

Project Lunch Notes

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Shadowlawn Elementary, Naples
3rd grade

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

I have served as an educator for the past 10 years. Nine have been with Collier County Schools, specifically in Title 1 schools. To paraphrase the title character in the movie Forrest Gump, working in a Title 1 school is sometimes like eating a “box of chocolate--you never know what you're going to get.” Every year, I am amazed at the resilience, hard work and growth that students demonstrate by the end of the year.

I am currently working at Shadowlawn Elementary, where 82.2% of our students receive free/reduced lunch. In addition, 64% percent of our students are Hispanic and about 53% of them come from homes where Spanish is the primary language. When they go home, their parents are unable to support them in English and some even have trouble supporting them in Spanish.

Our students have great potential even though the odds are stacked against them. As an educator, I strongly believe that every child is able to grow both academically, emotionally, and socially.

As a mother of two young boys, I often pack little notes in their lunch boxes. The notes began simply--their name and the words “I love you” usually followed by hearts. I asked my son once what he liked most about the notes and he said the hearts that I drew because it showed that I loved him. As my son got older and could read more, I wrote notes telling him how proud I was when he did x, y, and z. I left silly jokes and always ended it with hearts. I believe that children hold on to small gestures and it helps them grow. As adults, can you think about how you felt the last time someone left you a note either expected or unexpected? When children know that they are loved and respected, they are able to show love and respect others no matter what religious, racial, cultural, or other differences exist. Kindness promotes empathy and empathy promotes kind and caring citizens. This cycle is never ending and often unbreakable. John Steinbeck said it best: “You can only understand people if you feel them in yourself.” It is hard to demonstrate a character trait that you don't understand or experience yourself.

This brings me to where I am now and my motivation for “Project Lunch Notes.” One day as I was writing lunch notes for my children, **I realized that since 82% of our school is eating school lunch, 82% of these students are not getting any special notes to show that someone is thinking about them.** To make matters worse, many of these students arrive at 6:30 or 7:00 am and don't leave until 6:00 pm. Some kids spend 12 hours at school. And when they go home, it is most likely just dinner and bedtime.

Many of our parents are working very hard to support their families, and I truly believe that it takes a community to raise a child! So, it is my job to make 7 out of those 11 or 12 hours at school as rewarding as I can, both emotionally and socially. As a teacher, my *main* job is to make sure my students reach their academic goals. However, it is also my responsibility to ensure they learn to be kind and accepting of others regardless of race, religious beliefs.

Describe the lesson(s) or activity(s); and if adapted from another source please reference.

Introduction: This lesson plan was adapted from my personal experience as a mother. There was a need for encouragement and a sense of community in my classroom. Third graders are at a point in their lives where they rely more on their peers than their teacher for encouragement. I could say something 20 times, but if 1 of their peers say it, they “get it.” This simple observation led to the idea of having students write notes of encouragement and stories to one another. A few times a month, students will write a note for a random classmate. For the first six weeks, I will provide the students prompts and sentence starters. For example, “I think that you are a wonderful person because of these three qualities,” “When I am sad, this is what I do...,” “Want to hear a joke? _____. I hope that I made you laugh.”

Objective: Students will learn how to be thoughtful and how their words affects those around them.

Length of Lesson: Every 2 weeks for 15-20 minutes

Materials:



Lesson Sequencing:

1. Students have their own “lunch notes notebook.”
2. Before we write, we spend the first few minutes talking about what it means to have and write in someone’s notebook. (being kind, respectful of someone’s notebook, good vibes, etc.)
3. I take the last 15-20 minutes of the day and randomly pass out the notebooks to my students. The recipients are chosen at random. Once they receive their notebook, I have them make sure that it is NOT their own. If there are absent students, those notebooks are filled out by me. I will leave a note for them to read the next day. **(That ensures that no one is left without a note. (Being that they are only 8 and 9 years old, I also walk around and monitor what they write.)**
4. Students are told to ask THEMSELVES when they are done;

- a. "Would I like to receive a note like this? Would this make me happy or sad if I read this IN MY NOTEBOOK?"

(This thinking really makes my students conscious of their words and actions when writing. Each notebook is special to the owner, so we really focus on making sure that we put something in there that would make them feel good.)

5. Students receive 10 minutes to write in their classmate's journal. Once they are done, I give the students 5 minutes to read their notes.
6. At the end of the year, the students will have a notebook with stories and notes that show how much they were cared for in third grade.

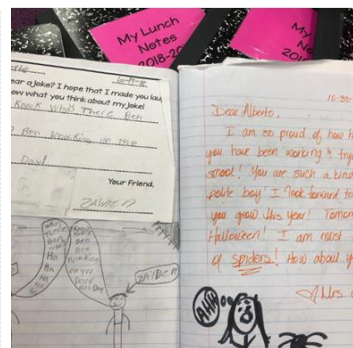
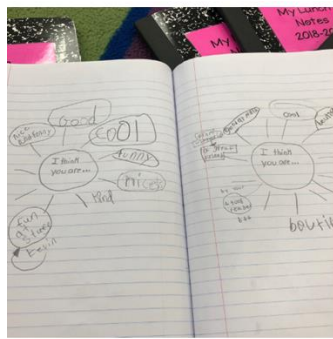
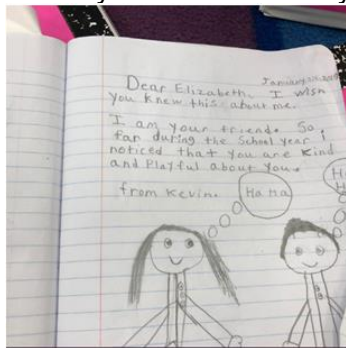
Explain how the lesson(s) or activity(s) teach students the importance of respecting others no matter what religious, racial, cultural, or other differences exist. Explain how it helped them counter bigotry and bullying and prepared them to stand up for justice.

These lunch notes teach children to be thoughtful of their classmates regardless of their religious, racial, and cultural differences. It teaches them to not only say kind things but it connects them with classmates that are different from them. In a school where 80% of our students are economically needy, knowing that classmates care and authored positive notes for a student can go a long way towards supporting the student's developing self-concept. It also creates a bridge during recess time for the children to connect with one another.

Children are not born to hate. They are taught. However, it is not impossible to show them how to love and how to be loved. Lunch Note's main purpose is to instill a sense of care for one another.

For example, in their January 24th entry, the students were told to tell their friends something they wished their friend knew about them and something that they noticed about their classmate throughout the school year. Here are some sample writings:

- "Dear Elizabeth, I wish you knew this about me. I am your friend. So far during the school year I noticed that you are kind and playful."



- "Dear David, I wish you knew this about me. I'm always nice and I love making friends. So far during the school year, I noticed that you are so much good and great and a good worker."
- "Dear Alberto, I am so proud of you!"

The students also went around doing a “Scoot” activity where they all wrote a word describing their classmate. Simple words often create the biggest smiles.

- “I think that you are beautiful, good at math, nice funny...”

With these activities, we are creating an environment where we naturally become protective of our friends and classmates. I believe that even though my students aren’t all friends, they really do look out for one another outside of class. They respect one another. They don’t let their classmates get bullied or teased which in a way prepares them to stand up for justice when they get older. These lessons are meant for my students to say “kind and thoughtful” things to their classmates who are not in their “clique.” I believe that nurturing this “mindfulness of thoughts to others” instills in students the importance of respect.

Respect, kindness and empathy go hand in hand. Once students can feel that they are respected and loved they can then counter bigotry and bullying. But first they must feel what it means to be loved or thought of.