

STAND UP FOR JUSTICE 2024

Applicant: Annina Cosentino (PRM)

Describe the precipitating events that motivated you to initiate these lessons or activities.

As a first-year school counselor, I am working to find my own, unique style of practice every day. When I started working, I knew one thing for sure; I wanted my students to know and feel that they were my number one priority. I also knew I wanted to show my colleagues what it meant to be a school counselor. Counselors are educators, leaders, mentors, supporters, and most importantly, an advocate for all. Over the summer, my principal told me that my co-counselor had an idea for this school year's theme. The theme would be "we rise by lifting others". In middle school language, "we feel good when we do good for the interest of others". It was the perfect theme to tie into almost every lesson I would plan as a school counselor. Whether it be kindness, inclusion, anti-bullying, or peer pressure, my middle schoolers needed to remember that lifting others up instead of putting them down is what we are trying to do here at Pine Ridge Middle. This is a difficult age group. A lot of students feel insecure. Many of them feel like they have no one to turn to. Many will engage in behaviors that go against their better judgement because they simply want to "fit" the mold of someone who is liked by others. Our heritage week activities were planned to not only celebrate the diversity and distinct students of Pine Ridge, but to remind them to be kind and celebrate one another instead of focusing on our differences.

Describe the lessons or activities; and if adapted from another source please reference.

Our heritage week took place from November 13-17th. We kicked off the week with World Kindness Day. I did classroom guidance in all my 8th grade language arts courses. A lot of my resources came from *52 lives: school of kindness* (<https://schoolofkindness.org/world-kindness-day>). I taught students about the

psychological and physiological benefits of spreading kindness. For example, students learned that people who are kind produce less cortisol in the body which actually slows the aging process. In addition, I focused on self-kindness and had students write a note to themselves. They learned that being kind to ourselves is just as important as being kind to others and that it is often difficult to spread kindness if we are unkind to ourselves. Students then wrote notes to others in their class, and we did the activity until everyone received a positive affirmation.

Explain how the lessons or activities teach students the importance of respecting others no matter what religious, racial, cultural, or other differences exist.

While I taught kindness in language arts, our teachers were engaging in curriculum that centered around diversity and inclusion. Students participated in a G4 summit (gab, garb, grab, grub). These activities encouraged students to share and honor their cultures of origin through traditions, holidays, language, and food. The kindness lesson was meant to set the tone for the week of heritage-based content so that students would be respectful of the cultural differences shared between peers. This was especially pertinent as we watched the terrible Israel/Hamas hate crimes all over the news. Our heritage week overlapped with this tragedy and all our school personnel were alert and aware of our Jewish students and what they may have been feeling and experiencing at the time. We were fortunate to have had very few comments even arise about our Jewish students. I believe this is because our students responded to what we were teaching. Our panther family knew for certain that we would protect our diverse group to the end.

Explain how it helped them counter bigotry and bullying and prepared them to stand up for Justice.

Our heritage week lessons were executed at a school-wide and classroom level that encouraged all students to focus on lifting each other up no matter their culture, race, ethnicity, gender, sex, religion, socioeconomic status, etc. Our theme for the year is a constant reminder to counter bigotry and bullying due to its emphasis on kindness and

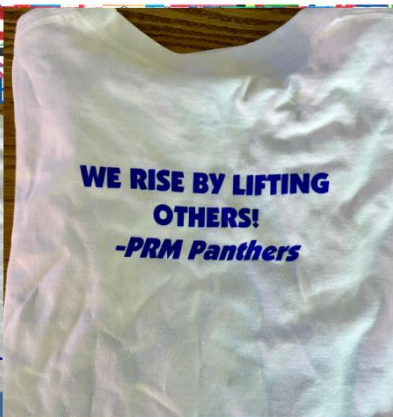
compassion. We have done an excellent job incorporating this theme into our school culture with t-shirts made by our principal for all staff and bulletin boards throughout the building. Additionally, when kind students are acknowledged and voted for student of the month, the winners receive the same t-shirt. Our amazing PTO has also recently purchased grade-level versions of this shirt so all students may represent this message. This shows that we are a united front that is actively working to counter negativity and hate. Our heritage week lessons simply reinforced student responsibility to uphold the theme of Pine Ridge in a fun and festive manner.

PROVIDE EVIDENCE/PROOF OF EFFECTIVENESS SUCH AS, BUT NOT LIMITED TO: QUESTIONNAIRE, INTERVIEWS, DOCUMENTED ANECDOTAL CONVERSATIONS, AND STUDENT WRITINGS, VIDEO, ETC.



2023 PRM HERITAGE WEEK

- 11/13 HALLWAY DECORATING & WORLD KINDNESS DAY** • GRADE LEVEL
- 11/14 POSTER COMPETITION** • INDIVIDUAL CONTESTANTS
- 11/15 WINNERS ANNOUNCED** • POPSICLES FOR CLASSROOMS/ GIFT CARDS FOR INDIVIDUALS
- 11/16 TEACHER LUNCHEON & STUDENT DRESS DOWN DAY** • FOOD IN MPR • WEAR CULTURAL COSTUMES OR COUNTRY COLORS
- 11/17 AFTERNOON ROTATIONS: TALENT SHOW, CULTURAL POTLUCK, OLYMPIC GAMES**



Above I have provided a collage of photographs I feel represent the work we are doing at Pine Ridge to honor and respect different cultural backgrounds. In the right corner, I provided an itinerary of our heritage week. Students participated in many events over the week to celebrate their cultural backgrounds. Our ending to the week was most enjoyable for the students. They engaged in a "PBIS" style afternoon full of cultural foods, sports, and musical performances. The country flags are displayed in each of the grade-level hallways. The bulletin board with our theme is one of many throughout the building and I've also included a picture of the student t-shirt. The student artwork and post-it notes are a representation of some of the work students completed in language arts and my guidance curriculum.