

Cross the Line

Cross the Line is a powerful activity that helps participants understand the effects of prejudice, ridicule, teasing and bullying.

What to Know

The goal of this activity is to help identify and eliminate the barriers between people that perpetuate acts of unkindness. Children become aware both that they are not alone in facing insecurities, fears and challenges and that there are differences among those challenges.

This activity should not be attempted until you've built trust and safety in your classroom over the course of the Don't Laugh at Me project and the school year. Although the content is quite serious, it is an activity that may be used with both young children and adults effectively. Other important guidelines include:

- Be careful not to be judgmental or shaming in this activity, rather be supportive and accepting. Everyone in the class will probably have a reason to cross the line.
- Pair with your school's counselor or counseling department for help in facilitating this and following up on any strong emotions that children exhibit.
- Involve families in any concerns you might have for children who have been chronically teased or bullied in your school.
- Reassure children that showing their feelings is healthy.
- Allow a comfortable space of silence after each "cross the line" before inviting students back to their original places. Slow pacing of the activity is important to its success.

Objectives

Participants will:

1. Understand the effects of prejudice, ridicule, teasing and other hurtful behaviors
2. Reflect on how it feels to cross the line
3. Recommit to and make any necessary adjustments to the Ridicule Free Zone

Materials

- [Red: A Crayon's Story](#) by Michael Hall (If you do not have the book,
- A line of masking tape across your classroom floor, with space on either side for all the children in your class (standing a few lines deep is okay)
- If I Had a Hammer song ([hyperlink](#))

Common Core Standard Alignment

- Anchor Standards for Literacy: Integration of Knowledge and Ideas
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 - Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
- Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1 - Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- Anchor Standards for Language-Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
 - CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.5- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

Gather Together/Warm Up/Bell Ringer: Red: A Crayon's Story (5 Minutes)

Read aloud [Red: A Crayon's Story](#) by Michael Hall.

Process: "What surprised the other crayons about Red? What did they expect of him because of his label? Was this book serious or silly? How do you think the message of this book might apply to our classroom or our school?"

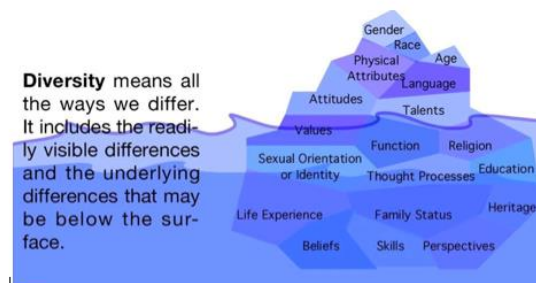
Main Activity: Our Diversity Iceberg and Cross the Line (20 Minutes)

Draw a picture of an iceberg and name it "Iceberg of our differences." (Sample below) 10% of the iceberg is above the line: these are the differences about us that we can see. 90% of the iceberg is below the line: these are the difference that we can't see.

Above the line: size, appearance, gender, age, color, race(sometimes!)

Below the line: religion, education, family, ethnicity, beliefs, talents, etc.

Diversity Iceberg



Introduce the activity:

"This activity is called "Cross the Line" and asks us to remember experiences we've had where we may have been treated badly or unkindly."

Explain some important agreements you'll need to make as a class before beginning:

- We will do the activity in complete silence (no laughing or talking); we can talk about it when it's over.
- Some strong feelings might come up like sadness or anger. Remember, all feelings are important. We need to be respectful and caring about one another's feelings so that everyone feels safe while we do this activity.

Ask everyone to move to the masking tape line on the floor facing in the same direction behind it. Explain how to do the activity:

"I'm going to call out an experience and if you have had that experience, please cross the line and turn around to face the students on the other side of the line. If you do not feel comfortable crossing the line, even though you are part of that group, that's okay. You can stay right where you are and notice any feelings you are having." For each experience you call out, people who have had that experience will cross the line. They will then turn around to face the students who have not crossed the line. When you tell the group that crossed the line to return, they will return to their original places on the other side of the tape, so that the entire group is standing together once more.

After each of the "cross the line" categories, you will:

- 1) Pause until the students who have crossed the line have turned to face the other students;
- 2) Then you will say: "Now notice how it feels to cross the line and notice how it feels to watch other people cross the line (pause.) Notice who is with you (pause). Notice who is not with you (pause);"
- 3) Ask everyone to come back together behind the masking tape.

"Now, cross the line in silence if you've ever been teased or called a bad name or made fun of."

"Cross the line if you've ever felt left out because you're a girl."

"Cross the line if you've ever been called a mean name or put down just because you're a girl."

"Cross the line if you've ever been called a mean name or put down just because you're a boy."

"Cross the line if you've ever felt left out because you're a boy."

"Cross the line if you've ever been told you should not do something or like something because you are a girl?"

"Cross the line if you've ever been told you should not do something or like something because you are a boy?"

"Cross the line if you, or someone you care about, has ever been judged or teased because of the color of your (or his/her) skin."

"Cross the line if you've ever been teased about your accent or your voice, or told that you couldn't sing."

"Cross the line if you or any one of your family members or any friends of yours has a disability that you can or can't see."

"Now cross the line if you've ever seen someone else being teased or called a bad name or made fun of."

"Cross the line if you've ever been told you shouldn't cry, show your emotions, or be afraid."

"Cross the line if you've ever felt alone, unwelcome, or afraid."

"Cross the line if you or someone you care about has ever been teased or made fun of for wearing glasses, braces, a hearing aid, or for the clothes you wear, your height, your weight, your complexion, or the size or shape of your body."

"Cross the line if you've ever felt pressure from your friends or an adult to do something you didn't want to do and felt sorry or ashamed afterwards."

"Cross the line if you've ever felt ashamed for speaking from your heart or sharing your worries, fears, or secret hopes and dreams with someone."

"Cross the line if someone's ever been mean to you and you've been reluctant or too afraid to say anything about it."

"Cross the line if you're ever stood by and watched while someone was hurt and said or did nothing because you were too afraid."

Process in the large group:

What feelings did you have during this activity?

What was the hardest part for you?

What did you learn about yourself? About others?

What do you want to remember about what we've just experienced?

What, if anything, do you want to tell others about this experience?"

Closing Activity: If I Had a Hammer Integrated Arts (5 Minutes)

Introduce the closing activity:

"This is our fourth cornerstone theme. We are recognizing that human beings are not always nice to each other and that sometimes our differences are used against us, but from the other themes we know that we can become upstanders for each other. We can support each other."

Process:

"What did you learn from this activity that can make our classroom and school more welcoming?"

End by listen to or singing "If I Had a Hammer" together. Make the point that our commitment to being an upstander can be our hammer—or one of the tools that we use to create a community we all want to thrive and learn in. Are there other tools?

Grade Level Modifications

K-1 Instead of having students stand up and “cross the line,” it may feel safer for younger students to sit in a circle for this activity. Their participation could be modified so that students are given a card with a large green dot on one side and a red dot on the other. If their answer to the question is yes, they lay the green side facing up in front of them; if it’s no, the red side faces up. The questions would then be reframed as, “*Have you ever been....*” instead of “*Cross the line if....*”

Limit the number of questions to the first seven or eight in the core lesson, as many of the others will not be developmentally appropriate for this level. You may want to add or substitute:

“Have you ever been told that you couldn’t play in a group of children on the playground?”

“Have you ever been told you couldn’t play in a group of children because you are a girl or a boy?”

Follow the instructions for grades 2-5 for the rest of the activity.

Grades 6-12 and Adults

Do the activity as outlined. You may choose to substitute or add additional experiences based on particular issues within your community (For instance, “Cross the line if you or someone you care about has been ridiculed or left out because they are/or are believed to be: gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered; Christian/Jewish/Muslim/Atheist; etc.

Curricular Connections

K-12 Literacy and Art: Using Todd Parr’s [It’s Okay To Be Different](#), have students create oversized paintings in the colorful style he uses. Point out to students the bold outlines he uses, the simple illustrations, and how there is little if any white space left in his illustrations. Make a chart that says, “In our classroom (school), it’s okay to....” and brainstorm with students a list of silly and serious differences. Then, students can use one of the ideas from the list, or make up their own and write it on a sentence strip. On large art paper, have students paint a picture to illustrate their idea.

K-5 Literacy: Read [Whoever You Are](#) by Mem Fox. In the book there is a gentle being guiding children around the world to see that although there are many differences among humans, “hearts are the same.” Have students use the text as a starting point for their own poems about this message. Poems can start with “Little one, whoever you are, wherever you are, there are others that...” Share poems with another class or another grade.

K-5 Literacy and Art: Read [The Colors of Us](#) by Karen Katz. Using “multicultural” or “people colors” paint have students mix colors until they match their own skin color. Students can do this on art paper or they can mix the paint directly onto their skin. Have students name the color of their skin. Once they have a match, students can paint a tracing of their hand. The hands with their self-chosen color name can be displayed around the room. (NOTE: This is a good place to introduce the issue of “flesh” colored crayons and what that tells us about how people view diversity.)

6-12 Literacy. Set in Mississippi at the height of the Depression [*Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*](#) by Mildred D. Taylor explores the life of the Logan family, who must live in fear because the white people in the community do not see black people as equal. Explore examples of discrimination in the book and look for examples in students' lives as well.

6-12 History and Literacy: In [*Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*](#), Anne says, "I still believe people are basically good," even though her life is in peril because of prejudice against Jewish people during the Holocaust. Have students discuss this quote in a pair/share. Do you think that people are basically good? If yes, what, if anything, in your life helps you to keep your faith in the basic goodness of people? If not, what in particular most discourages you from believing in the basic goodness of people?

6-12 Music and Integrated Arts: Discuss how music has been used over time to create social change. What examples do you think were most effective? How has art been used to create social change? Speech? Listen to some of the music provided through the Don't Laugh at Me program and research its use to support social change.

6-12 Industrial Arts: Create hammers and other tools that represent things you want to keep in your Don't Laugh at Me toolbox: an ear for an ability to listen; a giant "I" for I statements; a U to remember to be an upstander; etc. Display this tool kit in a central place in your school or town/city hall with captions explaining their function. Spread the RFZ!