed respectful fan behavior decline in nearly 40 years of playing, coaching and overseeing sports. “With so much TV coverage, what young people see going on at the pro and college level now drops right down to high school,” she says. “[Students] mock or imitate it. And the local athletic director is the one who has to deal with it.”

And deal with it the athletic director must, Winsor adds. The trick, she says, is to confront the behavior at a level appropriate to the situation. Overreaction can generate its own problems, including festering resentment and running feuds; but if interventions are too unclear or inconsistent, the challenges to authority will likely ramp up.

“I’ve had to ask fans to leave basketball games for yelling at the referees,” Winsor says. But she also tells the story of informing an unruly parent that he could attend soccer games only if he sat next to Sister Joanie, a devoted Xavier fan but also a stickler for proper behavior. “He told me afterward that he had a much better experience cheering and watching the game with Sister Joanie,” Winsor laughs. “You have to be ready to come up with creative answers to handle different situations.”

### Cracking Down Versus Buying In

Sports rivalries are dynamic relationships with many moving parts—athletes, coaches, students, pep squads, parents and others. When it’s healthy, fierce competition can engender respect as well as passion. Whatever antagonism exists is balanced by awareness that the two opponents *need* each

## HUMANIZING SPIRIT DAYS AND PEP RALLIES

While spirit days and pep rallies can energize a school and the student body, they can fray the nerves of educators and infuse the student body with negative messages.

Consider:

- Cheerleaders at a Texas high school pretended to gun down other cheerleaders dressed in rival school colors.
- A white junior at a Utah high school, dressed in the class color of white for the annual “spirit bowl,” covered his head in a KKK-like hood and allegedly taunted a mixed-race classmate.
- A Minnesota school district was sued by the family of a distressed black student for not blocking an unofficial spirit event known as “Wigger Wednesday,” when white students dressed up in caricatures of African-American fashion.
- The seemingly ubiquitous cross-dressing male athletes who sport huge rubber-ball breasts.

Helping kids and teens develop tolerance and sensitivity toward others is rarely an easy task. This can be especially true in communities with limited exposure to people of other backgrounds and ethnicities. In the unkind or naïve hands of young minds, intentions can wander off into the weeds of bad judgment and bigotry.

Heavy-handed censorship is rarely the best answer. It can cause students to sweep unexamined attitudes under the rug of teacher-approved behavior. Instead, savvy club advisers can offer adult reflection and guidance to student groups about the appropriateness of their skits or other public displays of school spirit.

One insightful exercise is to ask students to research rivalry-gone-wrong events like those noted above. As a group, they can analyze why these incidents generated so much controversy. Stimulate students’ critical thinking skills as well as compassion with this question: “Does our idea single out people and portray their identity—race, religion, class, gender, intellectual ability or sexuality—as inferior or laughable?”

If the answer is yes, or even maybe, then students should be urged to go back to the drawing board.



other as integral halves in the contest.

Demonization of the other side, though, is a sign the rivalry may be tilting toward something uglier, says PCA's Thompson. "When there is name-calling and taunting, it can very quickly lead to physical strife," he says. Students posting signs threatening mock violence against the other school, the vandalizing of school property, fans booing when the visiting team is introduced or cheering when an opposing player is injured—all can be warning signs that the rivalry may be coming off the rails.

When this happens, school officials can manage the conflict—existing or potential—with one of two general strategies, says Thompson: the crackdown model and the ownership model.

The crackdown model follows traditional lines of authority. Codes of conduct are explicitly stated and punishments for violations are clear-cut—ejection from the game, loss of privileges, suspension, even arrest for criminal acts like vandalism or assault.

The ownership model requires more forethought and commitment. It seeks to empower students, staff and parents by giving them integral roles in planning for and running rivalry-related events. "What about getting a cross-section of the student body—working with the athletic director, coaching staff and Parent Booster Club—to start planning for next year's big games?" Thompson asks. "Form a working group to determine what needs to be done. Have them ask, 'What kind of culture do we want to have at our games?' and identify potential problems and how to defuse them."

When safety is at issue, then some cracking down may very well be necessary, Thompson acknowledges. But the ownership model fosters buy-in that can reduce tensions and conflict long-term, and it requires less top-down intervention.

When working to rebuild or recast a rivalry that has turned ugly, Thompson proposes structured events to bring

together counterparts of the rival schools, like the "Sportsmanship Summit" organized by Madison and Chatham high schools. These interschool meetings might include nontraditional student leaders, if possible, he says. Few things can humanize a rival more than trading stories away from the court, field or diamond.

"It may seem like a lot of work, but talk about a teachable moment," Thompson says. Again, he sees such efforts as part of the educational mission. "It can be a fantastic leadership and learning experience for all involved, especially for the students."

If necessary and possible, Thompson recommends getting more explicit in pushing back against a distorted "us versus them" mentality. He describes what he calls "A Rivalry to Be Proud Of" campaign, jointly promoted by the rival schools. "You might have buttons and T-shirts made up with both school colors and that slogan," he says. "The captains of the two teams might create a public service announcement together describing what the rivalry means to them." He suggests efforts to welcome opponents as "guests" rather than "visitors," with principals, coaches, pep squads and players prepared to serve as role models of enthusiastic but respectful behavior for the home-team fans.

### **Sports and School Climate**

Richard Cardillo, education director of the National School Climate Center, believes it is important to evaluate the health of the overall school climate when determining how much crackdown and how much buy-in is needed or workable for a given situation. However, he contends that punishment for broken conduct codes, in and of itself, rarely gets at the underlying attitudes or behaviors that lead to incidents. In the buy-in approach, "It's not that you broke a rule, it's that you damaged a relationship," he says—a relationship with classmates, the school community, even the rival

school. The emphasis is then on repairing the relationship that was damaged, not just weathering a visit to the principal's office, a suspension or an embarrassing article in the local paper.

In Cardillo's view, developing pride in a positive, tolerant, classy school climate can become a rallying point for all students and staff. And school sports can be a big player in the campaign.

"I'm a big fan of pep rallies" as well as sports, Cardillo says. "It helps unify us around something." What that something will be, he notes, is an important question for every school to consider and answer for itself. That requires an honest inventory of potential problems, discussion of the values that students, student athletes, faculty and staff want the school to represent, identification of positive behaviors that embody those ideals and finally active promotion of those behaviors and ideals.

Staff, teachers and administrators need to walk the talk in creating that healthier learning and living environment, Cardillo insists. "Students aren't dumb. They figure out very quickly the pecking order among teachers, and who the administrator is that everyone is afraid of."

For sports in a school with a healthy climate, pride can be less about winning and more about representing a vibrant, can-do community where everyone's place and participation is respected. School unity is valued, defended and celebrated, in sports and elsewhere. In all things, winning is secondary to effort and honorable behavior, and triumph is not based on the defeat or humiliation of another or the other side.

In Cardillo's experience, school communities with a healthy climate become better at self-regulation. Students themselves will step up to interrupt cruelty and crass behavior before it gets out of hand, whether in hallways or the bleachers. "They'll tell others, 'We don't do that here. *This* is the way we do things at our school.'" ♦

# Give Bigotry No Sanction

Why did religious pluralism flourish in the United States? Because George Washington and other Founders worked hard to nurture it. *Facing History and Ourselves* offers lessons that can guide students through key documents that illustrate the freedom our Founders envisioned.

BY **ADAM STROM** AND **DARLENE KOENIG**  
HAND LETTERING BY **BERNARD MAISNER**

ON A MUGGY AUGUST MORNING IN 1790, President George Washington sailed to Newport, R.I., with Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson and other dignitaries. Three months earlier, Rhode Island's legislature had made it the last state to ratify the United States Constitution, and Washington was eager to gain support for the amendments that would later become the Bill of Rights.

The group was greeted by Newport's politicians, businessmen and clergy and, together, they gathered at a red-brick customs house where representatives of the community addressed the president.

Among them was Moses Seixas, who read two letters—one as the grand master of the Masonic Order of Rhode Island and the other as the warden of Newport's Hebrew Congregation.

It's hard to overstate the significance of the moment. Much of Newport's Jewish population had come to America to escape centuries of persecution in Europe. And Seixas's opportunity might have happened only in Rhode Island, which was founded by Roger Williams in 1636 as a haven for religious dissenters. Outside the colony,

freedom of religion for non-Christians was hardly a given. In fact, the freedom to worship for many nonmajority Christians—including Quakers, Baptists and Catholics—was nearly as precarious.

In the early days of the United States, religious minorities had several concerns: Would they be allowed to practice their religion? Would they be allowed to build houses of worship? Would they have the same political rights as members of mainstream Protestant sects? After all, it was within living memory that “heretics” had been banished and even burned at the stake. And, in 1790, many of the states excluded Jews, Catholics, Quakers and others from civic participation on the basis of religious differences. Even in Rhode Island, Jews could not vote or hold public office.

In this context, Seixas read his message to Washington on behalf of Newport's small Jewish population:

“Deprived as we heretofore have been of the invaluable rights of free Citizens, we now (with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty disposer of all events) behold a Government ... which

to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance.”

The courteous thing for the president to do was to respond in writing. But what would he say? Then, as now, disputes over religion had the potential to dissolve into controversy.

## Dueling Identities

In 2012, Americans belonging to minority religions as well as those who believe in no religion still struggle to claim a place in the public square. According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, more than 2.2 billion people—more than a third of the world's population—face religious restrictions. They live either in nations where the government restricts worship or where social hostilities force them to defend their beliefs. Even in the United States, there has been a long debate about the role that religion should play in our national identity, and research suggests that we know very little about each others' faiths, traditions and practices.

Lack of knowledge can lead to misunderstanding and distrust. Echoing debates in Europe, head coverings have come under suspicion in schools,



government buildings and motor-vehicle licensing bureaus. The effort to build an Islamic center near New York City’s Ground Zero memorial caused a firestorm of debate. A poll taken in July 2011 revealed that 22 percent of Americans would not vote for a Mormon for president, regardless of that candidate’s policies or record.

It’s in this environment that students can benefit from learning about Washington’s response to Newport’s Hebrew Congregation.

### Washington’s Words

Writing back just four days later, the nation’s first president reassured the Jewish community of Newport that his government “gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.” He went further, explaining the difference between mere forbearance and true freedom:

“It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights.” Washington envisioned that in the new nation, members of all religions would be able to practice their individual faiths by right—not through the permission or indulgence of the majority.

“All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship,” Washington wrote, defining religious freedom as a natural right preceding any constitution or laws.

Washington’s letter is a clear example of his intent to establish a nation in which the government upholds principles of religious freedom. But it is not an isolated document. He had also written letters to the nation’s Quakers, Catholics and Baptists. And his peers, including Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, held similar views. In a letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in Connecticut 12 years later, Jefferson wrote:

“Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship,



*George Washington’s exchange of letters with the Jewish congregation at Newport, R.I., helped set the tone for religious pluralism in the United States. The letters are important documents for all students to understand.*

that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,’ thus building a wall of separation between church and state.” (See our online portfolio for the full text.)

Washington’s letter is particularly important given the contemporary debate over the the Bill of Rights and its First Amendment. Just a year later, the states ratified the amendment understanding that it set a framework for religious freedom. Washington also offered something equally important: a moral vision that balances respect for religious difference with the responsibilities of citizenship.

### A Story with Universal Lessons

The story of George Washington and Moses Seixas is that of a particular cultural setting and the challenges faced by a unique religious community. And clearly, despite Washington’s intent, many religious minorities still dream of worshipping in environments that

have achieved, at the least, a degree of toleration. But educators can help students achieve a connection between that event and those of the present day.

Facing History and Ourselves and the George Washington Institute for Religious Freedom believe these important documents—and the lessons they offer about pluralism and democracy—are a great place to begin.

Deborah Conway, a teacher at the Facing History School in New York City, found the documents fascinating—as did her students.

“[The letter] was written so long ago, and yet here was a president expressing his views about religious tolerance,” she says. Her students wrote their own letters to Washington from a modern-day perspective, communicating examples of how Americans still struggle with these issues. The school’s proximity to the planned Islamic center near the Ground Zero memorial, she says, “definitely sparked” much of their discussion.

The goal is for students to experience what German philosopher Jürgen Habermas calls a “mutual recognition and mutual acceptance of divergent worldviews”—a “kind of tolerance [that] allows religion and democracy to coexist in a pluralistic environment.” ♦

*On the next two pages are artistic reproductions of the letters exchanged by Moses Seixas and George Washington. They remain enduring testaments to the spirit of religious freedom that shaped the United States.*

*Editor’s note: Different transcriptions of these letters provide differing punctuation, differing capitalization and, in some cases, slightly different wording. We have replaced some outdated usages for clarity while trying to preserve the original tone of the letters.*

To the President of the United States of America,

Sir:

Permit the children of the Stock of Abraham to approach you with the most cordial affection and esteem for your person & merits and to join with our fellow Citizens in welcoming you to New Port.

With pleasure we reflect on those days - those days of difficulty and danger when the God of Israel, who delivered David from the peril of the sword, shielded your head in the day of battle: and we rejoice to think that the same Spirit who rested in the Bosom of the greatly beloved Daniel enabling him to preside over the Provinces of the Babylonish Empire, rests and ever will rest upon you, enabling you to discharge the arduous duties of Chief Magistrate in these States.

Deprived as we heretofore have been of the invaluable rights of free Citizens, we now (with a deep sense of gratitude to the Almighty disposer of all events) behold a Government, erected by the Majesty of the People - a Government, which to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance - but generously affording to All liberty of conscience, and immunities of Citizenship: deeming every one, of whatever Nation, tongue, or language, equal parts of the great governmental Machine: This so ample and extensive Federal Union whose basis is Philanthropy, Mutual Confidence and Publick Virtue, we cannot but acknowledge to be the work of the Great God, who ruleth in the Armies Of Heaven and among the Inhabitants of the Earth, doing whatever seemeth him good.

For all the Blessings of civil and religious liberty which we enjoy under an equal and benign administration we desire to send up our thanks to the [Ancient] of Days, the great preserver of Men - beseeching him that the Angel who conducted our forefathers through the wilderness into the promised land, may graciously conduct you through all the difficulties and dangers of this mortal life: and, when like Joshua full of days and full of honour, you are gathered to your Fathers, may you be admitted into the Heavenly Paradise to partake of the water of life, and the tree of immortality.

Done and signed by  
Order of the Hebrew Congregation  
in Newport Rhode Island

Moses Seixas, Warden

August 17. 1790



Gentlemen:

While I receive with much satisfaction your address replete with expressions of affection and esteem, I rejoice in the opportunity of assuring you that I shall always retain a grateful remembrance of the cordial welcome I experienced in my visit to Newport from all classes of citizens.

The reflection on the days of difficulty and danger which are past is rendered the more sweet from a consciousness that they are succeeded by days of uncommon prosperity and security. If we have wisdom to make the best use of the advantages with which we are now favored, we cannot fail, under the just administration of a good government, to become a great and happy people.

The citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy—a policy worthy of imitation. All possess a like liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

It would be inconsistent with the frankness of my character not to avow that I am pleased with your favorable opinion of my administration and fervent wishes for my felicity. May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants—while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light, and not darkness, in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in His own due time and way everlastingly happy.

G. Washington

August 21, 1790





# Weighing In

## Healthy at Any Size?

As the number of obese and overweight children grows, so does size bias.

BY CAMILLE JACKSON ILLUSTRATION BY GEORGE BATES

CELEBRITIES LIKE SINGER JENNIFER Hudson and actress Kirstie Alley parade their drastic weight loss in commercials and magazine articles. Popular TV shows like *The Biggest Loser* promote fast, extreme weight loss. And fat jokes cut across race, ethnicity and gender lines to provide easy laughs for comedians at the expense of the heavyset.

Society is more fatphobic than ever before, with subtle and overt messages all around us that not only is fat bad, but so are fat people. It's easy for overweight children to feel singled out and shamed about their body size, at home and at school. Experts say children can easily interpret even the well-intentioned "war on childhood obesity," meant to promote health, to mean a war on their bodies and on them.

"The number of obese kids has increased, so negativity has increased," says Reginald Washington, the chief medical officer at Rocky Mountain Hospital for Children and a leader in the fight against childhood obesity. "It is true that if you are obese you are discriminated against in schools and the workplace, and even in your home. Physical education teachers see them as lazy and are harder on them in class. Studies have shown this."

Size-based stigma stems in large part from the myth that being fat is a

result of a lack of self-control and willpower, says Rebecca Puhl, a psychologist and coordinator at Yale's Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity. "There are prevailing public perceptions about the causes of obesity, like the widespread belief that obesity is simply an issue of laziness," Puhl says. "This perception drastically oversimplifies the complex causes—societal and biological—of obesity."

### Bullies Leave Scars

Lamar Richardson (not his real name), 25, of Greenville, N.C., remembers being humiliated in his sixth-grade physical education class when the coach jokingly suggested he wear a training bra. Richardson can still hear the laughter of his classmates.

"It affected me for a very long time," says Richardson. "I was not comfortable

with my body image. Even when I got to high school, after football practice I would go straight home and shower, rather than go to the locker room." He is now in a fitness program at a local gym but says he "still has the same issues."

Megan Hansen, the founder of a healthy-lifestyle support group in North Carolina, also isolated herself in high school because of her weight: "When you're fat you walk with your head down," she says. "You go from class to class not wanting anybody to see you." Megan says she was careful not to stand next to cheerleaders, for fear of being compared with them.

Lavinia Rodriguez, a clinical psychologist in Land O' Lakes, Fla., who treats eating disorders and weight issues, says most of the size-discrimination stories she's heard have come from adult patients. "Younger kids don't want to talk about that," she says. "They don't bring it up. The things they talk about suggest [size bullying], but they don't state it overtly." Richardson agrees: "I didn't talk to anybody about it," he says. "As a guy you're taught not to really share your feelings like that. You just suck it up."

Rodriguez points out that girls are more likely to talk about their body-image issues and self-esteem than boys.

### Am I biased about size?

- + Do I think obesity shows a lack of willpower?
- + Do I think that everyone wants to be thin?
- + Are all the heroines in our class stories slender?
- + Would I be willing to cast a heavy student as the lead in the class play?

“Girls tend to remember name-calling and boys remember getting beat up,” she says.

### Bias in Schools

Unfortunately, educators often promote the negative stereotypes overweight students face. Studies show teachers tend to call on lean children over obese students. Some are less likely to give a favorable grade to overweight kids, and they generally perceive these children to be less successful. According to the Obesity Action Coalition, teachers often view overweight students as untidy and more emotional, among other problems. Obese students are also less likely to be accepted to college, despite having equivalent application rates and academic achievement.

State efforts regarding size bias in schools have thus far focused on reducing weight, not reducing prejudice. For instance, in 2003 Arkansas became the first state to record students’ body mass index (BMI) and send the results home in a report card. However, federal agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, have not found enough evidence to recommend such programs as an effective strategy against childhood obesity.

The Arkansas program had no effect on obesity levels, according to a 2010 report by the state’s Center for Health Improvement. And experts disparaged Arkansas’s program coverage: “They didn’t go the next step to give parents tools on how to design better meals and find afterschool activities,” says Washington of the Rocky Mountain Hospital.

Yet Pennsylvania, New York, Massachusetts and other states soon followed with similar BMI-measuring programs. Georgia started a statewide school fitness program, the Georgia Student Health and Physical Education initiative, which seems to approach the issue in a more constructive way. In Georgia, kids are not labeled by their weight, says Therese McGuire of

#### IN THE PORTFOLIO

##### **Improving Health at Every Size**

*For educators, working with overweight and obese children can present a balancing act between showing acceptance and guiding them to healthier lifestyles. Re-framing the issue as a matter of health—rather than weight—can help. Here’s how.*

##### **Body Image and Health: Cultural Norms**

*Studies indicate many Hispanic and African Americans—especially girls and women—are not as cursed with the stigma of being seen as overweight. While notions of body image among minority youth may be less warped, many pay a price in terms of health. Read about it.*

[tolerance.org/weighing-in](http://tolerance.org/weighing-in)

Georgia’s Department of Education. Rather, “some kids will learn they are not in the healthy zone. It just means they need to make positive changes.” Teachers will receive the students’ data in aggregate form, she says, so that schools can customize their curriculum, for example by starting a running club.

### Lobbying for Protection

Children should be legally protected from size-based teasing and harassment in school, says the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA). The organization has called for changes in the proposed Safe Schools Improvement Act to add weight, height and physical appearance as protected categories, alongside race, religion and sexual orientation.

At a news conference last August in Washington, D.C., Peggy Howell, the organization’s public relations director, unveiled NAAFA’s online child advocacy toolkit, a 50-page booklet for parents and educators about size diversity.

“Discrimination continues to increase against people of all ages,” Howell told a room full of reporters. One in six children are bullied, she said, and of those, 85 percent are bullied for their size or physical appearance. And Howell argues that programs such as first lady Michelle

Obama’s “Let’s Move!” campaign, which began in February 2010, do not help matters. NAAFA contends that the campaign, intended to “solve the problem of obesity within a generation,” should focus on the overall health of children rather than on body size alone.

“Low body weight does not equal health, high body weight does not equal disease,” Howell said.

Rocky Mountain Hospital’s Washington disagrees. He points out that obese and overweight children are more likely to have high blood pressure, diabetes, bone issues and other substantial problems. And obesity-related health problems cost states billions of dollars each year. However, Washington does agree with NAAFA that size discrimination is increasing, and says that it is up to adults to be self-reflective about their personal prejudice against overweight people.

“Teachers have to look within themselves to ask, ‘Am I a part of this problem?’” he says.

### What Schools Can Do

Schools can avoid perpetuating size-based stigma by de-emphasizing weight and BMI numbers and focusing on overall health for all children. Psychologist Rodriguez says attention needs to be paid to behaviors, not to numbers.

“Don’t focus on one child as the one who has to do something different,” she said. “It should be a family or school project. Parents are so focused on size, the weight, the number, they look at the symptom and just want to make the child lose weight.”

Rebecca Puhl at Yale’s Rudd Center says that teachers must be more aware of their own attitudes toward overweight and obese children. Those attitudes affect the overweight children directly and can indirectly promote bullying by other students. “Essentially, weight bias is rarely challenged, and often ignored,” she says. “As a result many youth who are struggling with their weight are vulnerable.” ♦



# ACTION

FROM AWARENESS TO



Alec Loorz launched Kids vs. Global Warming, which educates and empowers students on the issue.

Young people make great political activists. How can you get them involved in fighting for issues that matter?

BY JOHN MICKLOS JR.

Like adults, many young people express concern about global warming. Like adults, most feel helpless to do anything about it. Not Alec Loorz of Ventura, Calif. At age 12, after seeing Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*, Loorz formed a nonprofit organization called Kids vs. Global Warming. He now gives presentations across the United States, reaching kids and adults alike with his message of awareness and action.

Now 16, Loorz spent much of the past year encouraging students across the nation to sign a petition in support of lawsuits seeking to force the federal government and states to cut greenhouse gas emissions. He organized the iMatter campaign to spur young people to take action on this critical issue.

"Youth are some of the most creative, dedicated and passionate people on this planet, and we know that climate change will affect us more than anyone else," Loorz says. "We are



Isaiah Lee fought against teacher layoffs in New Haven, Conn.

ready to transition to a society that values our survival just as much as short-term interests, like money and power.”

Meanwhile, in New Haven, Conn., Wilbur Cross High School student Isaiah Lee worked to bring about change at the local level by leading more than 40 students to rally at City Hall to protest teacher layoffs. “It’s important to have young people’s perspectives on these issues,” Lee says. “We are the ones who are ultimately affected by the decisions made by the authorities.”

Lee says that his political activism, which included meeting with New Haven Mayor John DeStefano Jr., was one of the best learning experiences he has ever had. “I’ve learned good communications skills,” he says, “how to research and present an argument, and how to mobilize people on important issues.”

Turn on just about any news program today and you’ll see the power of young people, from Occupy Wall Street to Arab Spring protests in the Middle East. Using the Internet and social media to spread ideas almost instantly, these young activists helped create unthinkable change in a remarkably short time.

What inspires young people to become activists? Events such as wars or regime changes obviously raise high emotions. But Alec Looorz and Isaiah Lee chose to get involved because they saw a need and felt compelled to take action.

#### How Schools Can Help

Young Americans have a long track record as activists. Among other things, they played a key role in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. And young people were actively involved in protests against the Vietnam War and the war in Iraq.

Schools and teachers can help inspire students to get involved as activists. For instance, many high schools have diversity clubs designed to promote awareness and activism around the issue of developing respect for all people, regardless of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, mental or physical aptitude, nationality and other traits. Many schools also have clubs that focus on specific areas of activism.

More than 500 schools across the country have Amnesty International USA groups, which organize a wide

range of activities to raise awareness about various human rights issues. For instance, in May 2011 about 50 students at Townsend Harris High School in Queens, N.Y., lined the main entrance of the school, bearing prosthetic bellies and carrying signs displaying statistics about maternal deaths worldwide. The demonstration was part of a weeklong effort to raise awareness of maternal health issues.

Becoming involved as activists “not only is a crucial part of students’ learning and core competencies around critical thinking, but it also allows them

#### *Build an Activism Tool Kit*

Focus on the tactics and strategies employed when teaching about social movements, and encourage students to build their own tool kit for action.

#### *Take Action*

Set up a special bulletin board in your class and use it to post information about ways students can get involved in local service. Encourage them to post items too.

to have an impact on critical issues of the moment,” says Cynthia Carrion, national youth program coordinator for Amnesty International USA. “They are actually doing community organizing, and this civic engagement makes for well-rounded students and lays the foundation for future opportunities as well.”

Schools or students interested in becoming involved as activists can visit the website of Do Something, a nonprofit organization that motivates young people to take action on a wide variety of social change issues. DoSomething.org offers dozens of causes to choose from and has support from many corporations and from celebrities such as Nick Cannon and Demi Lovato. The organization also provides grants and awards to support outstanding young activists.

At the 2011 Do Something Awards ceremony in August, 18-year-old Sarah Cronk of Bettendorf, Iowa, received the \$100,000 grand prize for her project, the Sparkle Effect. After watching her older brother struggle to fit in during high school because of his disabilities,

she formed an inclusive cheerleading squad at her school. Together with another squad member, she then founded the nonprofit Sparkle Effect, which has generated more than 25 similar squads throughout the United States and South Africa.

### Simply Go for It

From protecting the atmosphere to protesting teacher layoffs to making school activities more inclusive for all students, young people continue to seek ways to make the world a better place, and schools can help spark their enthusiasm. Over time, students can see how the choices they make and the actions they take can have lasting effects in their school, their community and even throughout the world.

“Young people always ask me how they can get involved or ‘do what I did,’ and all I can think to say is simply go for it,” Loorz says. “When I started, I knew nothing about what I was doing. I had no money, no connections, nothing. All I did was realize what I was called to do and go for it, and opportunities started coming almost by miracle. I know that



*Sarah Cronk created and coached the nation's first high school-based inclusive cheerleading squad.*

if we all find this passion for ourselves, people will listen to us, doors will begin to open, and we really will be able to make anything happen.” ♦

## TRAVEL WITH A PURPOSE

Imagine travel that combines service and sightseeing, learning and leadership. Increasing numbers of middle school and high school students are participating in organized trips that include a focus on volunteer work. Instead of—or in addition to—sightseeing, participants may spend time building schools or houses, volunteering in nursing homes, digging wells, working in food banks, planting trees or mentoring younger students. Such opportunities are often called “voluntourism.”

One organization that makes such experiences possible is Students Today Leaders Forever (STLF). Founded in 2003 by four college freshmen at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, STLF organizes Pay It Forward Tour road trips, pairing middle and high school students with college-age volunteer leaders. (They also offer college-level tours.) Busloads of students travel to destinations around the country volunteering in the morning, sightseeing or visiting colleges in the afternoon and then participating in reflection and leadership activities in the evening.

Based in Minneapolis, STLF has organized more than 317 tours involving more than 12,500 students who provided more than 175,000 service hours. “Our mission is to reveal leadership because we believe leadership is already within every single young person,” says Irene Fernando, STLF co-founder. “We want to provide an experience that helps that leadership naturally come out.” Irene is one of eight paid staff members who work with 600 college volunteers to get 3,500 students into programs annually.

“My participation in STLF has brought me to see how easily leadership can be revealed through simple acts of service,” says Aimee Vue, a high school student from St. Paul, Minn.

“STLF has been a shepherd on my road to self-discovery,” adds Ali Fadlallah, a college graduate from Dearborn, Mich., who has participated on multiple tours. “My STLF experiences have challenged me to change, and then become an ambassador for change.”





## SPANISH CLASSES ARE THE PERFECT PLACE TO HELP STUDENTS DEVELOP CULTURAL COMPETENCE.

BY LIZ RANSOM

**AT THE BEGINNING** of each school year, Spanish teacher Aurora Hermo displays pictures of a diverse group of people and asks her students to identify which of them are Latino. They confidently eliminate those wearing business attire. Then they narrow the group down further by eliminating those with the lightest and darkest complexions.

In reality, all of the images are of Latino men and women.

Hermo, who teaches at Summit Senior High School in Summit, N.J., says the results of this exercise are the same even among students who speak Spanish as a part of their heritage. In fact, she finds that her students' perceptions instead reflect the narrow portrayal of Latinos in popular culture.

The National Association of Hispanic Journalists tracks the presence of Latinos in the news. It reports that news stories in which Latinos are the subject most often concern immigration, poverty and crime.

And Hollywood does no better in reflecting the broad reality of Latino life. Latino characters are often portrayed as poor and uneducated. In his

book *Hollywood Hispano: The Latins in Motion Pictures*, George Hadley-Garcia writes, "Hollywood has not explored the world of Hispanics who are rich, educated, middle-class, who are gay or bisexual"—in other words, the depth and breadth of any culture. What students see often reinforces stereotypes and creates a skewed vision of the actual communities in which they live.

The good news is that Spanish-language teachers are perfectly positioned to tackle anti-bias issues within their curriculum. But it doesn't happen automatically. Educators must be purposeful in integrating language and culture, with a goal of eliminating biases as their students accumulate language skills.

### Embracing Standards-Based Instruction

Pablo Muirhead now teaches Spanish at Milwaukee Area Technical College. But it was teaching a middle school class that helped him reimagine the goals of foreign-language instruction. He created a unit about an indigenous Peruvian family that moves to the city. His eighth-graders learned what the

class needed to cover—such as vocabulary—from the text. But they also were able to explore the themes of cultural merging, discrimination and linguistic difference.

Muirhead's approach reflects the national standards for foreign-language learning issued by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The standards identify five interlinked goal areas: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons and communities. And they provide a framework for teachers to implement curriculum that explores both dominant and marginalized cultural perspectives while helping students acquire language skills. But Muirhead laments the "real, or perceived, pressure" teachers feel to get through certain chapters in a textbook, which often results in cultural themes being relegated to an afterthought, at best.

In contrast, Muirhead found that creating a more realistic unit that encompassed all of the standards engaged his students on an emotional level, making anti-bias goals easier to achieve.



## Creating Curriculum That Reflects Diversity

Hermo knows that students tend to accept the perspective of the dominant culture as reality, so she feels it's important that they develop critical cultural competence. She challenges her students in lively debates, and recalls one in which her advanced-Spanish students tackled the role of women in society. They were surprised to learn that women now serve, or have recently served, as the presidents of nations such as Chile, Argentina, Brazil and Costa Rica.

"Many kids are used to seeing themselves 'on top,'" Hermo says, but she constantly urges them to explore their own assumptions and to be more aware of the reality of the world.

Speaking as a teacher myself, that means replacing dominant perspectives about culture with more complex views. For example, in a unit highlighting the African diaspora in Peru, I once challenged my students to create a skit about a family. Two boys snickered and asked, "Can we be a gay couple?"

As a relatively new teacher, I balked, imagining the stereotype-filled rendition we'd see if I said yes. At the time, I thought I could remain neutral by saying no to the boys, but I've since realized neutrality is not possible.

In 2004, the California Safe Schools

Coalition report *Safe Place to Learn* found that two out of three students who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered reported being harassed. To help improve school climates, the report recommended introducing curriculum that includes people like them.

As a result, I no longer encourage students to pretend alternative families don't exist. Instead, we preface such activities by talking about the many forms of families and decide as a class not to tolerate stereotypes.

## Turning the Whole School Into Your Classroom

As a 10th-grader, Darling Cerna had little opportunity to share her Guatemalan heritage with other students until a Spanish teacher asked her to participate in an interview assigned as part of a class project.

"I thought it was a great idea," she says. "I love talking about my culture ... and it's nice to talk to someone about your differences now and then—something I barely get to do at school."

Her interview was part of a project for Spanish students at Princeton Day School, where I teach. Over the course of a week, the students prepared questions and recorded interviews in Spanish with native and heritage Spanish speakers

throughout the school. They included fellow students, faculty, administrators and staff, such as food-service workers. Students benefited from the chance to practice their language skills in an authentic setting, while the people they interviewed saw their language and culture elevated and valued.

Ninth-grader Jake Hall interviewed a science teacher of Mexican descent.

"This really piques your awareness about all of the students and faculty ... with a rich Hispanic heritage," he says, "and really brings to light the diversity of our community."

In addition to helping to break down stereotypes, reaching out to Spanish speakers helped create a greater sense of community at the school. Even after the project, food-service workers Lisette Rodas and Uli Chacon continue to chat in Spanish with their interviewers.

"It was flattering to be asked to participate," says Rodas. "It's nice that they see we're not just here to cook and serve." And for Chacon, who grew up in rural Costa Rica, it was interesting to teach the mostly urban students about life in the country. He also notes that students now call him by name.

"I felt good [talking to the kids]," he says. "It's a good thing to do—for both them and us." ♦

# THE POVERTY MYTH

‘LOW-INCOME’ SHOULD NOT MEAN LOW EXPECTATIONS.

BY **JACQUELINE CHING** ILLUSTRATION BY **JAMES STEINBERG**

IN HER FRESHMAN YEAR, BRENNA Reed, 17, was aware of the haves and have-nots. “At my school, there’s no in between,” says Brenna, a student at Green Bay Preble High School in Green Bay, Wis. “You’re either rich or poor.”

The former either drive to school or are driven by their parents, while the latter are bused from greater distances. Some 40 percent of students there, like Brenna, are enrolled in the free or reduced-price lunch program, a common measure of a school’s poverty rate.

Brenna felt marginalized by some of her teachers. One was nice for a couple weeks, but the relationship soured quite suddenly. “[The teacher] said to me, ‘Did you turn in your homework?’” Brenna recalls. “I said, ‘No.’ She said, ‘Of course you didn’t, bitch.’ The whole class heard it.” After that, Brenna felt “pegged”—just another underachieving low-income kid, pitied if not scorned.

The marginalization Brenna encountered is hardly unique to one school. In fact, students in every district are likely to face these problems of perception.

Seniasor Rodríguez-Gómez, Green Bay Preble’s student support staff person, says the school works hard to “make every student feel proud to be part of the school. But there are always students who are very aware of their personal situation and have low self-esteem.” After her run-in with the teacher, Brenna proceeded to fail half of her classes that year. But that’s not the end of her story.

Many school districts have deliberately sought ways to help their teachers become more conscious of personal biases they bring into the classroom. Stereotypes regarding race and gender

in particular have received increased scrutiny since the 1970s. Unfortunately, teacher dispositions surrounding low-income students rarely get the same level of attention. The teachers themselves may be unaware of the little ways they signal disdain or lower expectations for these students: that they see them as poorly motivated, emotionally troubled, lacking confidence and family support, or otherwise unprepared to achieve academically. And as

has been often demonstrated when it comes to stereotypes, students tend to fulfill those expectations.

“We have touted the myth that if you are low-income, you can’t achieve,” says William Parrett, director of the Center for School Improvement and Policy Studies at Boise State University. “That is an absolute myth.”

Parrett says that low-income students can find themselves pigeonholed. “You’ll hear terms like ‘those





kids’ or ‘poverty kids’ from teachers, staff, administrators. That’s how they often get labeled,” says Parrett, co-author of an upcoming book, *Poverty and Underachievement: How High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools Lead Their Students to Success*. “Classrooms might be set up to help those who are just below being proficient, not way, way below—because people think the chances of them catching up are small.”

### Blaming the Kids

Margo Hurrle, the shelter office coordinator for Minneapolis Public Schools, has heard it all. “There are teachers who think these kids are so unstable, why bother. They don’t want to give a student a uniform because they’re just going to leave.” Those attitudes demonstrate a lack of empathy and understanding of the realities of most low-income families, Hurrle adds. “In fact, we have stable, poor neighborhoods in which families have lived for generations.”

Another stereotype low-income students face is that their parents don’t care about education. “I hear, ‘Why can’t we put pressure on the parents?’ There are people in our community who believe [the kids] should pull themselves up by their bootstraps, and don’t understand what they go through,” says Hurrle.

The flip side of such hard-heartedness can be misplaced sympathy that can also hobble low-income learners. “Low-income students are faced with the stereotype that they can’t learn,” says Andre Dukes, engagement director of the Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) in North Minneapolis. “Administrators lower the standards in school because they supposedly can’t meet the norm. We say you should never lower the standards.”

Initiatives like NAZ seek to change expectations of poor and minority students in their neighborhoods. The program, which was modeled after Geoffrey Canada’s Harlem Children’s Zone, offers students a host of services to get

them college-ready. The best way to fight the stereotypes, Dukes contends, is to show that these students can achieve.

### Stripping Away Stereotypes

How can educators assess and correct for their own biases toward low-income students? Existing programs that promote awareness of racial and gender stereotypes can provide some starting points. But here are concrete steps for filling in partial knowledge regarding low-income families and communities, as well as helping low-income students feel welcome and more secure in school and the classroom.

➔ Examine beliefs regarding the so-called “culture of poverty,” a term introduced in 1961 by ethnographer Oscar Lewis. Despite later research challenging Lewis’ conclusions, the idea that many poor people share a degraded culture has been promulgated ever since. “The Myth of the Culture of Poverty” by Paul Gorski, published in *Educational Leadership*, is a good place to start.

➔ Conduct in-service training about issues of poverty in your community and the impact it can have on school-age children. Begin by contacting the district homeless liaison.

➔ Prompt students to reflect on and express their talents, beliefs and values in assignments and classroom activities. Such personal affirmations can bolster students’ confidence and performance, and help teachers recognize the unique qualities of all their students.

➔ Avoid references to free or reduced-price lunches, or other indications of financial assistance in front of the class. Do not tease about threadbare, out-of-style or ill-fitting clothing. Even seemingly innocuous comments can stigmatize low-income students.

➔ Expose your class to older, successful but empathetic students who can act as academic and social role models.

➔ Increase the number of cooperative learning opportunities. Comparisons and stereotypes are less common in cooperative settings.

➔ Confront bullying toward low-income students—by other students or fellow teachers—just as you would for other vulnerable groups.

➔ Include lessons about the antipov-erty work of Jane Addams, Martin Luther King Jr., César Chávez and others, but avoid learning materials that stereotype people living in poverty.

Respect for the unique challenges faced by low-income students can be the difference between educational achievement and dropping out. In the end, the support of other teachers helped steer Brenna Reed from self-doubt to success. After a year of cutting classes and blowing off tests, Brenna saw the light and enrolled in a program to build credits.

“What helped me was going to night school and getting my confidence back,” Brenna said. Since then, the girl who failed her freshman year has published a poem in *The New Yorker*, earned straight A’s and is now on her way to college. ♦

## Unmaking the Myth

KWL FOR EDUCATORS

KNOW—Low-income children often have a harder time achieving in school.

WANT to Know—How can what happens in schools from 8 to 3 can make a difference?

Need to LEARN—How to see opportunity gaps instead of achievement gaps.

QUESTIONS FOR HOMEWORK

Before you assign work, ask yourself:

- Do all my students have a workspace and good lighting to read at home?
- Do my students work in the evening or have household responsibilities?
- Do they have Internet access?
- Is there an adult who can help with homework?

WATCH THE CUES

Irritable student? Maybe she’s hungry.

Disengaged during class? Maybe he needs glasses.

Asleep at the desk? Maybe she has a night job.





# SUSPENDING HOPE

Schools in Maryland and Connecticut are rethinking suspension policies and practices. They are finding that promoting positive behavior choices rather than punishing the negative is leading to higher graduation rates, especially among students of color.

BY **BRIAN WILLOUGHBY** ILLUSTRATION BY **SEAN MCCABE**

IN THE 2003–2004 ACADEMIC YEAR, Baltimore City Public Schools recorded 26,000 suspensions. Six years later, that number had dropped below 10,000, before rising last year to slightly more than 11,000.

Those figures don't necessarily surprise Jonathan Brice, officer of school support networks for this district of some 84,000 students. He is part of a community-wide team that has gained national attention for its concerted and successful efforts to rein in a disciplinary tool that was getting too much use.

"We're not as good as we need to be, but we're significantly better than we were," Brice says. "It's a cultural shift away from suspension and toward intervention and prevention. And that's a sea change."

That sea change has school districts across the country looking to Baltimore for ways to reduce the number of and the need for student suspensions. Nationally, two decades' worth of hair-trigger zero-tolerance policies have blighted the records of many students, battered graduation rates and broken trust between many struggling youths and their teachers.

Ultimately, limiting out-of-school suspensions is about two things, says John Di Donato, assistant superintendent for youth development in Bridgeport, Conn., a district that has significantly lowered its suspension rates in recent years. "It's about believing in kids, and it's about believing that adults can make a difference."

## Recovering from Zero Tolerance

The dramatic rise of suspension rates can be linked to zero-tolerance policies that took root in schools in the late 1980s. Districts in several states began adopting them to address community fears of weapons and drugs in schools. They were soon expanded to punish lesser infractions, such as fighting, swearing, smoking and causing disruptions.

The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 and the 1999 killings at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., fueled the call for automatic zero-tolerance penalties for misbehavior. Occasionally, the policies were even applied to inadvertent rule breaking, such as the suspension of a Pennsylvania kindergartener who

took a toy ax to school as part of his firefighter Halloween costume.

Such policies, in large part, are why school suspensions and expulsions have doubled since the 1970s. Despite their seeming popularity, however, zero-tolerance policies have been consistently shown to reinforce rather than extinguish negative behaviors.

Once a low threshold for administrative punishment becomes part of a school's culture, it can be an easy cudgel to reach for. That is the conclusion of Pedro A. Noguera, a professor of teaching and learning at New York University. Noguera has researched the subject in multiple school districts, especially in the Northeast.

Noguera relates the following story from New Haven, Conn.: A middle school administrator began a professional development session by listing actual reasons teachers gave for sending a student to the office: *chewing gum; wearing a hat; forgetting to bring a pencil.*

The administrator then went down the list, asking the teachers whether these were legitimate reasons for sending a student to the principal's office



for punishment. In that group setting, no one could or would defend such a choice, though these were the very teachers who had made the referrals.

Baltimore’s suspensions were similarly skewed. While school staff had discretion to handle discipline—in the classroom, in-building detention, etc.—the most common response was to choose out-of-school suspension. More than 60 percent of those suspensions were for minor misconduct, including classroom disruption, disrespect, lack of attendance and similar infractions.

Teachers need to be trained better to give out discipline that’s proportionate to the offense, Noguera contends. “Alternatives are essential if schools are to stop using discipline as a strategy for weeding out those they deem undesirable or difficult to teach, and instead to use discipline to reconnect students to learning.”

For low-income students and students of color, suspensions and other harsh punishments too often disconnect them from school. Studies have shown suspensions and expulsions are applied disproportionately to these groups, with black students frequently punished for less-severe rule violations than white students. Students of color also routinely face punishment for more subjective offenses such as showing disrespect, loitering or being too noisy, while their white counterparts face punishment for more objective infractions like vandalism or smoking.

These trends can be reversed, fortunately. In Baltimore four years ago,

the percentage of African-American male students who dropped out nearly equaled that of those who graduated—48.4 percent and 51.6 percent, respectively. By last year, with efforts to reduce suspensions ongoing, those figures shifted dramatically to 74.9 percent graduating versus 25.1 percent dropping out.

“The issue is described as reducing suspensions,” Brice says, “but really the larger focus is keeping young people in school.”

### Bringing in the Change

How to reverse a school culture that has become too reliant on disciplinary policy and not enough on student-adult relationships? In the classroom, teachers must have the training and skills to deal with disruptive students before any disruption takes place. At the district-wide level, administrators Brice and Di Donato offer these key ingredients they believe are necessary to bring about needed change:

➤ *The effort must be district-wide and district-supported, with community connections.*

“Community will is essential,” Brice says. The Baltimore effort, for example, included teachers and administrators, parents, representatives from local philanthropic groups, community-based youth-advocacy groups and other nonprofits, and government officials.

➤ *It must be a K-12 effort. Starting in middle or high school is too late.*

### WHAT TEACHERS CAN DO

Classroom routines aimed at promoting positive behavior—rather than solely discouraging negative behavior—can be very useful strategies for handling discipline in class and avoiding office referrals. Experts, supported by multiple studies, encourage the following proactive classroom-management strategies:

➤ Maximize class structure. Predictable routines help students find success.

➤ Select three to five positively stated expectations that would improve the classroom. (Arrive on time, listen attentively when someone else is speaking, etc.)

➤ Define terms within these expectations. “Attentively,” for example, might mean hands and feet are still and eyes are focused on the speaker.

Once these expectations are finalized, post and teach them, then periodically review, model and reinforce them.

Offer pre-corrections. If silent reading time is when negative behaviors routinely happen, then introduce the routine with a reminder of the positive expectations, rather than waiting for something negative to happen.

Emphasize the positive. Any student should hear at least four (some urge six or eight or more) positive messages for every correction or negative message.

Corrections should be immediate, specific and brief. “John—please stop tapping your foot, so we can all pay attention to the presentation.”

Be specific with praise. Instead of “Good job,” say “I like the way you kept your hands and feet still during that presentation. Thank you for that.”

Make the first contact positive—with every student, every day. Don’t start with a correction.

### Positive Procedures

*Raise your hand to speak.*

*Call other students by their given names.*

*Listen while others are talking.*

*Be seated when the bell rings.*

### Thinking prompts for the reflective teacher

*My students’ behavior is a code and it’s my job to crack it.*

*I am the adult and I set the tone. My students’ behavior is related to messages my behavior is sending.*

*When I respond and react to students’ misbehavior in ways I don’t like, it’s a good time for a “gut” check.*

In Bridgeport, students in early elementary grades are offered small rewards for positive behavior. Di Donato recalls a decisive moment when one fifth-grader declined the incentive. “He said, ‘You don’t have to give me that’ because he hadn’t done anything special; he was just doing the right thing to do. That student entered middle school with strong skills to be successful.”

Di Donato says the district also seeks to provide a solid bridge between middle school and high school. For the first two days of school each year, all middle school guidance counselors are present on the high school campuses. The idea is to put familiar faces in place to ease incoming students into the next phase of schooling.

➤ *Discipline codes must be reviewed, adjusted and implemented uniformly and consistently.*

At Bridgeport, the former “Code of Discipline” was revised into the new “Code of Conduct.” That one-word change in the title illustrates Bridgeport’s shift away from solely focusing on punishing negative behaviors toward encouraging positive behaviors.

In Baltimore, the code was revised following a process that included several meetings seeking public input. The district subsequently held summer training sessions to prepare educators for its implementation that fall.

“It’s the ‘McDonald’s plan,’” Brice says. “The French fries taste the same at any McDonald’s you go to, and with 200 different schools in our district, we want our approach to discipline to be consistent and fair, no matter what school you attend.”

➤ *Professional development must be part of the process.*

Both Bridgeport and Baltimore have embraced Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a broad-based approach to improving student behavior that is in place at thousands of schools



nationwide. Developed at the University of Oregon, PBIS has been proven to reduce office referral rates by up to 50 percent a year, improve

attendance and academic achievement, and reduce dropout rates. PBIS isn’t learned in one professional development session. It’s a school- or district-wide approach toward behavior management that needs to be practiced, refined and sustained.

Baltimore started PBIS in 30 schools and now has it operating in more than 90 schools, with plans to expand to all 200 schools in the district.

In Bridgeport, the district secured grant funding to provide PBIS-focused professional development. Di Donato describes PBIS in admittedly simplified terms: “It teaches adults to be thoughtful mentors, and it teaches young people the social skills they need to be successful.”

➤ *Plans and actions must be data-driven.*

Incident numbers can help identify excessive out-of-school suspensions, and numbers can help illustrate the disproportionate impact of suspensions on students of color. Data must be part of the solution.

Weekly, data-driven meetings at individual schools allow administrators and educators to track progress and identify areas for improvement. If 12 out of 15 discipline incidents in one particular week occur in the cafeteria, for example, school leaders can focus on the need for more structure or supervision during lunch periods.

“Reviewing the data on a weekly basis causes us to ask questions,” Brice says. “From these questions, we can develop intervention strategies that are more effective than they would be without the data. It also leads to solutions that can be replicated in other schools.”

Tracking data also helps identify successes. At Bridgeport four years ago, the number of out-of-school suspensions was approaching 12,000. Last year, that number had been reduced by two-thirds, to about 4,000. “That’s a significant drop, and it’s a direct result of the work we’ve done,” Di Donato says. “But 4,000 is still way too many.” ♦





JON R. '12



# Defining Moments \ di-'fī-niŋ 'mō-mənts \

*n. pl.* Children's dictionaries have the power to shape how kids see the world. Be sure yours promotes tolerance.

BY **CARRIE KILMAN** ILLUSTRATION BY **JON REINFURT**

EVERY 10 OR SO YEARS, HOUGHTON Mifflin Harcourt releases a new edition of the *American Heritage Children's Dictionary*. In 2009, editors did something they had rarely done before: They reviewed and revised almost every single definition and added more than 2,000 new words and senses. The result was a massive overhaul for one of the most commonly used children's reference books in the United States.

The previous edition, published in 2003, was ripe for revision: It omitted several words related to personal and cultural identity, like *atheist*, *gender* and *ethnicity*; it defined *gay* as merely “cheerful” and “merry”; and its example sentences assumed that being male and having white skin were the norm.

“As we started revising, we realized there was a lot of stuff that sounded completely out-of-date,” said Steve Kleinedler, executive editor for American Heritage Dictionaries. “What was supposed to be a simple revision involving a couple of editors ended up involving the whole staff.”

Editors reviewed Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's corpus—a massive,

searchable database of text from children's literature—and examined common usages of hundreds of words.

“Language changes very fast—and it's our job to reflect how that language is being used,” said Louise Robbins, senior editor for Houghton Mifflin Harcourt's Trade and Reference Division and the project director for the revised children's edition. For example, Robbins said, “We all realized kids hear the word *gay* in school. You can't just say *gay* means ‘cheerful’ or ‘merry’ and pretend there isn't another meaning that is more common in the culture.”

Suddenly, *feminism* was in, as were *gender* and *atheist*. Family-relationship words, like *marriage*, were redefined to be gender-neutral. The definition of *ethnic* was expanded. Words that connote skin color were revised (the definition of *tan* was changed from “skin turning brown” to “skin becoming darker”). Illustrations and example sentences now offered a balance of ethnicities, genders and abilities. And *gay* was redefined.

“We needed to respond to the fact that these issues are being addressed

and discussed at younger and younger ages,” Kleinedler said.

New research suggests other children's dictionaries have room to follow suit.

## ‘A definition is a definition’

Children encounter new words every day. Although dictionaries designed for young readers can help students explore and experiment with language, it turns out many mainstream children's dictionaries fail to accurately describe the world in which many students live.

Last fall, *Teaching Tolerance* asked Amy Scharf, an anti-bias educator for more than 20 years, to examine how popular children's dictionaries present concepts of identity, including race, gender, religion and sexual orientation.

“A lot of teachers rely on asking students to look things up, and they assume their students are getting accurate information,” Scharf said. “Until this research, it never occurred to me to question the dictionary. I think most people think ‘a definition is a definition.’”

Scharf looked at eight of the most commonly used children’s dictionaries, in print and online, including those published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Merriam-Webster, Scholastic, HarperCollins and the popular online tool offered by Yahoo! Kids. (Scholastic, HarperCollins and Yahoo! did not respond to *Teaching Tolerance’s* request for an interview.) The survey also included Dictionary.com, even though it is not strictly a children’s dictionary, because it is frequently used in schools.

In many instances, the dictionaries Scharf examined were missing nuanced

definitions. And though many terms were included in some dictionaries, they were not included in others.

For example: In almost every dictionary, *race* was defined as a biological phenomenon, based on what a person looks like, with little reference to race as a construct with social and political implications. *Racism* was usually defined as a personal attitude, without acknowledging cultural structures that promote it.

The terms *gay* and *homosexual*, when mentioned at all, were almost always defined in purely sexual terms, with no reference to families or the many nonsexual components of intimate relationships.

Although most dictionaries included *ethnic* to describe things like customs or restaurants, the idea of *ethnicity* as an element of people’s personal identities was almost completely absent.

The word *gender* was almost always presented in binary terms (“you’re either a boy or girl”) and equated with biology (“your gender is how you were born”). This runs contrary to current understandings that a person’s gender is more of a societal description, as distinct from a person’s sex, which is rooted in biology.

“We all have built-in assumptions about the world and other people, based on how we first understand words,” Scharf said. Incomplete or missing definitions, she added, “can make it more difficult to do the kind of awareness-raising work around these issues that a lot of us want to do.”

### Not an ‘easy fix’

The challenges to children’s dictionary publishers can be steep.

First, there is the rule that definitions should only include terms that



## Distorted Definitions

*When a word is in dispute, teachers often confer authority on the dictionary, telling young children to “look it up.” Yet many important dictionary entries seriously miss the mark and reflect outdated information and social ideas in their definitions. Because they’re “authoritative,” they can reinforce prejudice instead of challenging it.*

### Race

The concept of race is a human invention with no basis in genetic biology. However, children’s dictionaries often treat it solely as a biological construct, ignoring social factors. Scholastic’s definition below implies this biological basis and makes no mention of cultural forces; Webster’s goes further and ties race to blood type, hair color, etc.

*Scholastic Children’s Dictionary:* “One of the major groups into which human beings can be divided. People of the same race have similar physical characteristics, such as skin color, which are passed on from generation to generation.”

*Webster’s New World Children’s Dictionary:* “A large group of people who have certain physical features in common. The type of blood and the color of hair and skin are some of these features that are passed on from one generation to another.”

### Gay

Some children’s dictionaries acknowledge the current usage of *gay*; others ignore it. This widely used term, which adults know describes same-sex attraction (and usually refers specifically to men) is often used by young people as a general put-down. Here’s how some dictionaries handle it:

*Collins Cobuild (online):* “Gay people or gays are homosexuals.”

*Yahoo! Kids (online):* “Of, relating to, or having a sexual orientation to persons of the same sex. Showing or characterized by cheerfulness and lighthearted excitement; merry. Bright or lively, especially in color; given to social pleasures. Dissolute; licentious.”

*American Heritage Children’s Dictionary:* “1. Attracted to people of the same sex. 2. Merry; cheerful.”

### IN THE PORTFOLIO

*Hands-on activity to explore more words in your classroom dictionary*

*Student-focused discussion questions*

[tolerance.org/defining-moments](http://tolerance.org/defining-moments)

are also found in the same dictionary. Says American Heritage's Kleinedler: "How do you define complicated terms in a way that doesn't require the inclusion of a ton of supporting language? If you word things a certain way, it requires changes to so many other definitions. It becomes a domino effect."

Then there is the fact that children's reference materials aren't updated as frequently as adult volumes—often because sales numbers don't demand it. As a result, their content can sometimes lag behind the rapidly changing language in a high-tech culture.

*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, for example, is updated each year. The company would like to update its children's volumes every two years—a mark they've hit with their intermediate and high school volumes, though not with those for younger readers.

## ► SHARE YOUR STORY ◀

*Teaching Tolerance* plans to explore this topic in more detail in a future issue. Have a story to share from your own teaching experience? We want to hear from you! Email us at [editor@teachingtolerance.org](mailto:editor@teachingtolerance.org). Put "Children's Dictionaries" in the subject line.

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Merriam-Webster editors decide how to revise the children's editions based on recent changes to the collegiate volume—things like new words, evolving definitions and terms flagged as disparaging. Usage notes allow editors to explain historical changes in a word's meaning. "Like the term *midget*," said Linda Wood, senior editor for Merriam-Webster's four-volume K-12 dictionary line. "Kids will come across these words in classic literature. We want to make sure they understand, 'In the past this was used, but now some people consider it offensive.'"

Wood acknowledges that her staff is "probably more cautious with the

children's dictionaries." But, she says, "A word wouldn't be excluded on the basis of content. If it's something students would come across in their readings, it should be included."

However, that might be hard to judge—and not all teachers or parents would agree with the result. For example, Merriam-Webster's elementary-age dictionary omits *homosexual* and *heterosexual*, Wood explained, "because we don't feel like those words are a part of the vocabulary students are using for schoolwork."

Sometimes, too, the logistics of printing books can make longer, more nuanced definitions a challenge. Both

Merriam-Webster and American Heritage editors pointed to the large type size required for younger readers. "There is only so much you can fit in a children's book," Kleinedler said.

That's changing as more children's dictionaries move online. In her research, Scharf found the online dictionaries usually offered longer, more nuanced definitions. Other bright spots she identified included thorough explanations of the term *culture* and strong definitions for the term *feminism*.

"I don't think this is a quick and easy thing to fix," Scharf said. "This is the important take-away: When defining these terms, the dictionary should just be the beginning. It's about having a deeper conversation, so that kids learn how to thoroughly examine what words really mean."

For its part, the *American Heritage Children's Dictionary* will get a minor update in a couple of years and a new edition around 2019. ♦

*DK Merriam-Webster Children's Dictionary*: only provides definitions about "cheerful" and "merry."

### Gender

Gender refers to the social roles, behaviors and traits that a society may assign to men (masculine) or to women (feminine). Some dictionaries, like *DK Merriam-Webster*, confuse it with sex, which is rooted in biology.

*American Heritage Children's Dictionary*: "The condition of being male or female, especially as a way of appearing or behaving in accordance with a society's customs."

*DK-Merriam Webster Children's Dictionary*: "The state of being male or female: sex."

### Atheism

Atheism is simply a lack of a belief in a god or gods. It is not a religion or doctrine, and it has no bearing on the ability

to be moral. However, some children's dictionaries do not make these important distinctions.

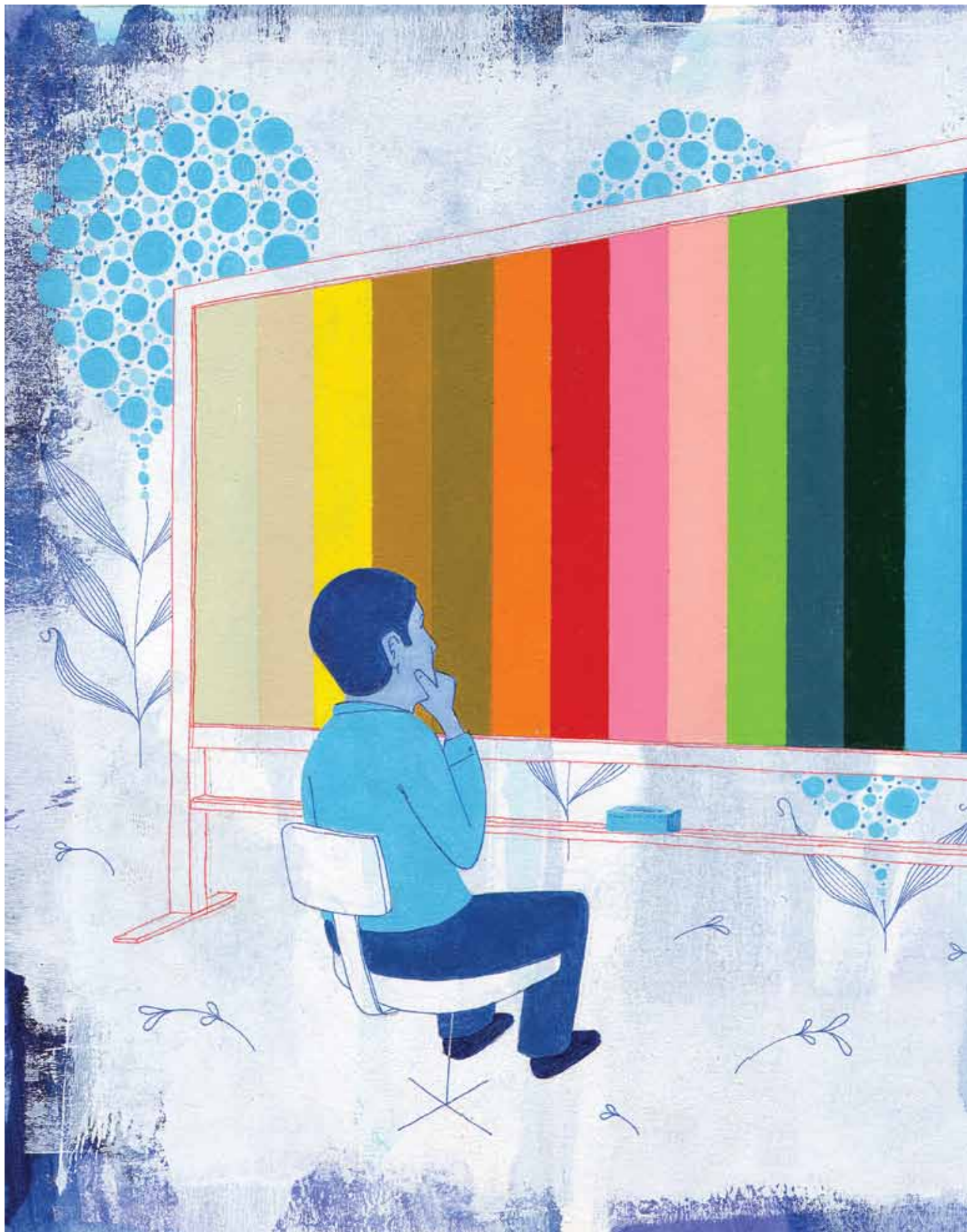
Yahoo! Kids (online): "Disbelief in or denial of the existence of God or gods. The doctrine that there is no God or gods. Godlessness; immorality."

### Retarded/Retard

This is an outdated term that is no longer used by health professionals or the federal government. This is not reflected in some definitions. (This survey includes Dictionary.com, even though it is not strictly a children's dictionary, because it is frequently used in schools.)

Dictionary.com: "1. Characterized by retardation: a retarded child. 2. Mentally retarded persons collectively (usually preceded by *the*): new schools for the retarded. Slang: Disparaging. A mentally retarded person. A person who is stupid, obtuse, or ineffective in some way: a *hopeless social retard*."







# Class Outing

LGBT educators enjoy more openness and acceptance than ever before. But their gains have been fragile and uneven. And many still feel it's safest to teach from the closet.

BY **WARREN HYNES** ILLUSTRATIONS BY **SCOTT BAKAL**

**A**s an activist, you know you're getting somewhere when Barack Obama wants to see you in his office.

In March 2011, Jaim Foster was sitting on a sofa in the White House, watching the president lean forward in his chair, listening intently. Foster was part of a small group the president and first lady Michelle Obama had invited. The Arlington, Va., teacher was there with a parent and three students to talk about bullying.

"I said that as a gay male, I had been bullied and gone through some traumatic times myself," says Foster, who is secretary of the National Education Association's Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Caucus. "And that has led me to become an advocate."

And, anecdotally at least, more LGBT teachers are becoming leaders like Foster. But the comfort levels of these educators can vary sharply from region to region and even from school to school. In conversations with LGBT educators across the nation, it is clear that many still face bigotry and difficulty. But there are also many heartening stories of acceptance, respect and leadership.

"I think over the last 20 years, there's been so much more of an understanding that gay people are not these monsters," says C. Scott Miller, a second-grade teacher in Santa Ana, Calif. "People

will ask you what you did on the weekend, and did you see this movie or that movie. People are far more aware that these relationships are just as normal as anyone else's."

## Setting Aside Stereotypes

Those teachers who speak of greater acceptance within their schools emphasize a culture in which students and colleagues focus more on the individual than on any label or stereotype.

"A lot more families that I come in contact with know someone who's gay, whether it's a sibling or whatever," says Felix Gil, an elementary school principal in Summit, N.J. "It's not like you're the only gay person they know. They have a reference or a contact for that experience." Gil says this allows him and his school community to "focus on the work."

This cultural shift has also turned some LGBT educators into resources and sounding boards. Administrators, teachers and parents alike come to LGBT teachers with questions regarding the sexual orientation of students or family members. Miller, for instance, has a colleague whose daughter recently came out to her. "She said, 'Because I know you, it was easier for me to talk to my daughter,'" Miller recalls.

Of course, LGBT teachers also can provide increased awareness





and support for the primary focus of their work: the students. “I think it’s important for all kids to have LGBT teachers,” says Erika Sass, an elementary school technology and literacy teacher in Minneapolis. “For straight kids to see that Miss Erika is not creepy and scary and mean, maybe they won’t think that being gay is weird. And it’s especially important for queer kids to have a positive queer adult. When I was a youth, I was desperately looking for a queer adult who was healthy and living a normal life, to verify that I can live a normal life and be OK.”

### Coming Out?

Frank Burger, a high school biology teacher in Flint, Mich., has worked with LGBT students as co-adviser of his school’s Gay-Straight Alliance. “If a gay student sees a gay teacher, they see someone who looks like them or acts like

them,” Burger says. “And they feel safer and more supported in the classroom.”

So does that mean every LGBT teacher should be out at this point? Despite Foster’s invitation to the Oval



### Pop Quiz

#### WHAT IS HETEROSEXISM?

- The assumption that everyone is attracted to the opposite sex.*
- The idea that male-female attraction is superior to same-sex attraction.*
- The belief that being heterosexual is better than being lesbian, gay or bisexual.*
- All of the above.*

Office, there is still no federal anti-discrimination law covering sexual orientation or gender identity. On the state and local levels, the kind of protection afforded to LGBT workers depends on where a person lives and how the laws are written. There are 19 states with no anti-discrimination laws protecting LGBT workers. Sixteen others offer partial protection, meaning that only public workers or sexual orientation are covered.

Bridget Valenzuela teaches science at Salt River High School on the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Reservation outside Phoenix. While Arizona law does prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in public employment, Valenzuela says it’s much different teaching there than in areas such as San Francisco or Chicago.

“It’s kind of like you’re under cloak-and-dagger,” says Valenzuela, who has been teaching for seven years. “It takes a lot longer for things to progress and make strides. It feels like things are moving at a snail’s pace. When I first started teaching, I said, ‘There’s no way I’m ever going to be out.’ Coming from a job where I was out, it was like being in the closet all over again.”

Rep. Patricia Todd is a state legislator in Alabama, one of those states without any protection for LGBT workers. She introduced a bill in May 2011 designed to protect LGBT teachers from being fired because of sexual orientation or gender identity. No action was taken on the bill, but Todd, who has been out as a lesbian for three decades, says she plans to introduce the bill again this year and, if necessary, in 2013 as well. She describes the attitude toward LGBT teachers in her state as “hostile” and says she would not come out if she were a teacher.

“I have a friend who was fired from her school specifically because she came out,” says Todd, a Democrat from Birmingham. “I just think this is absurd that we would fire a teacher not on merit, but based on stereotype and



misperception. We should encourage teachers to live their lives openly.”

Burger, who serves as male co-chair of the NEA’s GLBT Caucus, says he worries that as tenure laws are relaxed in some states, LGBT teachers could be targeted further. Burger wears an “Out and Proud” bracelet to his school in Flint, Mich., every day, and believes that every teacher has the right to live openly and honestly. But he is concerned for the LGBT teacher who is thinking about coming out now.

“I think you just need to be careful about how you do it,” Burger says. “You need to know the laws of your state. It’s not one of those things where you just go into a class and say, ‘I’m gay.’ You don’t do that. I’m not saying you’ve got to hide in the closet, but you do need to watch what you do.”

### Causing Controversy

Watching what you do is a common theme in conversations among LGBT teachers, even those whose states offer anti-discrimination protection. After all, it doesn’t take much to stir up controversy if certain elements come together. A few years ago, a parent complained about the photo on Burger’s desk of him and the man who is now his husband. The parent alleged that the photo was intended to elicit conversation with students and promote homosexuality.

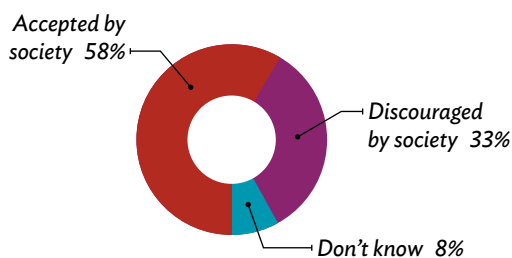
Complaints such as these can lead LGBT teachers to fret over their curricula as well. When Sass was teaching at a Los Angeles high school before moving to Minnesota, she found herself feeling anxious over a PowerPoint slide she had prepared about Bayard Rustin, the civil rights leader who also happened to be gay. “That’s one of the challenges of being an LGBT teacher—making sure you’re not being seen as pushing your personal agenda,” she says.

Emmy Howe co-directs the National Seeking Educational Equity and

Diversity (SEED) Project on Inclusive Curriculum, an international staff-development project designed to bring teachers together to discuss fairness and equity in school climates and curricula. In her years as an LGBT educator in her home state of Massachusetts and throughout the nation, Howe has noticed that opposition to LGBT teachers tends to increase just as gains in acceptance are experienced elsewhere. This happened in Massachusetts, she says, after same-sex marriage was legalized in 2003.

“Once a group gets a little power, people maybe become a little more afraid,”

### Homosexuality should be ...



— Pew Research Center Poll, 2011  
Does not add up to 100 percent due to rounding

Howe says. “The fact that marriage was legitimate made the people who were politically against having out teachers become more adamant and active.”

The impact of these political actions and reactions can send ripples throughout the country. A New Jersey high school world languages teacher, who has taught for more than 20 years, considered coming out for this story. But in the end, he felt that too much was at stake. “Politically, under this climate—it’s so toxic—I think everybody is operating from fear,” the teacher says.

Yet even without ever coming out, that same teacher has encountered students and parents in his district who view him as a valuable resource beyond his teaching expertise.

“I have noticed increasingly over my career that I attract students to me

who are grappling with LGBT issues and confide in me, even though I never have put myself forward as someone to confide in,” the teacher says. “I think that there are families over my career who have put their children in my program because they wanted them to have me—not because of the language I teach. They might have noticed in their children some confusion about identity and thought that this would be a safe place for them.”

### ‘A Long Way to Go’

Sass, whose home state of Minnesota has seen very public debates over sexual orientation in recent months, works in a charter school that offers her a lot of support. She is grateful for her situation yet saddened to know that some teachers feel the need to play it safe by not coming out. This, Sass says, is a societal challenge.

“What are we doing to (a) make sure that we’re hiring diverse teachers and (b) support diverse teachers to keep them retained?” she asks. A more visible LGBT community would make it easier to hire and support more diverse teachers, she says.

Even those LGBT educators who’ve had a seat with the president know it’s not easy for everyone. “If they don’t feel safe, they should not come out,” Foster says of his colleagues. “I do believe in the saying ‘Be the change that you want to see in the world.’ But it’s tough. It’s tough. We still have a long way to go.”

Gil applied for a principal position in his current district because he knew the administration there valued diversity. In thinking carefully about where he works, Gil has allowed himself to lead others while also being honest, open and comfortable with his identity. As the messy path toward progress continues, perhaps this is the final goal of the LGBT teacher.

“Ultimately, you will find a place that appreciates you,” Gil says. “And that will be the place where you can have the greatest impact. You may not be there now, but if you look for that place, you will find it.” ♦

# 2011

EXCELLENCE IN CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

— And the —  
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MEET FIVE EDUCATORS  
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THOUSANDS OF TEACHERS each day help students from diverse racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. What if you could honor the best of these talented educators and help spotlight what they do?

That is what the **Teaching Tolerance Award for Excellence in Culturally Responsive Teaching** is all about. The first of these awards were presented at a special ceremony in December in Washington, D.C. Five honored teachers were awarded \$1,000 apiece. More importantly, they were videotaped in their classrooms to help educators across the nation learn from their techniques.

“Quite simply, it’s easier to understand how to do something when you can see it being done by others,” said Teaching Tolerance Director Maureen Costello. “We hope this award not only recognizes the talented teachers reaching students from diverse backgrounds but also provides many other teachers with the tools to enhance their expertise.”

The winners of the first Teaching Tolerance Award are as diverse as their schools and their students. But all of them maximize learning by creating supportive teams of educators, students and families. They look beyond the standard touchstones in choosing learning materials. They push aside cultural stereotypes to foster strategies that work. And they take advantage of what students bring to the classroom.

#### IN THE PORTFOLIO

Profiles of each of the five Teaching Tolerance Award winners  
[tolerance.org/tt-awards](http://tolerance.org/tt-awards)



**Sylvestre Arcos**  
*Laboratory School of Finance and Technology,*

*(Middle School 223), Bronx, N.Y.* Five years ago, Arcos helped set up a new, dual-language program at this school that emphasizes cross-cultural learning and the development of Spanish-language as well as English skills. As a result, there is a renewed respect for both languages and proficiency has improved. “We do not see them coming in with zero knowledge,” says Arcos of Spanish-dominant students. “We see them coming in with a wealth of knowledge. They are just adding a second language to their repertoire.”



**Tracy Oliver-Gary**  
*Paint Branch High School,*  
*Burtonsville, Md.*

Oliver-Gary teaches open-enrollment AP history classes. Her classes are a diverse mix of Asian, African, Latino, black and white students. She says any teacher in that situation faces a learning curve. “One thing I had to learn is that just because I’m black doesn’t mean I know how to teach black kids,” she says. And Oliver-Gary often finds herself teaching study skills as well as the curriculum. But she has learned how to access her talent for teaching in new ways. Giving her students a voice, she says, also allows her to “paint a picture of their future.”



**Amber Makaiau**

*Kailua High School, Oahu, Hawaii*  
What does it mean to be Hawaiian? It's not an easy question in this multicultural state. In 2004, Makaiau helped to write the curriculum for an innovative course in ethnic studies. Now mandatory for Hawaii ninth-graders, the course has been successful in reducing school violence and violence-related suspensions. Students see it as a success as well. In a recent essay, one student wrote, "Racism lives off the racist remarks we make toward others. I am still living and still learning. I have much ahead of me to ... experience. [But] I blossomed into something more [in this class]; my growth increases every day. ... I am a girl who honors all of my family names; I am a proud leader and I am Hawaiian."



**Soñia Galaviz**

*Endeavor Elementary School, Nampa, Idaho*

Galaviz's school serves families with the lowest socioeconomic status and the highest English-language learning needs in her district. "Building relationships," she says, "is at the heart of my pedagogy." She starts by visiting the homes of each of her students during the first two weeks before school to learn more about each student's hidden strengths and how to work best with each family. In class, Galaviz supplements the curriculum with authentic materials and experiences that reflect the cultures of her Mexican-American, Asian, American Indian and white students.

### Checklist for Awardees

- + Builds relationships with students
- + Ensures all students are included in the curriculum
- + Uses flexible and heterogeneous grouping
- + Gets to know students' families
- + Learns about students' cultural backgrounds
- + Varies instructional strategies

**Katy LaCroix (not pictured)**

*Logan Elementary School, Ann Arbor, Mich.*

LaCroix heads up her school's "equity team," a group of faculty that meets throughout the year to share culturally inclusive teaching practices. One of her key strategies is to learn as much as she can about her students. She does this in part by going to lunch with them and, when she's invited, attending important events, like church services and basketball games. "This strategy is at the heart of culturally relevant teaching," she says. "Using what I know about my students, I can incorporate their interests, hopes and aspirations into my classroom."



# What We're Reading

The Teaching Tolerance staff reviews the latest in culturally aware literature and resources, offering the best picks for professional development and teachers of all grades.





**1** How did “zero-tolerance” policies come to dominate discipline at so many U.S. public schools? And what damage have they done to students? Author Annette Fuentes answers these and other important questions in ***Lockdown High: When the Schoolhouse Becomes a Jailhouse***. Fuentes shows why zero tolerance is a disastrous policy and how communities can save their schools from this maximum-security mentality. *professional development*

**2** ***Be Honest and Other Advice From Students Across the Country***, edited by Nínive Calegari, allows readers to hear directly from the young people who enter our nation’s classrooms each morning. Students reflect on topics such as favorite teachers, dream schools, personal struggles and ideas for a better future. The writing is funny, smart, tender, persuasive and—most important—authentic. *professional development*

**3** ***My Princess Boy***, by Cheryl Kilodavis and illustrated by Suzanne DeSimone, is the real-life story of a boy who expresses gender in his own creative way. With the support of family and friends, this young boy teaches students about the importance of acceptance, compassion and being true to one’s self. *elementary*

**4** Well written and filled with primary-source documents, ***Birmingham Sunday***, by Larry Dane Brimner, tells the story of

the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in 1963. That Ku Klux Klan attack claimed the lives of four young girls and shocked the nation. This book makes an engaging supplement for classes learning about the civil rights movement. *middle & high school*

**5** In ***Silhouetted by the Blue***, by Traci L. Jones, Serena Shaw’s mother is dead and her father has been overcome by depression. While trying to maintain her class work and play the lead in the school musical, she must assume responsibility for running a household and taking care of her brother. This story of survival and hope will connect with students. *middle & high school*

**6** ***Rethinking Popular Culture and Media***, edited by Elizabeth Marshall and Özlem Sensoy, helps educators explore bias and stereotypes. The book, based on articles from *Rethinking Schools* magazine, examines cartoons, books, television, music and other forms of media. It can help students unlearn some of the pernicious messages they’ve received about race, class, gender and the LGBT community. *professional development*

**7** ***From North to South***, written by René Colato Laínez and illustrated by Joe Cepeda, addresses the complexities of immigration through the eyes of a child in a thoughtful and timely way. This is a bilingual English and Spanish book. *elementary*

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

***What If All the Kids Are White? Anti-Bias Multicultural Education with Young Children and Families*** by Louise Derman-Sparks and Patricia G. Ramsey

***Making Art Special: A Curriculum for Special Education Art*** by Helen Goren Shafton

***Doing Multicultural Education for Achievement and Equity (2nd Edition)*** by Carl A. Grant and Christine E. Sleeter

***Homelessness Comes to School*** by Joseph Murphy and Kerri Tobin

## MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL

***Real Men: Urban Teens Write about How to Be a Man*** by Youth Communications

***Then*** by Morris Gleitzman

***Out of Iraq*** by Sybella Wilkes

***Sorta Like a Rock Star*** by Matthew Quick

## ELEMENTARY

***Marisol McDonald Doesn’t Match*** by Monica Brown and illustrated by Sara Palacios

***Child of the Civil Rights Movement*** by Paula Young Shelton and illustrated by Raul Colón

***Yasmin’s Hammer*** by Ann Malaspina and illustrated by Doug Chayka

***Sharing Our Homeland: Palestinian and Jewish Children at Summer Peace Camp*** by Trish Marx with photographs by Cindy Karp





# An Unlikely Friendship

BY SUE CARLONI

The first thing I noticed was the drool. A thin strand ran from the corner of her mouth to the red bandana tied around her neck.

While Mrs. Wagner introduced the new student as Sarah, all I could focus on was that glistening spit. As Miss Brown, Sarah's aide, pushed the wheelchair toward me, I panicked. Why was the only empty desk next to me? I shrank in my seat.

"Hi," said Sarah. At least that's what it sounded like. Did she really belong in fourth grade?

The morning dragged by. When the recess bell rang, Miss Brown asked, "Natalie, would you play with Sarah? She could use a friend."

*How am I supposed to play with Sarah? I wondered. She can't even walk.*

"Grab a rubber ball from the bin on your way outside," said Miss Brown.

Once we were on the blacktop, Miss Brown locked the brakes on Sarah's wheelchair.

"Throw ball!" said Sarah.

Standing close to her wheelchair, I said, "Catch" and gently tossed the ball, expecting Sarah to drop it. But she didn't.

Sarah threw the ball back to me. Her throw was rather clumsy, as her arms didn't work like mine.





When the bell rang, Miss Brown asked, “Natalie, would you walk with us back to class?”

I walked next to Sarah while she held onto the ball, dripping drool all over it. There was no way I was going to touch that thing.

Thankfully, Miss Brown took the ball from Sarah.

The rest of the morning continued to drag on. I was hungry for my peanut butter and jelly sandwich and apple. I wondered if Sarah could feed herself, but I didn’t want to sit by her to find out.

When the lunch bell rang, I hung behind. “Mrs. Wagner,” I asked, “can ... can I have my seat changed?”

“Why?” asked Mrs. Wagner.

I stared at the floor. “Well, maybe someone else would like to sit by Sarah.”

Mrs. Wagner placed her hand on my shoulder. “Sarah not only has special needs, she has feelings, too. Give it a try.”

My eyes stung. This wasn’t fair! I didn’t want to be Sarah’s friend. And if Mrs. Wagner didn’t care about my feelings, why should I care about Sarah’s?

All afternoon, I did my best to ignore Sarah. I only glanced at her once and caught her smiling.

At three o’clock, Mrs. Wagner said to the class, “Time to put on your gym shoes.”

As I bent over to tie my shoes, I studied Sarah’s. There wasn’t a single scuff mark on them. I wondered what it would be like to never walk, never run, never climb a tree or ride a bike. My throat felt tight.

Miss Brown tapped my back. “Natalie, would you please help Sarah be a part of gym class?”

I could only nod. The lump in my throat sat as motionless as Sarah’s legs.

“We’re going to play kickball today,” said our gym teacher.

Sarah’s and my team was pitching first. Matt kicked the ball and started rounding the bases. The ball came to me and I handed it to Sarah. She threw it. The ball didn’t roll far, but it sneaked up on Matt like a snake, striking his heel.

“You got him out!” I shouted. Sarah threw her head back, laughing, and her drool went flying. Then I laughed, too.

When it was our turn to kick, the ball bounced off the tip of Sarah’s spotless shoe. She made it to first thanks to a lazy throw by the pitcher, and everyone cheered wildly. We made it to second, thanks to another hit. But the next batter kicked the ball high in the air. It was caught for the third out. The inning was over. “We’ll win next time,” I said. Sarah smiled.

At the end of the day, Miss Brown wrote in a notebook and read the journal entry from Sarah. “My first day of school went well. I had fun playing kickball in gym class. I made a nice new friend. Her name is Natalie.”

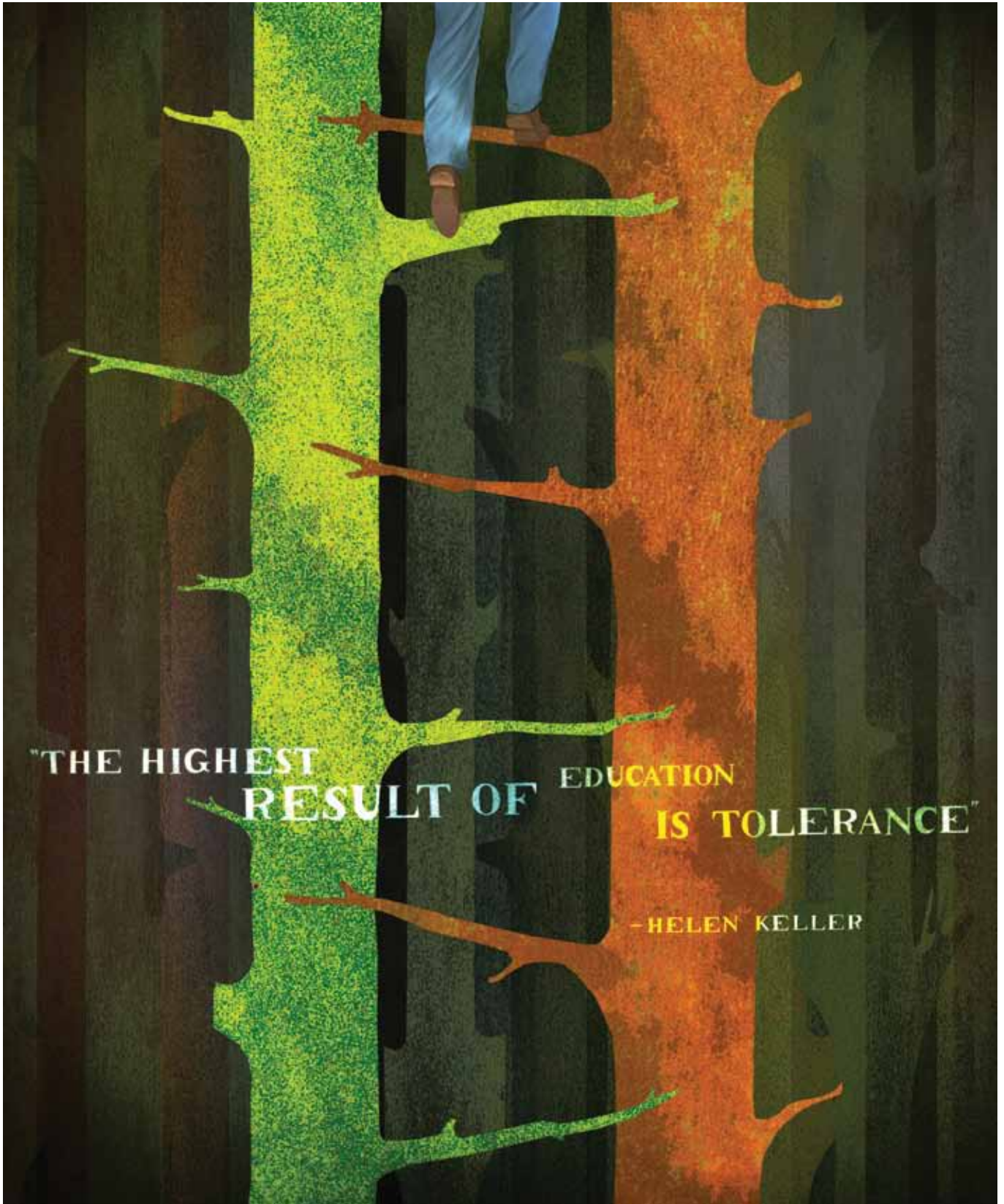
Sarah smiled at me. I hardly noticed the thin strand of drool running from the corner of her mouth to the red bandana. What I saw was a new friend, a friend I had almost missed out on. ♦

### Questions for Readers

- Why didn’t Natalie want to be Sarah’s friend at first?
- What helped change Natalie’s mind about Sarah?
- What do you learn from a first impression?
- Have you ever changed your mind about a first impression? Why?
- What do you think Natalie is going to do in class the next day? Why?

For more discussion resources visit the portfolio for this story at [tolerance.org/unlikely-friendship](http://tolerance.org/unlikely-friendship)





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# Mix It Up

at Lunch Day



PHOTOS BY JIM WEST, STEVEN VOTE

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