

Stand Up For Justice

Shannon Beauvais

Ms. Beauvais has always worked hard to create a culture of kindness among her students and it is evident when you walk in her classroom. If you enter her classroom, there is a feeling of calm, students are working together, and there is a slight scent of aromatherapy and music playing in the background. As much as Ms. Beauvais wanted to report that all of her students were kind all of the time, and that they experienced kindness from others all of the time, she recognized that this was not always the case. At times, unkind words were said, and she noticed that the students' responses would only escalate the problem. Therefore, she set off on a mission to help students learn new ways to process their feelings and respond in those situations.

As most elementary educators do, Ms. Beauvais sought out the advice of well-respected expert, and who better than Dr. Seuss! She thought about the story of 'The Grinch Who Stole Christmas', the mean intentions of the Grinch and how the kindness of Cindy Lou Who helped his heart grow three sizes. Ms. Beauvais decided to incorporate this story into her curriculum, so each December the Grinch comes to visit her students. He arrives with the intent to create havoc in her class by doing some very unkind things, the students must then journal about his actions, their feelings and how they will respond. During the early days of December, the students respond with anger and revenge, the Grinch in turn responds with more unkind actions. This continues until that small breakthrough, the kind word shared by one student, the empathy shared by another student or even an offer to help the Grinch. These small gestures have a big impact on the Grinch and slowly his actions begin to change, slowly his heart begins to grow. Day by day, the actions of the Grinch become more kind as the responses of the students become more kind. Through this experience, Ms. Beauvais' students learn that the power of kindness has the power to change people and the power to change hearts.

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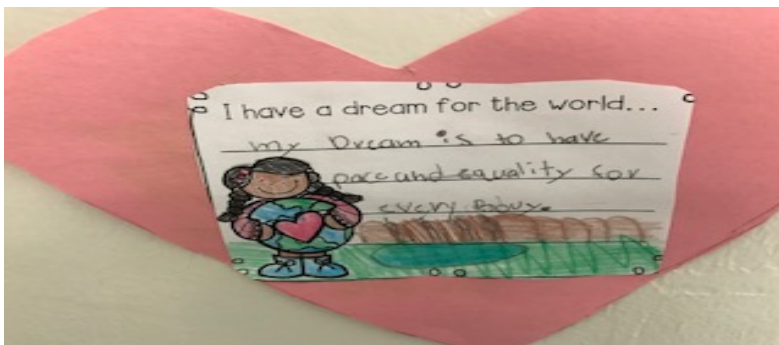
Through this process, Ms. Beauvais recognized that it is often easier for her students to be kind to those who are kind to them but as we, all know, much more difficult when we are feeling hurt by another person's words or actions. Ms. Beauvais decided that as important as it is for her students to be kind to others it is just as important for students to be kind to themselves. By building up the students' self-esteem and confidence, the students will be respond to situations in a thoughtful and calm manner. Ms. Beauvais remembered a quote that stated "You will never speak to anyone more than you speak to yourself in your head. Be kind to yourself" so Ms. Beauvais created the 'I AM...' wall. During this activity, each student thinks of positive words to describe themselves, then they add that word to the "I AM..." statement. The "I AM..." statement becomes a mantra that they repeat to themselves, Ms. Beauvais teaches them that it can especially be helpful in times of sadness, anger or loneliness but also as a defense against the unkind words that one might hear during the day. She encourages students to celebrate themselves and their uniqueness every day.

Ms. Beauvais also teaches her class mindful breathing, which helps the student take a moment to breathe and calm down when angry or sad so that he or she can respond in a thoughtful manner. Last year each student in her class received a special kindness award when they wrote notes and taught mindful breathing to the students in a partner class who were upset after there was a medical scare in their classroom. The kindness and empathy of student helping student in this difficult situation was healing for both the groups of children, while giving the teacher time to deal with the issue at hand. Ms. Beauvais has empowered her students to take care of themselves and to take care of others.

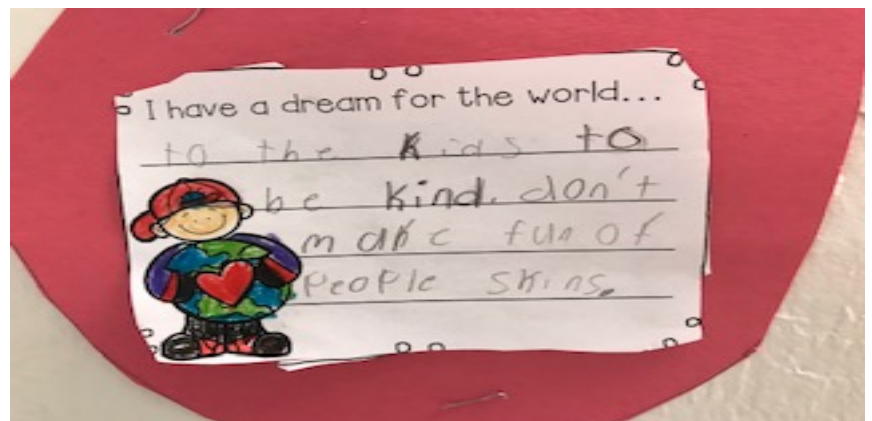
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Ms. Beauvais also shares this skill with the students in her mindfulness leadership club, and they in turn, work to share this skill school wide. They have made calming bottles for each classroom's calming corner, a place for students to go when they feel angry, sad or frustrated. She has also worked with the other third grade teachers to have students to think about their dreams for the world. After studying Dr. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech, each student wrote down his or her dream for the world. Many of Ms. Beauvais' students emphasized the importance of kindness, empathy and respect in their dream for the world. One student stated, "For kids to be kind don't make fun of people's skins". Another wrote, "My dream is to have peace and equality for everybody". I think that we could all agree that those are our dreams too, and with the kindness leaders that are being cultivated in Ms. Beauvais' class, I hold on to hope that all of these dreams will become reality.



Third Grade's Dreams for the World



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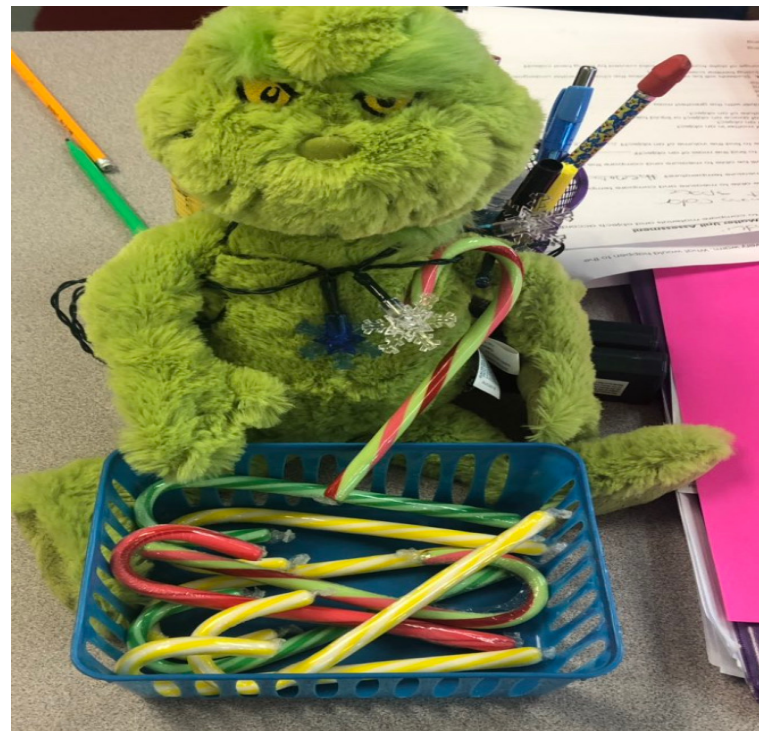
Mindfulness Club



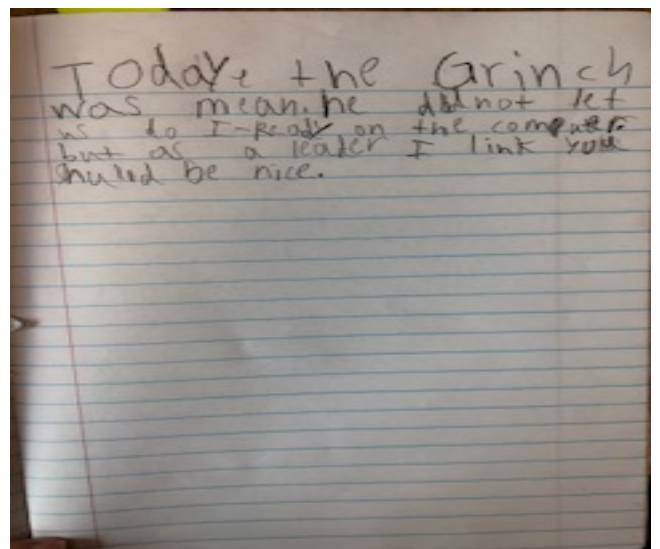
The Grinch Comes to Visit...



The Grinch was not very kind!



With a little Kindness from Ms. Beauvais' class, the Grinch learns to share.



Students learn to be a leader and show kindness even when others may not.