



Peace and Justice Education

Creating a Giraffe Classroom *Grades K-2*

Background

The goal of giving a beautiful name to a classroom, such as "Giraffe Classroom," is to create a comfortable atmosphere to carry out the educational process, where teachers and students are in a place where they feel familiar and loved, are happy with what is new to them, and positive interaction occurs between everyone. The room comes to embody these qualities. Each child is allocated her/his own space in the room, and a place on the wall designated for the drawings, articles, games, or poems they have created as they learn about cognitive, empathic communication. The giraffe and the jackal, characters from the animal world, represent the challenges, difficulties, and problems we go through in our daily lives. For better interaction among the participants, the students sit in a circle, where they can clearly see each other as well as their teacher. The language of the giraffe is a powerful language that can influence others and encourage effective communication throughout the year.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Learn the characteristics of giraffes and jackals
- Draw a giraffe and a jackal
- Describe how they can interact with each other and with adults more like giraffes and less like jackals
- Describe the classroom as a place where they can practice empathic communication, like giraffes

Materials

Crayons or markers, paper, photographs of jackals and giraffes, tape

Activity Steps

Show photographs of giraffes and discuss as a group what giraffes look like, how they might act toward each other. Build on the children's prior knowledge but also encourage them to use their imagination.

Provide more information about giraffe behavior. The giraffe, an animal with a big heart and a long neck, can see the future and monitor the results of actions and deeds. They are curious, gentle, and caring of each other and their young. They are not aggressive, but can defend themselves. They are very social creatures and form strong bonds with each other and with their young. Researchers are learning that giraffes have even more social behaviors than we thought, including friendships, daycare practices and grandmother roles.

Do the same for jackals. Show photographs of jackals and discuss what jackals look like and how they might act toward each other.

Provide more information about jackals and their behaviors. They are not pack animals. They are alone much of the time. They don't rely on each other. They are very vocal – they whine, they bark, they growl. They are clever hunters and predators.

Invite the children to draw a giraffe and a jackal. Their drawings don't have to look like the real animals in the photographs. Display these drawings in the classroom in order to remind the children of empathic communication and being in a "Giraffe Classroom" throughout the year.

Ongoing Activity

As time goes by, adults and children will identify good "giraffe behavior" in the classroom (i.e., observing, sensing and naming feelings, responding kindly, working together, asking for help). These behaviors can be listed or named on posters around the room or the school.

Conclusion

Collect and display students' drawings of the giraffe and the jackal. Consider: How did the children react? How did I do as the adult leader? What will we do next?

