



Peace and Justice Education

A “Pledge Tree” of Nonviolence

Grades 3-5

Background

Love, justice, mercy, and tolerance are basic values in raising children nonviolently, especially for the school students at the House of Hope. In grades 3 - 5, with their understanding bolstered from our “Language of the Heart” curriculum for younger children, students can develop a deeper and broader understanding of social relationships and the effects of their actions on others. The lesson illustrates how to be good friends with everyone and solve our problems without getting angry or hitting others. Making a “pledge” or promise and then displaying these pledges in the classroom enables students to continue to practice empathic communication and remind themselves of positive behaviors throughout the year.

Nonviolence teaches us to be kind and understanding to others, even if they are different from us or have different ideas. It means that we listen to each other, respect everyone's feelings, and always try to find ways to work together peacefully. This is an interactive activity aimed at teaching students about the culture of nonviolence and how to apply it in their daily lives. This activity relies on teamwork, critical thinking, and creative expression.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Gain an initial understanding of the concept of nonviolence by making personal pledges for their own lives.
- Understand the connection between their pledges and the work of nonviolent leaders in our world such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr.
- Use the language of nonviolence to discuss their pledge in life.
- Demonstrate cooperation and teamwork skills.

Materials

A large piece of cardboard or bulletin board, crayons, watercolors, or paint and colorful paper cut into the shape of many leaves. Glue or staples for fastening.

Activity Steps

Prepare the tree: Draw or paint a large leafless tree on a clipboard or bulletin board. The tree should be large enough to accommodate the many “leaves” that students will add.

Begin with a short introduction to nonviolence. Discuss how small actions can contribute to building a more peaceful society. Read about Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. and identify key words, including tolerance, peace, compassion, justice, love, kindness, respect, nonviolence, empathy. These are words that may be used in the children’s pledge leaves.

Write pledges on leaves: Each student chooses a leaf-shaped piece of colored paper and writes a personal pledge on it that reflects the principle of nonviolence. For example, “I will listen empathetically when my friends talk to me” or “I will use my words to resolve conflicts peacefully.”

Decorate the tree: Students paste or pin their leaves to the tree of nonviolence. As they add their papers, they can share their pledges with the class if they wish.

After all students have added their pledges, discuss how these pledges, when put into practice, can contribute to a more peaceful and understanding school and community environment.

Ongoing Activity

The Tree of Nonviolence will remain in the classroom as a constant reminder of students’ commitment to building a more peaceful society.

Conclusion

Consider: How did the children react? How did I do as the adult leader? What will we do next?

