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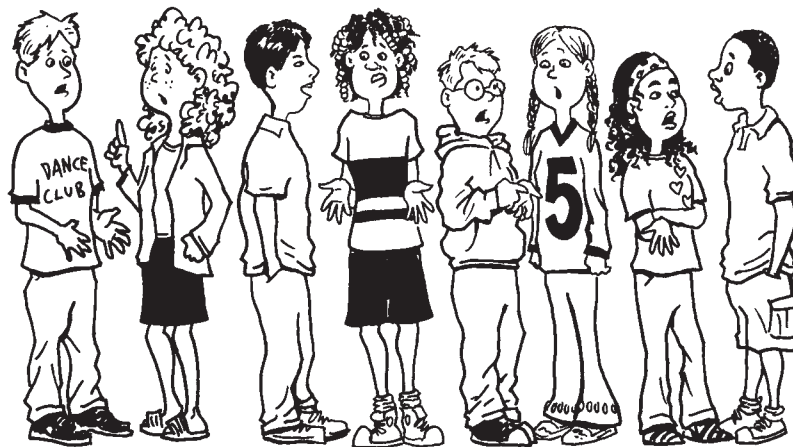
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Respect Matters

Real life scenarios provide powerful discussion starters for all aspects of respect

R.E. Myers



Dedication

For my son, Hal, with much love and admiration.

Good Year Books

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Cover design: Gary Smith, Performance Design
Text design: Doug Goewey
Drawings: Sean O'Neill
Cover photos: comstock.com

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ISBN-13: 978-1-59647-056-9

ISBN-eBook: 978-1-59647-163-4

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 – DBH – 09 08 07 06 05

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Introduction

We're at a point in the history of American education where opinions are almost equally divided as to whether the schools should attempt to deal with the character and attitudes of students or redouble efforts to teach fundamental skills. From the days of the McGuffey readers, when moral lessons were the subject matter of reading instruction, we've arrived at a time when lessons in moral education and social and emotional learning are again being offered as panaceas for our pervasive social problems. Should teachers attempt to *teach* their students morals, or even the basics of civil behavior? This book represents one small answer in the affirmative.

You *can* expose young people to certain concepts and precepts when engaging them in dialogues about appropriate and inappropriate behavior of both adults and juveniles. Educators who are currently trying to integrate lessons in social and emotional learning have proved that, as was the case with the McGuffey readers, the instructions can be located in the regular curriculum, but it can be infused with matters that affect students now—with such topics as crime, alienation, divorce, teenage pregnancy, war, responsibility, and respect (Elias, Bruene-Butler, Blum, and Schuyler, 1997).

Why should the schools be concerned with social and emotional education? There are at least three powerful reasons. The first one is obvious—namely, so that schools can be safe, healthy places for students, teachers, and staff. The sooner in their lives that young people come to grips with a sense of responsibility for their own behavior, the sooner police will no longer be patrolling the halls of junior and senior high schools. Second, we must teach social education because teachers, more and more, have become surrogate parents. There has to be a sufficient number of admirable adult models that children can emulate. The third reason is that our society as a whole has become one that needs revitalization of its civic imperatives. We can't ignore the accumulating evidence that our moral and spiritual values are steadily eroding.



Respect Matters is an attempt to bring to the attention of students and teachers the fact that respect is the foundation for all civil behavior. There can be no civility—or morality—without respect. If we don't respect another person's worth, body, property, or privacy, we have destroyed the basis upon which citizens can exist amicably in a community. These serious topics are brought forth in the stories in *Respect Matters*.

Respect is a positive regard for the worth of someone or something. The concept includes respect for the rights and dignity of other people, for laws and authority, for nature, and for oneself. Respect connotes appreciation, understanding, and esteem. It is the indispensable element in positive relationships among individuals and groups of individuals.

All over the country young people are striving to inculcate genuine respect in their peers. Some examples are the Kids Committee in Albuquerque, New Mexico; People are People at Hoffman Estate High School in Hoffman Estates, Illinois; Teenagers Against Racial Prejudice in Reno, Nevada; CityKids Foundation in New York City, New York; and New Moon Publishers, an editorial board of eight- to fourteen-year-olds in, Duluth, Minnesota. Because of their awareness of problems of hatred, prejudice, and intolerance, it is the young people themselves who are acting.

There are several ways in which this collection of stories and activities can be used in the classroom. Perhaps foremost among them is an open discussion of the story, followed by students proposing practical strategies for solving the problem that is presented. When you administer a story's activity after the discussion, you give students an opportunity to examine in depth the type of respect that was illustrated in the story. Another way of using a story is to integrate it with a social studies, science, language arts, or science lesson. Some of the units fit nicely into curricular programs. For example, "Saplings and Cans" can fit into units about ecology, conservation, and biology, and "Billy the Bully" dovetails with units concerning mental health and citizenship. Most, if not all, of the stories and activities in this book can be integrated into the regular curriculum.

In the world of today's youth, "dissing" is a behavior that means disrespecting and insulting a youngster. If the idea of disrespect is so explosive in juvenile society, perhaps *respect* can be as powerful in defusing conflict and building good will.

Sources for Further Reading

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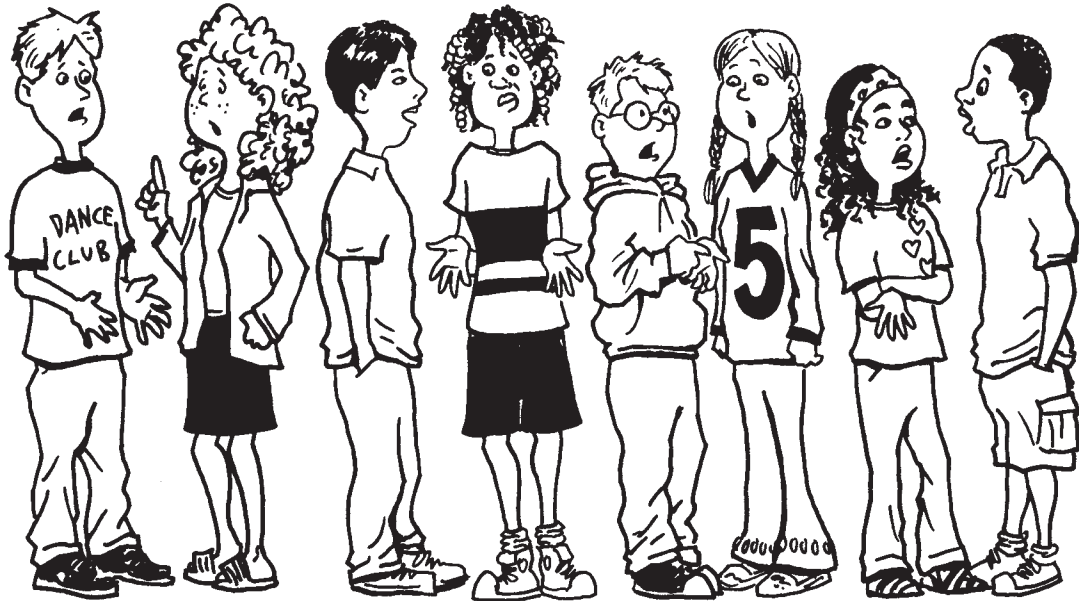
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How to Use This Book

Each of this book's 25 units includes a story followed by several discussion questions and an activity. The questions include space for student responses. The story and questions are formatted so that you can duplicate them and hand them out to students. The next section of each unit is teacher material, which includes summary remarks about the story and information about the question responses, along with a student activity. Some activities include a handout page for students.

Note that you do not need to present the units in any particular order. Use them in whatever order is appropriate for your students.

The Right Way



The eight members of the Dance Club could not agree on the criteria for electing officers for the next year. Some wanted to elect the best dancer as the next president. There was little debate about who that was—Tom was everyone’s choice. On the other hand, several members wanted the president to be the best organizer and leader, and that was obviously Ashley. She had been class president last year and had done an outstanding job. Still others wanted to elect someone as president who would “look good at the annual dance and be an excellent master of ceremonies”; that person was probably Ryan, who had even been a soloist for the school chorus. The debate rolled on.

When the discussion finally simmered down, it was obvious that every member of the club had some outstanding quality that might recommend her or him as a good president. Gradually, all of the members recognized that each of them had been mentioned as a possible president, and so a calm settled over the group.

“You know,” began Marcus, “we must be a pretty special group. I think all of us have been mentioned as someone who could be president.”

“That’s what I like about this bunch—people are honest and don’t just nominate their buddies,” added Matt. “Each of us has something to offer, and we all recognize those things. Let’s stop the discussion now and take a secret ballot. The one who gets the most votes is president.”



Name _____

Date _____

The Right Way: Student Responses

Think about your answers to the following questions and write your response to each.

1. The Dance Club may be an unusual group of young people. They love to disagree, but they have learned to listen to one another. When is disagreeing a sign of disrespect?

2. By the end of the school year, the Dance Club members seemed to have learned how to listen to each other and to even conduct productive meetings. Describe the kind of respect that they demonstrated for one another.

3. Do you think dancers tend to be more cooperative and more sensitive to others because they have to pay close attention to what their partners are doing? Explain.
