

Harvey “Smokey” Daniels • Sara K. Ahmed



standers

How to Engage Middle
School Hearts and
Minds with Inquiry

HEINEMANN
Portsmouth, NH

Heinemann

361 Hanover Street
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912
www.heinemann.com

Offices and agents throughout the world

© 2015 by Harvey Daniels and Sara Ahmed

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review.

“Dedicated to Teachers” is a trademark of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

The authors and publisher wish to thank those who have generously given permission to reprint borrowed material:

Excerpt from *Not My Fault* by Leif Kristiansson. Text and illustration copyright © 1973, 1999 by Leif Kristiansson. Published in the United States by Heyrin Books, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Ia Atterholm Agency/ICBS, Malmö, Sweden.

Home Court Advantage lesson adapted from *Reading and Writing Together: Collaborative Literacy in Action* by Nancy Steineke. Copyright © 2002 by Nancy Steineke. Published by Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH. All rights reserved.

Figures 8.5 and 8.6: “Introduction: Triangle Fire” from *American Experience: Triangle Fire* (www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/introduction/triangle-intro/). Copyright © 1996–2014 WGBH Educational Foundation. Reprinted by permission of WGBH Educational Foundation.

Figure 9.5: Membership Grid adapted from *Reading and Writing Together: Collaborative Literacy in Action* by Nancy Steineke. Copyright © 2002 by Nancy Steineke. Published by Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH. All rights reserved.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Harvey, Daniels

Upstanders : how to engage middle school hearts and minds with inquiry / Harvey “Smokey” Daniels and Sara K. Ahmed.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-325-05359-2

1. Middle school education—United States. 2. Middle schools—United States. 3. Middle school teachers—Training of—United States. 4. Inquiry-based learning. I. Ahmed, Sara K. II. Title.

LB1623.5.H37 2015

373.236—dc23

2014027014

Acquisitions editor: Tobey Antao

Production editor: Patty Adams

Cover and interior designs: Suzanne Heiser

Typesetter: Gina Poirier, Gina Poirier Design

Manufacturing: Steve Bernier

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

19 18 17 16 15 EBM 1 2 3 4 5

dedication

*“All grown-ups were once children . . .
but only few of them remember it.”*

**—ANTOINE ST. EXUPERY,
AUTHOR OF *THE LITTLE PRINCE***

To the kids and the grown-ups who can always
find their inner kid.

contents

Acknowledgments ix

PART 1 **Welcome** 1

Chapter 1 A Core Curriculum of Heart and Mind 3

PART 2 **School as Our Homeplace** 19

Chapter 2 The Kids 20

Chapter 3 The Teacher 31

Chapter 4 The Space 42

Chapter 5 The Toolbox 55

PART 3 **Open Hearts and Inquiring Minds** 75

Chapter 6 Lessons in Identity and Empathy 76

PART 4 **A Compassionate and Challenging Curriculum** 103

Chapter 7 Mini-Inquiries 104

Chapter 8 Curricular Inquiries 132

Chapter 9 Literature Circle Inquiries 154

Chapter 10 Open Inquiries 184

Coda 217

Works Cited 218

Index 221



acknowledgments

FROM SARA

With deep gratitude to my entire family. To my parents for their bravery in traveling across an unknown ocean in search of the American dream—a dream they found by being vehicles of change in their community for over forty years. I know you wanted three Indian doctors, but you got three educators instead! To Samira and Asra, for your guidance and for giving me the floor of the car on our road trips to Florida. It's tough being the favorite. To my Batavia family and the best girlfriends a middle schooler could ask for: nearly twenty-five years later and no matter the distance between us, I am always home when I am with you.

To my Burley School family. A Dream Team of educators with a spirit of open doors and an unmatched drive to do what is right by kids. To Barbara Kent for raising me to always be in search of my humanity in literature and the world around me. To my friends from the ground floor to the third. Eight years of storied laughter, tears, road trips, and social committee events. Special shout-out to anyone who ever fed me or gave me supplies from their closets—you know who you are. Thank you.

To my Bishop's School family. Thank you for embracing the new kid with welcoming and supportive arms. My first step on that campus every morning is always greeted with warmth and ready laughter. Special thanks to A. C. and Carol for your leadership and support, to Cory Ann, and to Team 6.

To my Facing History family. An international team dedicated to supporting teachers and students through inquiry and the human story. Special thanks to Chuck Meyers for literally being on my doorstep on a moment's notice and the offices in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, London, and Boston.

To all of my students, near and far. Thank you for always reminding me how important curiosity and laughter really are.

Finally, to my life's mentor, Smokey. You are my Don Graves. This work would not be possible without your guidance, aggressive keyboarding, your NERF basketball hoop, and our mutual love for YA music. I am truly indebted to you and Elaine for sharing your whole hearts and your home on this journey. I am standing on very big shoulders.

FROM SMOKEY

To my mentor, Sara. As Al Pacino once said in a movie, “I am a scary judge of talent.” When I first walked into your classroom in Chicago, I immediately thought to myself, now THAT’S what middle school should look like. And I wanted to collaborate with you. Mentoring only works if it is mutual, and whatever I’ve done for you, I’ve gained double in return. We didn’t just write a book together. We became friends and then family. But still, I am an elder in the profession, and there’s one more thing. I am asking you, young one, to carry on the long and always threatened struggle for progressive education in America. That is a lot to put on someone’s shoulders. But you are so strong.

To my family. Marny, the hardworking, book-devouring Queen of Retail. Nick, California’s Mr. Pathology, a human vacuum of nonfiction, and my financial guru. I’m so proud to call these two upstanders my children. Spouse Elaine, teacher and coauthor, partner and co-conspirator, and the most supportive reader of really rough drafts ever. The best is yet to come, and won’t it be fine?

To my school families. I have the greatest job in the world, which now entails serving as a guest teacher across the United States. Just in the past year, I worked with kids and teachers in public, independent, Catholic, and reservation schools. Everywhere I go, I am awed by the dedication of this country’s teachers, who work in the face of “reforms” that too often disrespect their precious work. And I am moved and encouraged by the intelligence, creativity, and human decency of our students, young people who are definitely not “data.”

FROM BOTH OF US

To Team Heinemann. This is Sara’s first book with Heinemann; it is Smokey’s fifteenth. So we know a few things about our publisher. Have you ever heard that old joke from *The Peter Principle*? As any organization matures, all of its positions gradually become occupied by people who are incapable of performing their duties? Well, Heinemann is the opposite: every single person we work with is at the very top of their profession. From the principled leadership of Lesa Scott, Vicki Boyd, and Lisa Fowler, through every department, people like Eric Chalek, Brett Whitmarsh, Suzanne Heiser, Sarah Fournier, Victoria Merecki, Anthony Marvullo, and a dozen others make us look good. Our editor, Tobey Antao, seamlessly wove our thoughts and our voices together, despite every obstacle. Tobey, we long for the days we will meet you again in tracked changes! Smokey’s longtime production editor Patty Adams took on this new writing team with unfailing patience, contagious serenity, and completely unfounded optimism that we could meet a warp-speed production schedule. And now, when

we take our new work on the road, Michelle Flynn, Cathy Brophy, Cheryl Savage, and Cherie Bartlett will guide our professional development events every step of the way. It is incredible to have a team like this around us.

Heinemann, thanks for your commitment to middle schoolers around the country, for believing in the power of the middle school amygdala . . . and ours.

To the Band. Some of this book was actually written while we were sitting in the same room. Despite our vast age difference, we found that we were both energized by the same background music. So, thanks to Taylor Swift, the Beastie Boys, Billy Joel, Justin Timberlake, the Dixie Chicks, and Paul Simon.

To the Posse. We are so fortunate to have a network of dear friends who also happen to be teachers, authors, researchers, and fellow travellers (both literally and metaphorically). For all you do, for who you are, we will be forever grateful for the way you have empowered and cheer-led this project.

Big tweets to @KristinZiemke @NSteineke @StephHarvey49 @StevenZemelman @LiteracySpark @Donalynbooks #yourock #edupstanders

To the Shoulders We Stand On. Donald Graves, Stephanie Harvey, Anne Goudvis, Lucy Calkins, Nancy Steineke, Linda Hoyt, Donalyn Miller, Nancie Atwell, Jerome Harste, James Beane, Richard Allington, Steve Zemelman, P. David Pearson, David and Roger Johnson, and Chip Wood.



PART 1

*

WELCOME



A Core Curriculum of Heart and Mind

This book is about growing a caring classroom community that deeply supports its own members and also monitors, investigates, and cares for the world beyond its walls. This means helping young people learn to think hard, build knowledge, become skilled researchers, and communicate carefully—in the service of humanity, not just themselves. The new Common Core State Standards (2010) set quite different goals. That four-hundred-page document’s announced aims are “Career and College Readiness,” with much talk of preparing individual students for “global economic competition.” Words like *rigor*, *complexity*, and *argument* proliferate in this burgeoning genre of standards literature. There is no mention of citizenship, either local, national, or planetary. Indeed, in Core-World, many subjects of urgent importance are omitted when the purposes of schooling are enumerated. Among the disappeared topics:

chapter 1

identity
empathy
altruism
justice

equality
democracy
curiosity
compassion

choice
responsibility
courage
peacemaking

critique
struggle
change
collaboration

In the “reformed” American schools of today, these values and principles are treated as naive or simply irrelevant. But that’s recent. If you look back at the mission statements of virtually any American school district from fifty or even twenty-five years ago, they unabashedly embraced many of these same ideals. In fact, many contemporary schools retain this kind of visionary language, even though their daily operations may be focused on test prep, and not the development of human character and potential.

You probably didn’t become a teacher mainly to raise some child’s standardized test score .05 percent—or to ensure that America continues to grab a disproportionately large share of the world’s goodies. Instead, you wanted to be part of raising smart, ethical people who would work for their own families—and for a better neighborhood, country, and world.

But we can have both. Nurturing compassionate, collaborative citizens of the world can indeed advance our students into colleges and careers as well as toward the neglected third C—citizenship. Our kids can learn, pass tests, find a place in the global economy—and make the world a better place for all. Our school system’s passive, top-down pedagogy has already raised generations of bystanders, grown-ups who lack the tools to think critically, the discernment to judge, and the courage to act. Today, we need to nurture a new generation of “upstanders”—active and informed human beings who will make thoughtful and brave choices in their own lives, in their communities, and on the ever-shrinking world stage. The voices of young people must be part of our nation’s conversation, not after they leave school, but right now. And the better they learn to read, write, think, investigate, and collaborate, the more effective they will be in creatively solving this planet’s problems and extending its future.

In 1930, George S. Counts wrote one of the most famous books in the history of American education, which posed the question, “Dare the schools build a new social order?” Looking at the world around us today, we damn well better.

Hard Work, Heart Work

This is work from our hearts.

SMOKEY: *On one of my visits to Sara’s room last year, the TV news was full of the brutal civil war in Syria, and her kids were concerned. Sara’s students were reading newspaper and web reports of desperate refugees, many of them children, crowding into IDP (internationally displaced person) camps across the Turkish border.*

Sara explained that one student asked, “Ms. Ahmed, all we keep seeing in the news is that kids are dying. Why are they targeting kids?”

Warren, another student, was drawn to the media coverage, as are many people during atrocities, and even posted something to our class web page one night. See Figure 1.1.



Figure 1.1 Warren Z., Matthew M., and Michael X. discussion posts.

The images on the Internet were heartbreaking. More than 2.5 million people had already been displaced by the civil war, and prospects for peace were dimming by the day. As Sara always does, she started searching for people, organizations, and websites where she could learn more for herself and find potential resources for her kids. Sara, can you pick up the story there?

SARA: *Sure. Syria was all over the news at the beginning of the school year. There were sickening images of piles of child graves and chemical weapons on every form of media you turned to. We use CNN Student News as another class resource and the kids were beginning to ask questions. I had my own questions too, not knowing too much about the complex history of the conflict.*

*One of the other teachers invited a parent who is a news reporter to come in and speak about her experience covering the atrocities. I used our **Edmodo** page to list links for the kids to read and get some of their questions answered, and I also had them search for their own articles to share with the group. We had already done critical literacy lessons on choosing credible sites. With the power of literacy and inquiry, the more they read, the more questions they asked, and the more they felt an urgency to do something.*

I couldn't be a good enough source to them alone, so I started searching on Twitter for anything and everything I could on a Saturday morning. I searched Syria, Syrian children, and Syrian refugees, and came across Camp Zeitouna and the hashtag #Play4Syria. I read some tweets and grew interested in this organization's work with children in the camps through school and soccer. (Selfishly, two of my favorite things.) I googled the camp and found an ambiguous contact email. I wrote to the address asking how we could get involved in a way that would be meaningful and valuable for these kids. I didn't want it to be just about money. I received a response from the director right away. We spoke on the phone the next day, and I couldn't wait to tell the kids about it. That Monday, I showed students an email from Kinda Hibrawi, the cofounder of Camp Zeitouna, who assured them the camp needed our help, but it was up to us to decide how. Here in Figure 1.2 were some possibilities we came up with:

	<p>Me to Syria (SocialStudies7)</p> <p>This is the website for the Karam Foundation. Let's brainstorm a way to be upstanders for them. It does not need to involve money, we can simply send them art we create to show them we haven't forgotten about them or to show them we value their education too. List your ideas here and we will bounce ideas off each other.</p> <p>http://karamfoundation.com/projects/camp-zeit...</p>
	<p>Me to Syria (SocialStudies7)</p> <p>Melanie and Warren made a suggestion on the wall of the Syria page. Can you both repost under here? Thanks!</p>
	<p>Melanie S. • Sep 23, 2013</p> <p>We could make art and send it to the kids in Syria/refugee camps. We could also put a loose change drive outside of the snack bar and vending machines</p>
	<p>Warren Z. • Sep 23, 2013</p> <p>Yeah we could send the art to them.</p>
	<p>Warren Z. • Sep 23, 2013</p> <p>Or we could give them supplies to make art.</p>
	<p>Shannon B. • Sep 23, 2013</p> <p>We could also make bracelets, or other things to sell for fundraising purposes.</p>
	<p>Melanie S. • Sep 23, 2013</p> <p>Shannon had the idea that we could make and sell bracelets</p>
	<p>Alexander V. • Sep 23, 2013</p> <p>I think we should make a website to donate money to Syria, based on the school. In fact, if possible, we could make it on the school website.</p>
	<p>Tate M. • Sep 23, 2013</p> <p>i like the idea of selling things for fundraising especially food, think about how much people spend on the snack bar</p>
	<p>Michael X. • Sep 23, 2013</p> <p>We could send pictures of motivation, which I did at my old school for the Sandy Hook school.</p>
	<p>Melanie S. • Sep 23, 2013</p> <p>There is something called beads of courage. That people wear for different things we could do something like that and give them to the syrian children and sell them here.</p>
	<p>Shannon B. • Sep 23, 2013</p> <p>We should write books and stories for the children, then send them back with Kinda</p>
	<p>Matthew M. • Sep 23, 2013</p> <p>Since I am in the ASBC, I can communicate/persuade other officers of middle school to make a fundraiser for the refugee camps we are planning to. My idea is to have a "shoot-a-thon" where you shoot 5 balls trying to make as many balls in the hoop as possible. It is \$5 per entry. Whoever gets 4-5 hoops will get a prize!</p>

Figure 1.2 Discussion on class website regarding the Karam Foundation.

Melanie and Shannon's idea won out—to make bracelets for the Syrian kids, but the vision was to be like the Tom's shoe company, where you buy one and give one. This was decided unanimously. As my students reflected later, this way those kids will always know someone is thinking about them. We talked about overhead costs for making bracelets and they introduced me to the idea of bracelets made out of strips of T-shirts. Everyone brings in an old shirt or two and there is no overhead! The idea gained momentum and support, as our team of seventh-grade teachers and the kids' peers were instrumental in helping make as many bracelets as they could.

SMOKEY: *The next time I came to visit, I found Sara's kids scattered around the floor, weaving multicolored strips of cut-up T-shirts into beautiful bracelets that they planned to sell to raise money for Camp Zeitouna. Around midmorning, Kinda Skyped in from the agency and praised the kids for their dedication. Pumped up, a team of Sara's seventh graders marched into a whole-school assembly (grades 6 through 12) and with exquisite eloquence, told all those older kids about the refugee camp, showed the video they had made highlighting their campaign, called #playforSyria, and why all students had better be buying lots of T-shirt bracelets later that week. Sara's students were not just skilled artisans, but pretty effective sellers, too—I brought home enough bracelets to adorn all my family members and neighbors.*

SARA: *The ideas for fund-raising, the video, and the sale itself would not have happened without the intense research and reading of articles and media we pored over. We all got increasingly concerned and fired up. But we knew we would have to communicate our sense of urgency to others who lacked our growing schema on the issue. So the kids practiced writing "Convince Me" letters, with The Bishop's School community as the audience. Having a go at this persuasive writing included finding statistics and citing sources, directly quoting evidence while considering audience, and pulling at heartstrings. Figure 1.3 shows Lulu and Sophie's version.*

The kids worked at braiding bracelets during every spare moment (and a few minutes in class, too). Everyone who bought a bracelet for \$2 could also handpick another one that we'd send to a Syrian child. The sale raised over \$700, which was eventually used to buy computer equipment for a makeshift school for the refugee children. That same week, Kinda came to Bishop's to personally pick up the bracelets to take with her to Turkey and the Al-Salaam school. The kids were beyond psyched, and many skipped lunch to come meet her.

SMOKEY: *It was amazing to see the kids' commitment and dedication to this project. It also reminded me that teachers like you are sometimes accused of imposing their own politics on kids, making them into little apprentice crusaders working on the teacher's hobbyhorse issues. Some crabby person could probably see your Syria project that way—after all, you did initiate it.*

SARA: *It's important to remember where this work began: the issue was prominent in the non-fiction magazines we were reading and the media we were engaged with at the time. The kids became more and more aware, and began to ask more and more questions. I initiated it in the sense that I didn't let it slide, and instead made even more visual and print resources available to students on a topic for which none of us had much background knowledge, me included. They analyzed a variety of complex nonfiction texts to develop answers to their questions, they wrote with specific claims and evidence of the atrocities, and they were able to analyze and validate the credibility of sources they used. The skills and awareness kids gained from this inquiry were invaluable because it was student-driven, they had an authentic audience, and they witnessed the power of their own voices.*

Dear Bishop's Middle School and Upper School Students,

Every Child deserves to play, to learn, and to grow. But for the 100,000 plus displaced kids in Syrian refugee camps, things like soccer fields and schools are a long way away. Sometimes, being the privileged community we are, we forget about those who aren't as fortunate as ourselves. The kids in Syria have almost nothing; they have lost their houses, their possessions, and in many cases, their families.

Our 7th grade social studies class along with other members in the middle school community, is putting together a fundraising project to help these unfortunate children. We have connected with a Syrian-American woman, **Kinda Hibrawi**, who lives in Irvine. She will be making a trip to a refugee camp in December. Kinda has been working with these kids for a while, providing food, education, and fun! Our class, in an effort to help alongside of her, is creating bracelets that we will sell at middle and upper school lunch. We are using the TOMS idea of a buy one give one program. **If you buy a bracelet, one will also be sent to a child in Syria.** We will give the money we raise and the bracelets to Kinda who will deliver them when she visits the children.

Please help us in an effort to assist these poor kids, who are struggling to even survive. We have so much, and them so little, it's the least you can do to buy a bracelet and donate a little money!

For info please contact Ms. Ahmed.

Thanks!

Sophie and Ms. Ahmed's SS7 class

Figure 1.3 Lulu and Sophie's letter to the school community.

My job is to have my students unpack challenging nonfiction texts on a variety of topics, so I was teaching directly into the Common Core standards in this project. But also, my time with them is too short—our lives are too short—to study content that doesn't matter. I do teach what I value, which is usually what the kids value. There is no reason that advocacy and action on an urgent issue like Syria should be overlooked in favor of reading Chapter 9 in our textbook. That can wait; refugee children can't.

Months after our fund-raiser, we received a message from Kinda that our idea had spread across the country. Carmel Catholic High School in Chicago saw our video campaign, Ask Me About My Bracelet, on the Karam Foundation's Facebook and Twitter accounts. They adopted the idea, generated their own bracelet campaign and fund-raiser, and raised another \$3,000 for Camp Zeitouna. Amazing!

We watched the Carmel video as a class and responded to what we saw on a Padlet (see Figure 1.4), an online collaborative "corkboard" (padlet.com).

Kids are making choices, doing investigative research, sharing their concerns, using their voice for other kids, and watching the seeds of their advocacy and action spread.

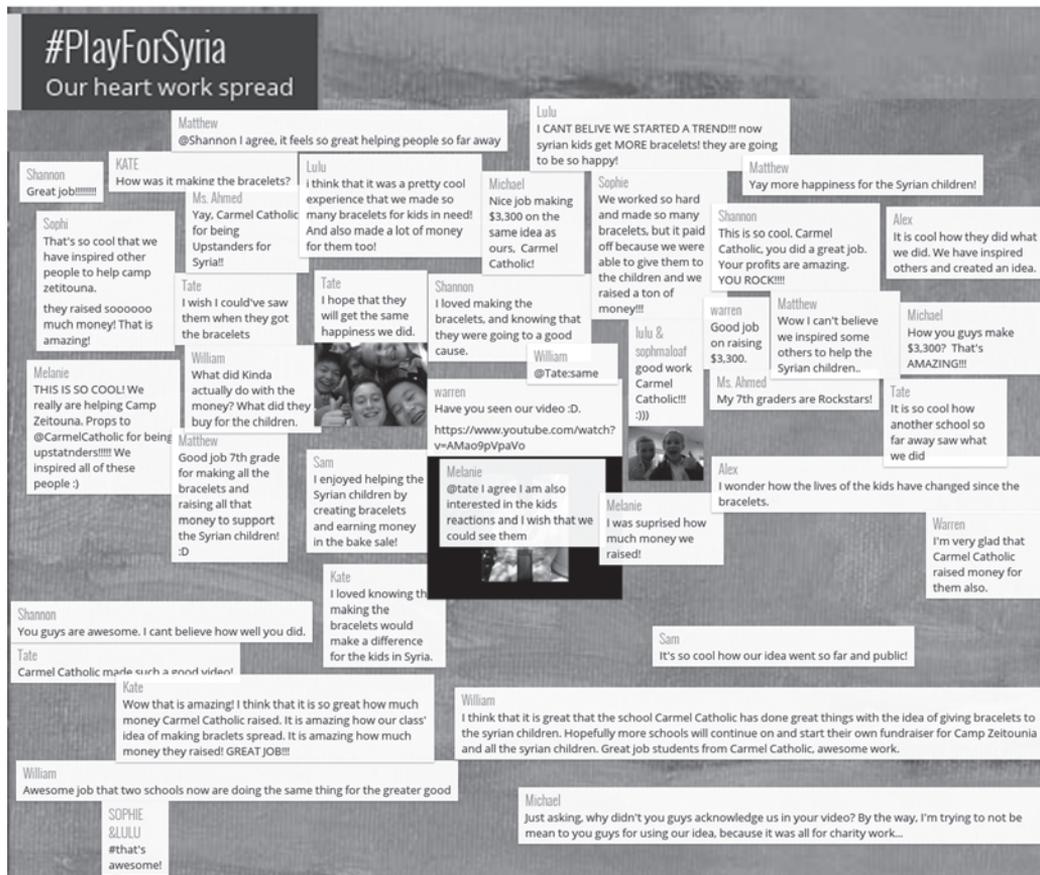


Figure 1.4 Our Padlet filled out before, after, and during the video.

I forwarded the Padlet to my colleague at Carmel Catholic; Figure 1.5 shows her very heartfelt response.

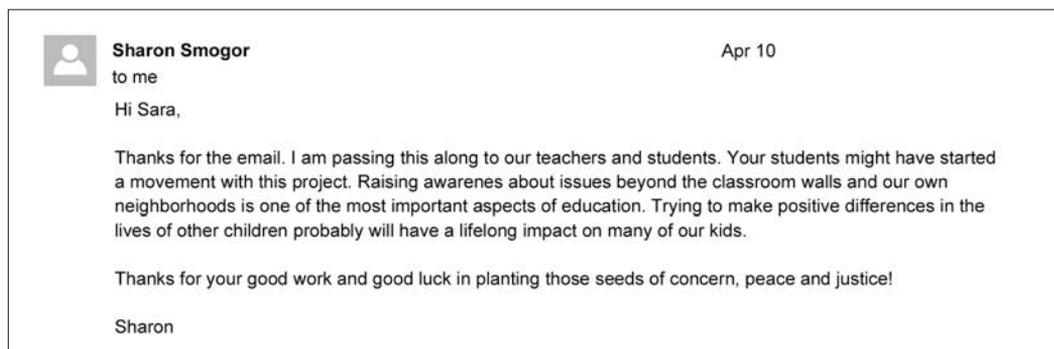


Figure 1.5 Email response from Sharon Smogor at Carmel Catholic.

When I first posted the Padlet with its title, Warren blurted out, “Ms. Ahmed! Ha, I get it! Heart work, hard work, ha-ha, get it, you guys?” Warren was thinking this was a play on words.

“Oh, I didn’t even intentionally do that, Warren. I was genuinely calling it heart work, and I never realized how ‘hard’ and ‘heart’ could be a pun until you said that.”

“Wait, then what do you mean?”

Melanie interjected to help her buddy. “No, she means that this is hard work from our hearts, Warren.”

Spreading the seeds of advocacy and action was a result of creating the space for inquiry work in the classroom. From the very beginning the catalyst was the kids’ wonders, their concern, and compassion. It was their activism, awareness, and aid. It was their readiness to project their voices outside of our classroom walls in order to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. And they were heard, loud and clear.

Introducing Ourselves

We are two teachers, a generation apart in our careers, who have been engaging with adolescents, striving to embody progressive values, and using student-centered, inquiry-based classroom practices for a total of 56 school years. Smokey started teaching in 1969; Sara in 2002. You can do the math to determine which of us accounts for most of those decades.

We didn’t meet until 2009, when Smokey and comprehension researcher Stephanie Harvey came to visit Burley School in Chicago. He started hanging out in Sara’s classroom, getting to know her kids, admiring her skills and her values, and later hosting an annual literacy institute where teachers would come to spend a week with Sara and other

great Burley educators. Sara was featured in several of Smokey’s subsequent books and videos. Along the way, we became good friends, and when Sara took a new teaching job in California, Smokey began visiting her classroom there, and we started talking more seriously about writing this book. We also talked about why in the world Sara would rent a ground-floor apartment in downtown San Diego, where different homeless people would camp out on her porch every night. Smokey is learning to downplay the fatherly advice. Slowly.

We’ll say more about who we are in Chapter 3, when we talk in detail about teacher identity in middle school classrooms. For now, here are some demographics:

SARA: *I was born and raised in the suburbs of Chicago, where my class was the first to attend an early middle school model, and where I made all of my best friends to this day. My teaching journey began in a two-room schoolhouse in the suburbs of Dublin, Ireland, thanks to a great student teaching opportunity offered by the University of Iowa’s School of Education. Next, I made a nine-year stop at Burley School in Chicago. There, a team of mentors took me under their wings and said, “Read this professional text,” “You have to read this novel,” “Try this,” and “Let’s do this together.” Sometimes all at once. And my whole heart fell in love with city kids, coaching them on and off the field. I am a better person and educator for all of it. It was at Burley that Smokey and Steph Harvey walked into my room and lit up my middle school teaching life. It’s not every day the books you read in college come to life.*

I couldn’t take the polar vortex in Chicago anymore, so I headed west to America’s Finest City (San Diego) to explore education in an independent school. I’m feeling like a first-year teacher all over again, but The Bishop’s School is the most welcoming and supportive community I could ever have asked for. Here, I have joined a team of colleagues that works together to do what is right by kids. And I am enjoying the weather, ocean, and mountains as well.

FACING HISTORY AND OURSELVES

There’s one other important influence on my work that I, Sara, should mention here: Facing History and Ourselves (www.facinghistory.org, @facinghistory). Facing History “combats racism with history,” helping secondary teachers and students see history through the eyes of the victims, perpetrators, bystanders, and upstanders. My mentor in this organization, Chuck Meyers, showed me how to view history as the human story. This lens rocked my world, and I’ve seen it give my students the gift of perspective.

The term “Upstander” and the Facing History and Ourselves resources described in this book were developed as part of the Facing History and Ourselves sequence of study. This powerful sequence begins with identity—first individual identity and then group identities with their definitions of membership—and then moves to a case study of the failure of democracy in Germany and the steps leading to the Holocaust as well

as other cases of mass violence in recent history. It ends with examples of responsible participation, urging students to find connections and think about how they can make positive differences in their own worlds.

Facing History reaches more than 90,000 educators and nearly three million students in 150 countries each year via educator workshops, community events, online resources, and a catalogue of lessons. Facing History brings students' empathy to a new level: perspective and wonder lead to critical reading and thinking, awareness, advocacy, and action for those who may not have the opportunity to speak for themselves.

SMOKEY: *Like Sara, I taught in Chicago and fell in love with city kids, so alien to my white-bread Minnesota upbringing. Except that my first year of teaching was 1969. With my kids at Westinghouse and later Lake Forest High Schools, we did inquiries using primary source documents, set up dramatic simulations of mass production lines and lobbyists working members of Congress, and investigated the Soviet Union as a culmination of geographic as well as political features. I've written about twenty books for teachers over the years, and every good idea found in their pages invariably traces back to some great teacher like Sara who let me study and write about her practice. When I moved to New Mexico in 2007, I got back into the classroom with an amazing cohort of sixth graders on Santa Fe's south side. When we did inquiry projects together, my kids investigated questions around climate change, the prospects for our common future, animal extinction, and the use of nuclear weapons in World War II.*

These days, I serve mostly as a guest teacher in other people's schools. Sometimes I do demonstration lessons with kids, sometimes I lead professional development for teachers or coaches, and other times I support whole districts and their leaders. As you might be suspecting, I have the best job in the world.

Sometimes in this book, we will speak in a unified, “we” voice. Like now. Other times, we'll break out under our own names and tell a story or describe a lesson. We'll also be talking to each other along the way. We hope our conversations will give you the flavor of our friendship and the nature of our thinking—and also to show that, for kids or for grown-up teachers, working with a partner is not just sociable and energizing; it can lift up our thinking, too.

With the Syria story above, we wanted to give you a window into Sara's classroom right away, so you can watch how the kids are thinking, the collaborative spirit of the room, and the way our commentary works. It's a quick snapshot of the inquiry classroom: using authentic sources to build curiosity, leading to personal questions, building momentum, and activating emphatic responses. Kids are making choices, doing investigative research, sharing their concerns, using their voice for other kids, and watching the seeds of their advocacy and action spread.

Teaching Middle School Today

There's an old joke among teachers that we gradually assume the characteristics of whatever age group we teach. According to this adage, primary grade teachers tend to be sweet, child-like, gentle, and huggy. (You see where this is going, right?) There are classic stereotypes about middle school teachers, too. But before other people can categorize us, we often label *ourselves* as ADD, impulsive, volatile, and sometimes even hormonal, just like our students.

Of course the stereotypes aren't true about the kids—or us. Mostly. We are simply grown-ups who think that teaching kids from ages ten to fourteen is a unique, demanding, and tremendously satisfying occupation. We enjoy these guys; they crack us up. We teach a distinctive age group that displays the whole range of human development, from cuddly dependence, to narcissism, to total hilarity, to deep questioning, to world-embracing empathy—sometimes all within the same class period. If you love this job, you probably like roller coasters too.

Yet, for all the emotional rewards it offers, this is an especially hard time to be teaching middle school. We feel the pressure of meeting the complex Common Core (or our own state's) standards. We are striving to prepare our kids for the ever-proliferating standardized tests that enforce the standards, rank our students and our school, affect our own performance ratings, and even set our salaries. The kids themselves come to us with more complexity than ever; we see more diversity in our classrooms, more languages spoken, more family income disparities, more diverse experience backgrounds, more exposure to the Internet (and less to books), and more intense attachments to digital pastimes that we don't even understand. Hey, how are we supposed to keep them engaged in the classroom when they have Black Ops and Minecraft at home?

With all these changes and cross-pressures, with all this static in the air, how do we work with young teenagers today? How do we bring out the best in them—and in ourselves, as mentors, models, coaches, and content experts? How do we meet elevated academic goals? And how do we save time for raising citizens, not just consumers, borrowers, spenders, and order-takers?

Maybe we start softly.

Passing Periods

In most middle schools, class periods change with a clanging bell, a mad, jostling rush through the halls, and students hustling to their next desks a millisecond before being marked “tardy.”

In Sara's current school, there are no bells. The kids filter into their next classrooms gradually, over a few leisurely minutes. Students set down their backpacks and take off their shoes, leaving them beside the door. If they have work to turn in, they silently slide it into a box on the teacher's desk. Then, each kid grabs a book or tablet or magazine, finds a comfy spot, and begins a few minutes of independent reading. Though whispered conversation is

not outlawed, the room is mostly quiet. On the whiteboard is a note saying what to bring to the gathering area when the whole group convenes. After eight or ten minutes, Sara gently says, “Meet me at the rug,” and the kids promptly shift across the room, materials in hand, ready to work together.

SMOKEY: *Sara, I was really knocked out when I first experienced a “soft start” in your classroom. It’s something I’d been trying to perfect for years. When I taught sixth grade in Santa Fe, we always started the day by quietly reading the local newspaper (we had class subscriptions; how great was that?). The kids would come in, grab their copy of the New Mexican, and sit somewhere comfortable. We would all read silently at first; all you would hear was the sound of flipping and folding pages. Then we’d gradually shift to casual, out-loud conversations about the hot stories of the day. One kid favorite I remember was a story about a girl in India who had been born with two heads. The baby was being adored as a goddess by the people in her village, but my student Nadia saw it another way: “Two heads, more kissing,” she mused dreamily.*

Anyway, years earlier, when five of us started a new high school in Chicago, the first thing we did was disconnect the bell system so we could have soft starts something like yours. But at first, managing this was hard for the kids (and some of the teachers). How did you establish these routines?

SARA: *On the first day of school, as each group of kids arrives for class, I meet them outside the door. I introduce myself and talk to them about how we enter the room ready to learn. I give them some guidelines: sit anywhere you want, share the space, everyone has to be included, don’t split up by genders. When we come in, we have to get in “the Zone” right away. That means our bodies and minds are focused and ready to take on the day. The same way we get ready before a big game or a performance, our actions show we are ready to be our best selves. The kids know what to do: they walk in; make sure their volume is at a level that isn’t disruptive to others; check for a note on the board; turn in any work that is due; kick off their shoes (literally and figuratively); grab a novel/magazine/map/nonfiction book; and find a cozy, safe place to curl up in and read for five to ten minutes while our minds settle in.*

On that first day, it’s not exactly serene. They do come rushing in, scour the nonfiction shelves, magazine racks, and library, and eventually nestle into their respective spaces. Gradually, they relax into the reading—a few on a couch, others on beanbags, some on the rug. In stocking feet, minds deep into reading, a few moments of solace in a very hurried day.

SMOKEY: *Dumb question, but why the shoes off?*

SARA: *It started out as a rule because I had a brand-new rug and was being militant about not getting mud and grass on it. I just turned into my mom. (Didn’t we all have that living room carpet we weren’t allowed to step on somewhere in our childhood?) After the kids went for about a week in stocking feet, we started to discuss why they loved it. Then I started hearing*

from parents that the hot dinner table conversation at home was my shoeless classroom. It was a hit. A mood setter. Of course, I realized that details like this make the classroom feel like home. This small victory, and about a million other climate-building decisions, sets me up for successful classroom management, by making kids feel safe and comfy.

SMOKEY: *I know that your middle school is departmentalized, so how do you get kids from class to class at Bishop's?*

SARA: *If one class ends at 8:30, the next begins at 8:30. The faculty members trust each other to release kids within a reasonable window. As kids arrive, different teachers have their own guidelines for how to begin their class, and also interventions for any kids who are habitually later than they should be. Soft starts create less of a police action for tardies. No one is standing at the front of the room, itching to teach and playing security guard at the door. The expectation is that learning has already begun through a series of routines and mutually understood practices. These routines can be up to ten minutes long and can begin with simple note on the board; a quiet beginning and autonomy. In my own classroom the same sign is posted near the door all year.*

Come in ready to learn:

Adjust your volume

Turn in your homework

Check for any notes

Relax and read

We talk about this daily routine for the first days of school, so kids know what it takes to create a positive and calm learning environment. It is a peaceful way to begin; no grown-up is shouting directions and no kid is unclear on what to do (which is what so often causes disruption). I can check in with anyone that I need to, and it gives the stragglers time to come in without a big scene.

Most of us have a box designated for each class period, for kids to turn in work. There is a screen that may or may not have a note on it. If it doesn't, they read their independent novels from home or the library, any of our classroom nonfiction, magazines such as Kids Discover or New York Times Upfront, or a particular reading that we will be tackling together as a class later.

After about ten minutes, I quietly shift their direction to our minilesson for the day, asking them to meet me on the rug. Some of them are already there, nose-deep in their novels.

SMOKEY: *Could you do this kind of soft start even if there was a bell system in your school?*

SARA: *Of course! During my eight years at Burley School in Chicago, we had fixed passing periods. But once the kids were in my room, we started softly, with some type of independent reading. I guess my consistent principle has been that "time on task" doesn't have to mean the*

teacher talking from bell to bell. And that a gentle, reflective interval is a good way to get kids centered and ready to learn. They have ownership and agency when they walk through the door and I am not competing to yell over them with directions.

SMOKEY: *A lot of teachers might say, “Wow, that’s a lot of your teaching time to devote to independent reading, every day. Hey, don’t you have any curriculum to cover?”*

SARA: *Ha! I hear that all the time. People ask, in a fifty- to sixty-minute class period, how could I allow the kids to read for ten minutes and not begin “teaching” (read: lecturing). My answer is generally this: time spent with a book and reading is far more valuable than my lecturing could ever be for my kiddos. Growing a lifelong love of reading (or sustaining it) in middle school is crucial for our students. Without it, they will only be exposed to the mandated print of the day (test prep, textbooks, teacher-chosen text) for almost the next decade of their lives. I love what Nancie Atwell said in *The Reading Zone* (2007): “A child sitting in a quiet room with a good book isn’t a flashy or, more significantly, marketable teaching method. It just happens to be the only way anyone ever grew up to become a reader.” I want my kids to be selective and eager text connoisseurs. I want the better part of their sometimes anxiety-filled days to be full of enjoyment, choice, and wonder.*

SMOKEY: *Of course, the research supports your decision. The quantity of free voluntary reading is highly correlated to reading achievement; kids who read lots of self-chosen materials become better, more self-sustaining readers (Krashen 2011). In fact, Richard Allington and Rachel Gabriel (2012) have shown that when kids read books of choice and also talk about them with peers, there is a trifecta of benefits: kids are more engaged in reading, their comprehension improves, and standardized test scores rise. Gotta love that. I also notice a bonus when I visit your classroom—when kids are given a genuine choice of what to read, they often pick materials that are related to content they are studying in class.*

SARA: *Thanks for noticing that. Donalyn Miller (2008) makes it her life’s work to ensure kids are making their own choices in what they read and that they feel validated for those choices. I try and flood the room with as many nonfiction sources as I can to let the kids know that reading does not have to mean textbooks only, but also the thousands of trade books and periodicals that are fun to read. I actually take a lot of my “assigned” readings from these materials. New York Times Upfront, Discovery Kids, Time for Kids, and National Geographic Explorer are all fantastic resources that are designed for kids to grab and dig in. Donalyn writes often of what access to books means, and I am mindful to provide a wide range of reading levels in my classroom in all types of print.*

So, yes, soft starts do some great things for me as a teacher: they help the kids academically and they make classroom management easier for me. But the most important

benefit of soft starts, for me, is this: they grow upstanders. This afternoon Sophie came in red-faced after tennis practice, sprawled out upside down on the couch and declared:

Everyone should start class the way we do . . . so we can all just relax. Then when we are relaxed, we can read for fun. Plus then we read the magazines and get curious about what is going on in the world. And then we want to help like we did for Syria. Like there's bigger things out there, ya know, Ms. Ahmed? It's kind of like, you're looking out for our Common Good, so we have time and want to look out for others' Common Good.

How the Book Works

We wanted this book to begin gently, just like Sara's classes. So we are meeting you here at the door, inviting you to step in, slip off your shoes, get comfortable, and settle in. We have a big agenda for you, but we don't have to rush. There are so many elements in creating a collaborative, inquiry-based, social justice-oriented classroom that getting started can feel overwhelming. So we've begun with one story about young people taking action in the world and one seemingly "small" classroom idea, soft starts, which begins to transform the middle school classroom. Now, piece by piece, we are going to share what we know, and try to make the picture as "3-D" as we can; we want you to see, hear, and feel the everyday contour of middle school kids working hard and doing well.

Upstanders fits loosely under the umbrella of Smokey and Stephanie Harvey's book, *Comprehension and Collaboration: Inquiry Circles in Action* (2009, a new edition comes out in 2015). It is a descendant of that work in that it promotes inquiry-based teaching using small-group investigations, and espouses the explicit teaching of both thinking strategies and social interaction. But the family resemblance remains "loose," because this volume is so profoundly Sara, and so distinctively middle school.

The book has four sections. Here in Part 1, we have been introducing ourselves, giving you a welcome, offering some samples of what's to come, and now, giving directions to help you find the best path through the material we've assembled.

Coming up in Part 2, we discuss the key ingredients of great middle school classrooms: the kids, the teacher, the space, the teaching tools and structures. Here, as elsewhere in the book, we try to balance being highly practical—offering lots of instant takeaways and lesson ideas—and sharing stories, narratives of young adolescents learning together. We believe that story is the mother of all teaching methods, both for kids in the classroom and for teachers in professional books.

Not to shock you, but most kids are not born knowing how to operate within a collaborative community. That's why Part 3 shows the specific lessons we use to develop those social skills, values, and attitudes. You'll see how to lead kids through a stepwise series of specific

(and easily teachable) lessons in identity and empathy. Many of these activities are adapted from Facing History and Ourselves, the international organization which Sara serves as a member of their Teacher Leadership Team.

Part 4 is the longest section. It shows how to gather everything together—a bunch of lively kids, our teaching selves, our purpose-built spaces, the just-right teaching tools, some powerful language, a set of collaborative values, the commitment to community, the kids’ growing self-insight, and their outward-reaching empathy. From all these resources, we co-construct ambitious, engaging, and important inquiry units out of whatever curriculum we are called upon to teach. Here we’ll show you all the steps, stages, and materials—and we’ve parked full-size copies of key handouts on the book’s web page, www.heinemann.com/products/E05359.aspx (click on the Companion Resources tab).



We’ll also try to get behind the “magic” that sometimes seems to produce these units. Great, mind-expanding, world-embracing units do not result from some teacher’s “golden gut” and certainly not from “winging it.” They originate in and are sustained by careful teacher thinking every step of the way. But that doesn’t mean that everything is foreseen and planned out in detail the previous August. For inquiry teachers, there’s always a “skydiving moment” when you decide to jump and cope. Sara calls this process “making game-time decisions,” those in-the-moment choices that inquiry teachers must make every class, almost every minute.

For our curricular examples, we have chosen some of the most widely taught middle school topics: civil rights, immigration, child labor, and health and disease, as well as subjects chosen and developed by the kids themselves. Our own definition of inquiry teaching is this: turning the required curricular topics into questions so fascinating that kids cannot resist investigating them.

In these units you’ll see young adolescents empowered by co-ownership of their own learning. They are engaged, they are curious, they are funny, they are moved. They are invited to wonder and question the world. Their wonders range on the profoundness spectrum from “How do the world’s religions view death?” to “If I sneeze hard enough, will my brains come out of my nose?” They blog about their questions, research, and new knowledge. They create debate and argument about child labor, and they walk among heroes of the civil rights movement. Before they can do any of this, they question their own identity and grapple with the eternal adolescent question: Who am I? We know very well that literature, history, math, science, and the arts can be better understood if you first understand yourself as a learner and a human being. It is from here we begin our journey.

In these units you’ll see young adolescents empowered by co-ownership of their own learning.



The Space

chapter 4

If you want to teach middle school, you must co-own your space. Working along with the kids, you create a new and unique classroom every year. Week after week, you gradually build a highly personalized environment together that optimizes community, support, and learning. The goal is something more like a *family room* than a classroom—with all the metaphors and connotations that word entails.

While there are many healthful room arrangements for young adolescents, you need a gathering area where the whole group can sit up close and personal for minilessons and discussions, and a separate work area with tables or desks where kids can work in small groups or on their own. You need to set up your classroom library, organizing and displaying books, magazines, and other resources. You must figure out how to best give kids access to the technology in the room. Maybe you also set up a couple of small nooks in the corners for quiet reading and reflection. As the year unfolds, the walls gradually fill with the student work and co-created anchor charts. It is almost impossible to undertake this kind of creation if, like most high school and many middle school teachers, you have to share a room with one or more colleagues.

SMOKEY: *In my second year of teaching I had to share a classroom with a somewhat difficult colleague. One day, I hung up a poster in our room during fourth period. Janet tracked me down during fifth and told me to take it down by sixth. This commenced a monthlong series of*

negotiations that I eventually abandoned. It turned out that she liked the walls bare, the room neutral and devoid of personality. The takeaway for me was a long time coming. But years later, when a group of us started a new high school in 1996, one of our founding principles was that all teachers would have their own room, no sharing, so everyone could co-create their unique environments with the kids.

SARA: Setting up a space where the students have ownership and space to think and collaborate takes constant tinkering. It starts with my own work in the summer, before the kids show up, constantly rearranging the furniture, desks, and materials to establish an initial setup that's welcoming, methodical, and accessible. Then, after the first few days of school, the kids become architects of the space as well. We realize that some things don't work; desks are facing awkward directions, supplies are not in the most efficient path. It really is not until students' bodies, backpacks, and countless supplies are in the room that we truly discover how we can function in our environment together. It's a blast living through this process; there is nothing better than a co-created space (see Figures 4.1–4.4).



Figure 4.1 Students working in the classroom.



Figure 4.2 Whole-class minilesson on rug.



Figure 4.3 Students working in beanbags.



Figure 4.4 Students reading on couch/floor.

↑ Sara's Classrooms

While I have actually taught in eight different classrooms, the last two have been the ones where I could most fully develop the space with my students. Here are overhead maps of my rooms at Burley School in Chicago (eight years) and The Bishop's School (three years) in Figure 4.9.

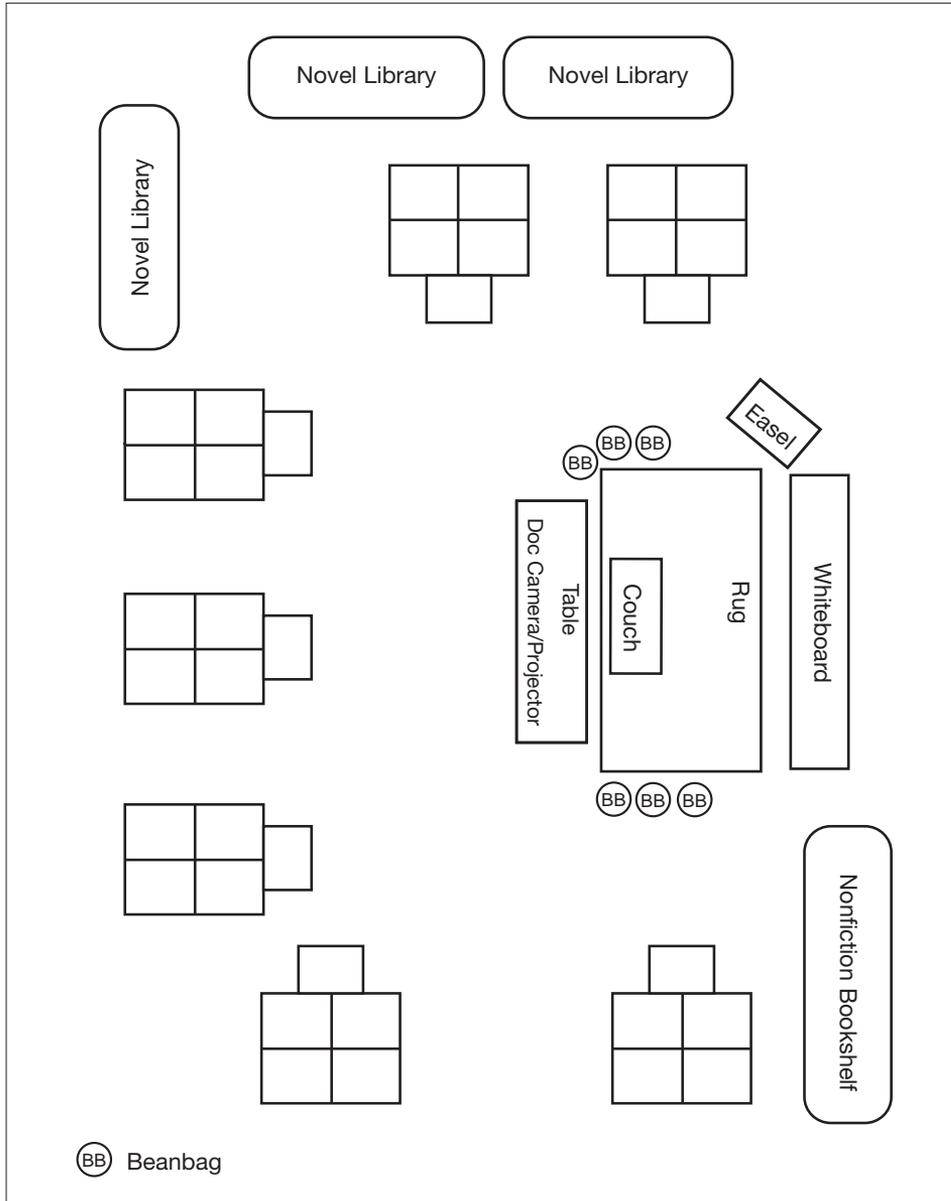


Figure 4.5 Burley classroom map.

BURLEY SCHOOL

My classroom was large and airy, with lots of light. It was the perfect space for thirty-plus seventh or eighth graders who need lots of room to move around. I went through many arrangements at Burley, but this was one of my favorites. It showcased the students on the rug as soon as you walked into the room and gave the kids plenty of space to transition from place to place. In this room you will notice that the projector and doc camera are behind the rug and couch. In some cases this meant that the kids' backs were to me if I was projecting something on the screen. That is fine, as I don't always want to be the focal point of the room. I would often move between a "leading from behind" position to the anchor chart easel by the whiteboard. See Figures 4.5 through 4.8.



Figure 4.6 Cluster of desks with nonfiction library.



Figure 4.7 Presenting from behind; kids on couches, beanbags, and the floor.

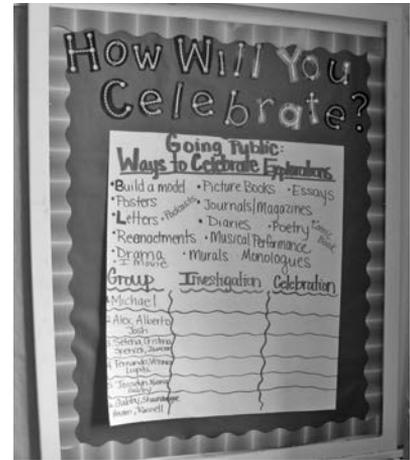


Figure 4.8 Anchor chart on ways to go public.

THE BISHOP'S SCHOOL

At Bishop's most classrooms are small, but I was fortunate enough to be assigned a converted library space the year that I arrived. See Figures 4.9–4.12. You will notice the significantly fewer desks, which just means there was more room for gathering. So I created two rug spaces, one with technology and one just homey, with the standard clusters of desks in between. The kids shift among these three main spaces almost every day; we are always moving. The library is organized in three sections—magazines, nonfiction trade books, and novels.

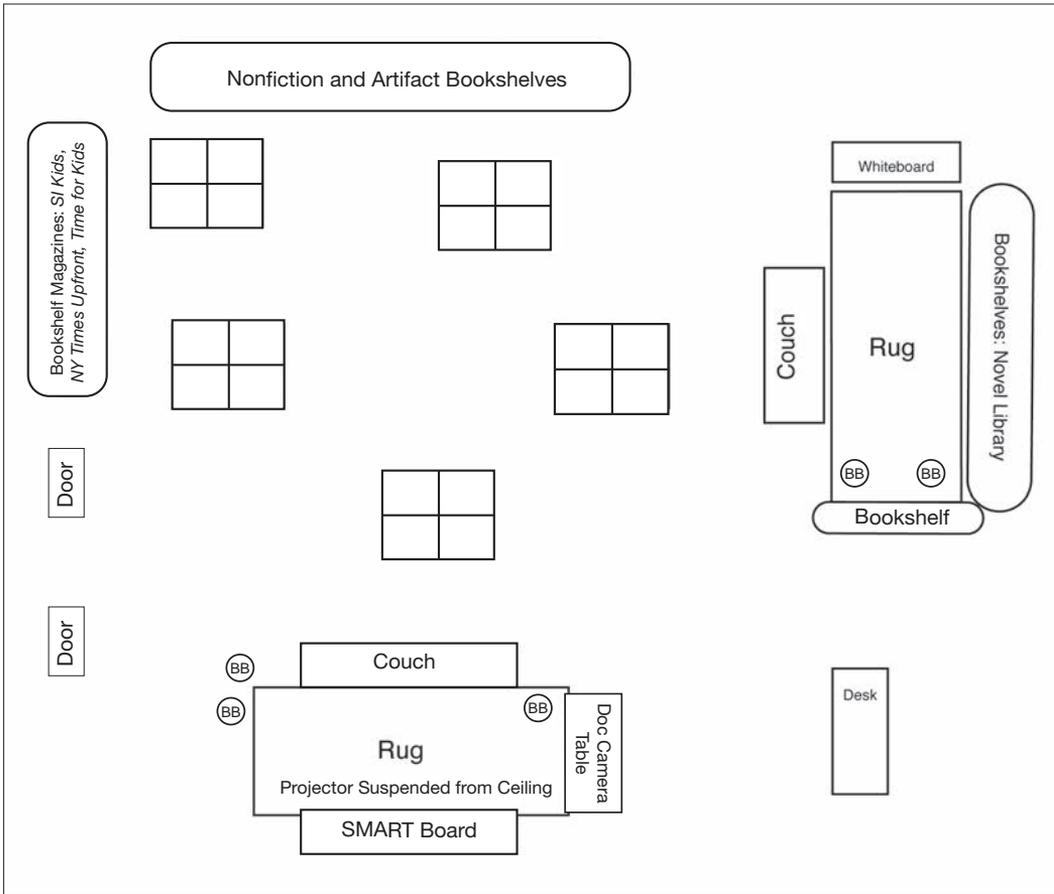


Figure 4.9 Bishop's classroom.



Figure 4.10 A soft start in our reading library.



Figure 4.11 Taking notes on iPads.



Figure 4.12 In small clusters of desks, kids can collaborate easily.

DESKS OR TABLES

Our desks are always clustered in groups of three, four, or five, depending on the size of the class and our goals. (If I had tables, I'd put four kids at each one, and be thankful that the movable chairs make it easy for kids to quickly rearrange into groups of three or five.) No matter what, we never put kids in rows, because we want them to be able to quickly look up and work with one or more partners, depending on the work at hand. Rows insinuate that the teacher is the only audience, the focal point of the room, and the only person who can help or collaborate with kids—and none of this is true. We want kids to be interdependent as well as independent.

Desks are students' own workspace for the time they are with us, and thus need to be thoughtfully arranged. We need to ensure that the desk formation speaks to kids in a way that says they are in charge of their own learning. They are not positioned to face forward and listen to a droning voice at the front of the room. They are positioned to listen, discuss, share, and to have an eye-line to many parts of the room at once. See Figure 4.12.

TEACHER DESK

For a long time, we had a trend in Chicago where we got rid of the teacher desks in our classrooms. They are generally large, cumbersome wood monstrosities that suck all attention toward them. None of us sat at them while we had kids in the room, and we wanted to make space for couches, collaborative tables, rugs, and bookshelves instead.

If we did have a teacher desk, we would hide it in a corner and just use it as storage for filing the endless papers teachers receive. So we are not saying to throw out your desk, but to position it to function best and send the right messages. Just like the students' desks, it should be thoughtfully located to show kids that the room is a space mostly for them.

RUGS

Some people think that rugs are for elementary kids only. So wrong! Yes, even eighth graders sit on a rug, and they love it. My former principal, Barbara Kent, would come around to our rooms in the summer to check in while we were cleaning and arranging, and to also thank us for spending our summer days working to have a welcoming space for the kids when they walked through the door in August. My favorite part about these drop-ins was her question, "What do you see when you first walk in the door?" Read: the rug and library really need to be the focal points of the room. That question was always enough to make us reflect on the setup of the room. Rugs are available at Home Depot, Ikea, business catalogues such as Demco, and on willing parents' floors everywhere. The parents at Burley knew we were always willing to take clean, well-maintained rugs off their hands. If this was not an option, some of us would check college dorm room displays and Craigslist (selectively). Rugs are comfortable during minilessons, independent reading, small-group work, whole-class meetings, and mental breaks! With any functional workspace in the room, there are norms at the rug. We set these up together:

RUG NORMS—OUR BODIES ARE POSITIONED TO:

.....

- turn and talk
- work independently
- participate in the minilesson
- be comfortable
- be in our own space
- learn the best way we can

Maybe you remember from Chapter 1 how the idea for my shoes-off classroom started with trying to preserve a brand-new rug. I'm not saying you should try this, but for me it keeps the classroom clean, and there is something zen about it. The kids are also in favor of it. They literally kick off their shoes the minute they come in the room and grab their books to read. "It feels like home," as Helen puts it.

COUCHES

Couches are also an ingredient in home-like classrooms. They go hand in hand with the rugs. They generally frame the rug area and provide more space for big kids to congregate when they come together. We also used to beg, borrow, and barter for these in our classrooms.

One of my dear friends lived across the street from Burley and when he and his roommates were moving, they generously called and donated a couple of couches. A team of us walked right over, cleaned them, and carried them across the street. They were his mother's old couches and she was thrilled they found a new home! The rug norms also apply to couches. Kids need to be aware of their personal space.

SMOKEY: *Are norms enough? Many middle school people spend their whole lives trying to keep the kids' bodies from touching in any way.*

SARA: *For sure, I have heard so many people question having teenagers "sit this close together" because they can't handle it, or it may be inappropriate. As spring rears its lovely head in middle school, budding romances are bound to blossom. As with anything, we want kids to be vigilant and aware of the fact that the couches are indeed a learning space and not an opportunity to cozy up to someone special.*

ANCHOR CHARTS

One very visible way in which the classroom environment evolves is in the ever-growing collection of co-created anchor charts hanging on the walls. See Figure 4.13. You may think of these tools as more for elementary classrooms, but we think middle school teachers should steal and use this powerful idea more often.

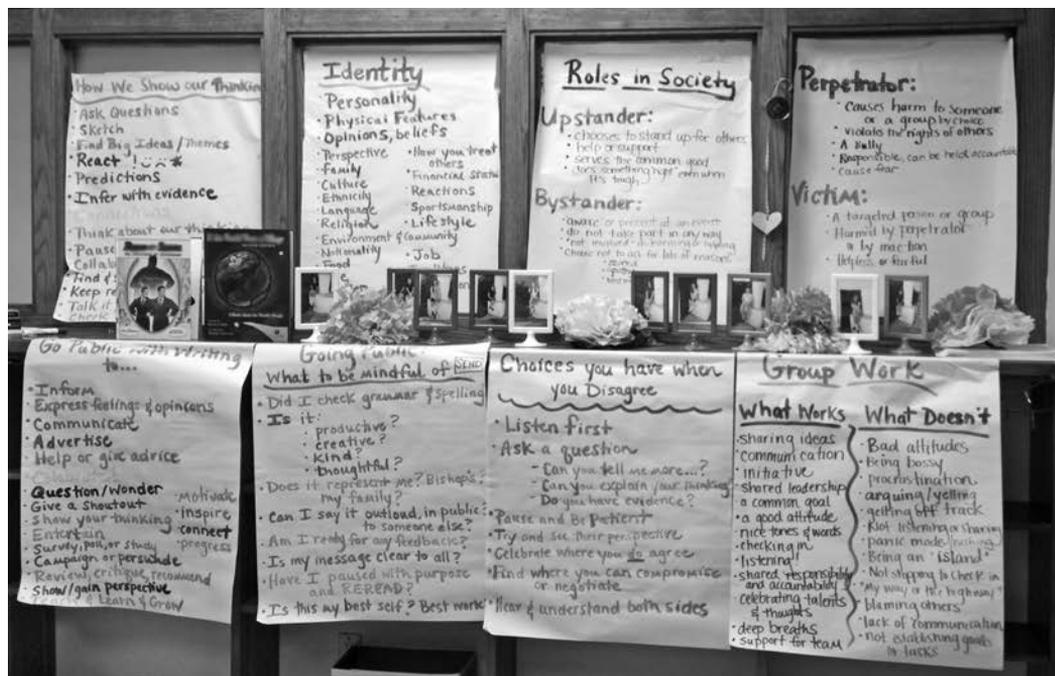


Figure 4.13 Co-created anchor charts from the first weeks of school.

An anchor chart is a list of ideas that we create together with kids, and then save in a visible spot for future reference. As Stephanie Harvey says, “Anchor charts help us connect kids’ past learning to today’s teaching” (Harvey and Daniels 2009). These can be lists of academic procedures or strategies, or ways of addressing community problems in the classroom. Typically, anchor charts get created with the whole group sitting in the gathering area, having a brainstorming session. We put the topic or problem at the top of a piece of chart paper and then invite kids’ input, discuss, and scribe it. Sometimes we are just looking for a single list of points or ideas; other times we’ll set up a two-column chart labeled “advantages/disadvantages” or “looks like/sounds like.” Here are close-ups of a few.

Figure 4.14 is an anchor chart we make at the beginning of the year. We start by thinking about the reasons why sports teams win more games at home than away. Then we take those ideas and turn them into ways of making our classroom our own “home court.” You will see more of this lesson, originally developed by Smokey and Nancy Steineke, in Chapter 6.

The chart in Figure 4.15 gets us ready for an inquiry mind-set. In a short five-minute minilesson, I ask kids who have a little brother or sister at home, and what that sibling’s favorite question is. They all say, *Why?* Everyone has a story. And with this, we begin thinking about our thinking: Why do we ask questions?

With the type of anchor chart shown in Figure 4.16, we don’t gather everyone at once. Instead, the teacher poses a question and leaves the chart on the wall for kids to add comments over a set period of time. When everyone has had a chance to weigh in, the last kid to post brings the chart to the gathering area, and we invite students to discuss what they noticed *other* kids saying.

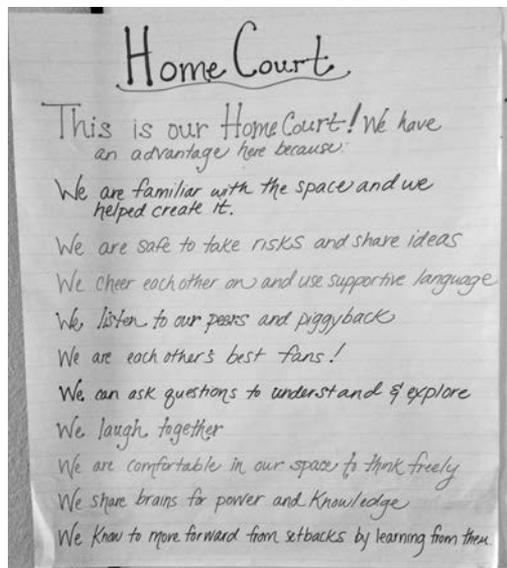


Figure 4.14 “Home Court” anchor chart.

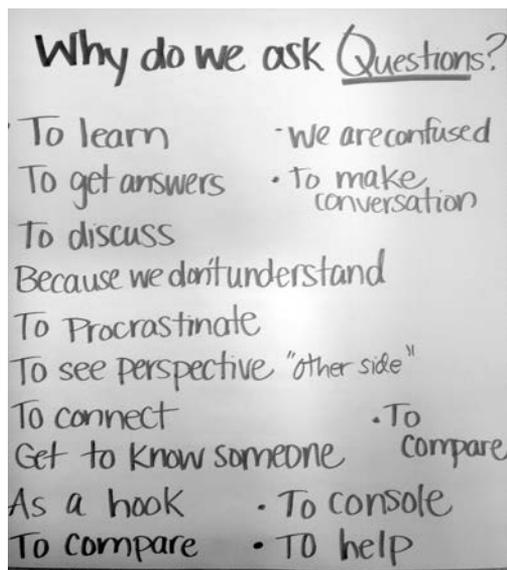


Figure 4.15 “Why do we ask questions?” anchor chart.

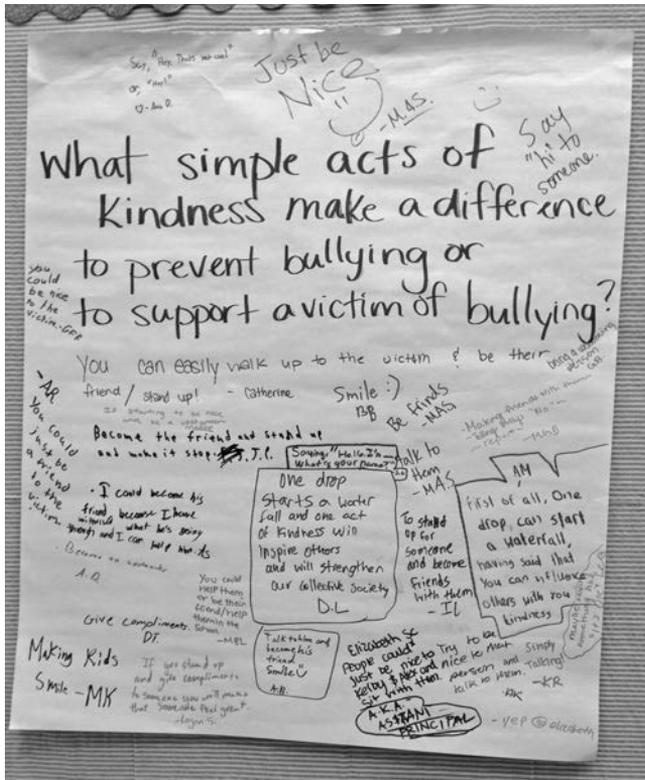


Figure 4.16 “What makes a safe school?” anchor chart.

↑ Classroom Environment Reflection (for You and the Kids)

After the first couple weeks of school, I give my students a quick survey to see if the learning environment is working for their learning style and sense of safety. I can deliver this on paper or electronically via email, SurveyMonkey, or **Edmodo**. Some of the questions I include:

1. What type of space do you need to get schoolwork done?
2. Where do you do your homework at home? Are there resources or conditions there that we could replicate here?
3. What do you like about the way our classroom is set up?
4. Do you have any changes you would make to the room?
5. Do you feel safe in the place where you are? You can tell me on here or see me privately if there is a concern.
6. Can you see yourself in the walls of this room?

This type of survey gives me a good idea where kids are on their environmental needs. Then we have a quick discussion the next day, where I first report the survey results to show them that I honor their learning space. Then we negotiate any helpful changes together.

I don't just ask kids how they think our space is working. I have my own reflection checklist that I use both in my initial setup of the room and again now, when I give the kids the survey. This checklist in Figure 4.17 was adapted from the incredibly thoughtful curriculum team at Burley School, representing primary, intermediate, and middle level classrooms.

Descriptor	Comments
Can your students “see” themselves on the walls/shelves? (photos, writing)	
Is student dialogue represented in the room? (quotes, wonderings, writing)	
Are there areas of peace? (quiet spaces to confer, discuss, work out conflicts)	
Is this a safe space to take risks and ask questions?	
Are materials easily accessible and labeled for students?	
Are there routines as students come in and/or leave the classroom? (homework turn-in, paper handouts)	
Have you established norms/expectations for the classroom space?	
Is there literature (fiction/nonfiction) available for students? (promoting a reading life)	
Are there cozy features in your room? (rugs, lamps/lighting, pillows)	
Have the students co-created the organization of things?	
Do the students have ownership of the room as well?	
Is your own (interesting, reading, active, curious) lifestyle displayed in a thoughtful way?	



Figure 4.17 Checklist for reflecting on classroom environment.

Forget that old advice about how you should dress on the first day of school. Your classroom environment makes a far more powerful first impression on your new kids. (OK, you should wear a nice outfit, too.) Kids notice everything. This is your first opportunity to let them know that this is their space too, and when they are here, they are cordially invited to read, wonder, listen, collaborate, take risks, care, and have fun. Classroom environments should be deliberate and thoughtful. They are mindful of the developmental needs of the kids. If we are all going to be in these spaces for the better part of our day and year, let's make them comfortable and enjoyable for everyone.

Upstanders

Lesson Excerpt from Chapter 6

Lesson 1: Exploring Identity

Coming up in this chapter are six lessons that have been Sara and/or Smokey's go-to community builders, no matter what age level or subject matter we are teaching.

1. Exploring Identity: *The Bear That Wasn't*
2. Empathy/Bullying: *Not My Fault*
3. Risk-Taking: Home Court Advantage
4. Working in Groups: Team Behavior
5. Disagreeing Agreeably: Framing Friendly Challenges
6. Responsibility: Building (and Protecting) Your Brand

The first two are transformational multiday lessons that help grow successful, interdependent, and caring learners for an entire year. They directly address issues of identity, empathy, upstanding, bystanding, and bullying. You will revisit them often throughout the year. The last four are steps toward a collaborative, collegial classroom. They take less class time and are more easily described, but are no less important.

LESSON 1

Exploring Identity *(45 minutes)*

Text: ***The Bear That Wasn't* by Frank Tashlin (1947)**

For an abridged version, please see <https://www.facinghistory.org/for-educators/educator-resources/readings/bear-wasnt>

SARA: *I normally teach this lesson on the first day of school, right after I have led the kids through our first "soft start" (pages 13–17). This experience is adapted from the resources of Facing History and Ourselves and is foundational to working with identity. It's based on a great read-aloud that kids immediately relate to. In the story, a bear wakes up from hibernation and realizes his environment has drastically changed. Trees have been replaced by factories, animals have been replaced by humans. When he goes to explore his new habitat, he deals with a series of confrontations where he questions his own identity because others attach labels to him.*

Group Brainstorming

The kids come in and after we go through the pleasantries of taking off our shoes and enjoying some independent reading, we get down to business. I ask them to bring their new journals over to the rug and I write the word *identity* on chart paper or a whiteboard.

"I am writing a term that is very important to history on the board. Can you write it down with me in your journals, and then just think in your mind for a moment as I write these questions?"

What makes up a person's identity?
What defines your identity?

Hands go up right away, but I ask them to put them down and just think for a moment, in their minds only. If they need to write down their answers first to get their thinking out, they can also do this. I introduce **turn and talk** by saying: "Turn to someone next to you, just say hi, and tell them how you feel about these two questions." Make sure everyone has a buddy to talk to.

I hear an assortment of answers: hair color, it's who you are, identity theft, what you like, personality. So we share out in the big group and come up with a great list and some fruitful discussion. See Figure 6.1.

Arman says, "How you treat others."

I push him to help us understand.

"Arman, can you tell me what you mean by that?"

"Yeah, well, how you treat other people says a lot about who you are. If you are nice, or mean to them."

"Why do you guys think I would be asking you about this word in history class?"

Gavin: I was just wondering that!

Me: Why on earth would I ask about identity—or you—in history class?

Bobby: Well, all of that stuff on the board is our history. We wouldn't be here without history.

Dash: Some of those things are from our parents or grandparents and they are our history. Our ancestors.

Me: What if I said, to really understand history, you have to understand yourself?

Blank stares and confusion . . . and soon, a few "ohhhhs."

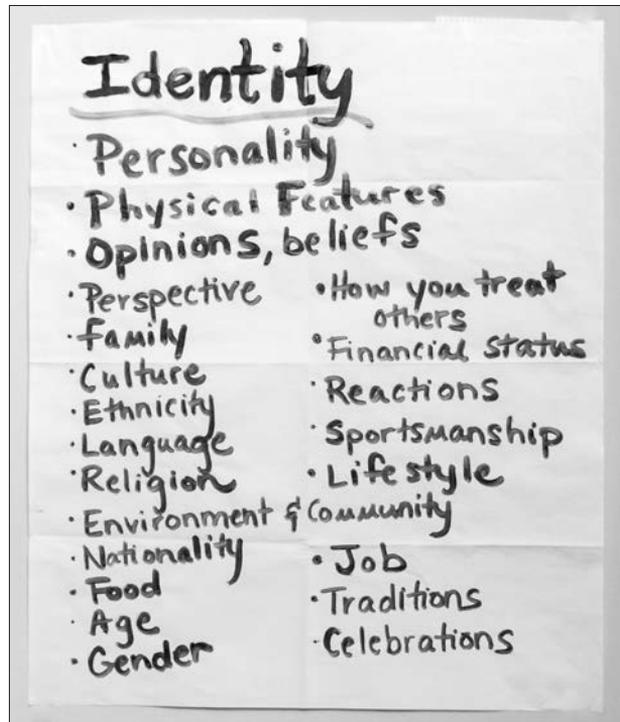


Figure 6.1 This chart stays up all year, and provides a working definition for identity that we add to as we share more experiences together.

"I am wondering if it is easier to understand history if we know how we would treat people, or want to be treated . . . and how we would react to something. Or what role religion or skin color may play in that moment in history. What if it was us in the pages of history we read this year?"

73 < 

"If I haven't totally confused you, **turn and talk** to your buddy about this. Can you see any part of your identity in history? Or if you are confused, talk about how you are both confused?"

I listen in . . .

Sydney tells her partner that since she is a girl, she can vote now because of some women in history and that she can play any sport she wants.

Isabela says that she read *Number the Stars* and the characters who were Jewish, like her, went through things she knows older generations of her family did. Some other kids are still confused and that is OK. It is the first day of school. This is a seed that we will be nurturing all year long.

As I watch the kids talking, I'm getting fired up for the year to come. I gather the class back together: "You guys, the cool thing about identity is that it's not just connected to history either. To understand the way you solve math problems, or science, the way you read and respond to novels or your own writing, or how you play out on the field or court, you really are trying to understand your own identity. The way you see things is because of who you are, the way you think about your own thinking."

64 < 

Identity Webs

"I am going to do my best to use our chart (see Figure 6.1) and make connections to myself." I draw a blank web on the board and write *Ms. Ahmed* in the middle. "Well, I'll start with some easy ones. Family: I am a sister, aunt, daughter, godmother. Gender: I am female. Job: I am a teacher. Nationality/ethnicity: well, that is fun for me because I am American and I was born here, but my parents were both born in India and that is part of my ethnicity and why I have some of the physical features that make me, me." See my web in Figure 6.2.



Figure 6.2 My own identity chart serves as a model that will connect ideas as the kids work independently.

“Can you guys go ahead and try your own web independently? I am going to keep going on mine up here.” This gives anyone who is feeling stuck an opportunity to look at my web and see if it sparks anything for them. They can piggyback off my web to add to their own.

I give them two to three minutes for some independent writing time on their own webs. When they are ready, I have them **turn and talk**, sharing one unique thing (that isn't necessarily obvious) about themselves with a buddy next to them.

Then I bring them back to the whole group.

“3, 2, 1 . . . Thanks. I want to hear from the whole group. Before we share out, I want you to know that this space for us is so, so safe. This is a space where I can share ideas and you can share ideas and we will work really hard to be good listeners to one another. We will talk about this a lot as the year goes on. Is there a brave volunteer who is willing to share something really unique to their identity? Something more than just the color of your shirt?”

A few courageous hands go up. I ask them to say their names as they share, because it is so early in the year and not all the kids know each other.

SMOKEY: *I am interested that you are naming the fact that it takes some courage to put yourself out there, especially on the first day of school.*

SARA: *Calling them brave gives them the permission to own it before they share something that could potentially lead to a vulnerable moment. If I call for a brave volunteer, it is an invitation to take a risk.*

Kids continue to work on their webs, as shown in Figures 6.3 and 6.4:

I am Chinese.

I love to surf.

I have grandparents that came here from Egypt.

I am a twin.

“You are developing some great webs! Can you all do me a favor and circle two of the most important pieces of your identity? The two things that really mean so much to you. That reflect who you are, every day.”

I do the same on my own web on the board for them.

I circle *teacher* and *Chicagoan*.

Read-Aloud

“OK, hold on to those two things for a while. We are going to read a great story together about identity. This is called *The Bear That Wasn't*.”

There is in fact, a bear in the story and he is having a really hard time with his identity because everyone keeps telling him that he is not a bear. He keeps on insisting that he is, but no one believes him.

I begin reading the story aloud. We watch as the bear encounters a foreman, who is convinced that the bear is one of his workers.

The Bear replied, "I don't work here. I'm a Bear."

The Foreman laughed, "That's a fine excuse for a man to keep from doing any work. Saying he's a Bear."

The Bear said, "But, I am a Bear."

The Foreman stopped laughing. He was very mad.

"Don't try to fool me," he said. "You're not a Bear. You're a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat. I'm going to take you to the General Manager."

The General Manager also insisted the Bear was a silly man who needs a shave and wears a fur coat.

The Bear said, "No, you're mistaken. I am a Bear."

The story continues as author Tashlin leads us through the bear's struggle to stand up for himself and declare his bear-ness to all the naysayers who are telling him otherwise. His identity is vulnerable and he must hold strong to who he really is.

As we read through the book, I stop periodically and give the kids time to practice turning and talking with one another and sharing ideas as they fill out their webs for the bear. Some write annotations while I am reading; some wait for the opportunity to turn and talk. As we finish the book, I see their webs are filling up steadily from all the ideas they generated on their own and in pairs.

We do a quick go-around for any words they added to their webs and I jot these quickly on the board, helping any readers/listeners who may have missed something. Next, I pass around a basket of skinny markers. They have all been writing in pencil and I want their new thinking to be in a different color.

One theme of the story is that people are defined both by how they think of themselves and by how others perceive them. I work with kids early on to make this distinction, or at least begin to grapple with and discuss it.

"OK, with your new color, I want you to pay close attention to something. See if there are any words you wrote down that may not be how the bear sees himself, but how others see him. Circle those words.

"I'll start us off with an example. I think some people see him as 'a silly man who wears a fur coat and needs a shave.' He didn't see himself that way, so I would circle that."

The kids all laugh because that is exactly what the foreman and everyone tells him. I flip through the book again, telling kids to simply look at the pictures. This helps to activate their memories as they are working through the different terms with each other. The "picture walk" stimulates kids to recall the story and lift any words they can from the images they see again.

"If you don't already have something other people said about the bear, you might think of something now. Go ahead and add it in this new color as well. So, by the time you are done,

all the words that show how the bear views himself are in pencil and the words that others use to label him are in a color." They talk with their partners and come up with some great terms: *a man, liar, not a bear, factory worker, less than they are.*

Quick Write

"At the beginning of this story we thought about how the bear sees himself. Then we looked at how others viewed him. Why might both those things be important to someone's identity?"

"I am going to ask you to write about this topic for a few minutes. Can you find a space in your journal after the webs and write down your thoughts about this? Why might how others see you affect your identity? Why isn't your identity only how you see yourself? Your notes can be in sentences or bullet points."

I move around and read upside down and over shoulders. I see lots of responses that reflect their developmental stage:

People care about what others think about them.

I know who I am, but sometimes people tell me things and it makes me think.

No matter what people say, you should always have self-confidence and just be yourself.

Identity is in constant question at this age. Kids are asking who they are and who they will be. They are hyperconcerned with the way others view them, and how they see themselves is continually evolving. We want them to work toward recognizing how the choices we make are grounded in our identity.

I don't expect kids to share this personal writing with the whole group, but I do ask them to summarize if they feel comfortable. In some classes the kids shared and in others they did not. I am OK with that because I was observing them as they wrote and checked in with kids who needed a quick conference. Again, I salute them for being brave by doing this kind of thinking and taking the risk to share in front of their peers.

64 

Identity Webs Go Home

"For homework tonight, you are going to continue to examine the Identity chart we just brainstormed together (Figure 6.1). You are going to actually give your parents or any adult you can find some homework. Go home and ask them to list ten things they think of when they describe their own identity. Show them the list we made in class so they have some terms to help them.

"Then have your grown-up circle one or two things that are most important to them. Ask them to either explain to you why and you write it down, or have them write it right in your journal. Be sure to tell them the two pieces of your own identity that you chose to model for them.

"Do you like the idea of giving your family homework?"

Smiles all around.

"Me too; have fun."

This lesson serves as a cornerstone of our year. We revisit this chart, we revise our identity webs, and we refer to the bear when we experience others telling us who we are. I want kids to continue the discussion of identity at home, because I'll explicitly share that theme with parents at our Open House, and it is something we will be working on all year.

This lesson is a great way to help families communicate at home. I often hear parents say, "I have no clue what is going on because when I ask how school is, they just say, 'fine.'" This identity work is one way to open up the lines of communication. In case there is no parent at home, I always offer the option of talking with another adult or teacher around the school, or even an older sibling. Parents always respond to this lesson by thanking me for talking with the kids about their selves and their family roots. I even hear from some parents that their students will not speak their family's first language at home and only want to speak English. I offer my empathy, as I went through this myself as a teenager. So now as an educator, I pledge to keep the home/school connection and dialogue open.

Viewing an Identity Video

We continue our exploration of identity with a powerful TED talk, "The Danger of a Single Story," by the remarkable African writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. (For this resource, see http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.) As Adichie explains, "Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity." Adichie explains how we often assign identity to others: we tell single stories that create stereotypes, which then become the only stories that are told and believed. So much of the work we do with middle schoolers is centered around their complex identities, so they, like the bear, are not reduced to a single story, a simplification, or a stereotype. We want them to examine their identities and own who they are. And we affirm with them that they are the only ones who get to do that.

Students consider their own personal identity webs and also create an identity web for Chimamanda Adichie. Then, they journal about the following questions:

What is the danger of the single story according to Chimamanda Adichie?
According to you?

After journaling and discussion, the kids were motivated to make a video public service announcement as shown in Figure 6.5 about the dangers of a single story, the single story that they feel others have assigned to them, as well as their view of themselves. This was an out-of-class project a small group of students did on their own time. They came up with a storyboard, dialogue, and filmed around school.



Figure 6.5 Screenshots of the seventh graders owning their identity from their single-story PSAs.