

WITH EYES TO SEE



PEACE AND JUSTICE CONCEPT: SCHOOL IN THE COMMUNITY

ideas for
teachers
who want
to
integrate
social
justice
concepts
into what
and how
they teach

February
2004

One of the most widely known songs in this country, from elementary schools to peace rallies, is Woody Guthrie's *This Land is Your Land* (written 1940). With its refrain "This land is your land, this land is my land, from California to the New York island... This land was made for you and me", including the images of wheat fields and golden valleys, the song captures the beauty and inclusiveness of this country. Most versions of *This Land*, however, stop there, leaving out the second half of the song. Verses four through six are:

As I went walking, I saw a sign there,
And on the sign it said "No Trespassing,"
But on the other side it didn't say nothing;
That side was made for you and me.

In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people;
by the relief office I seen my people;
As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking,
Is this land made for you and me?

Nobody living can ever stop me,
As I go walking that freedom highway;
Nobody living can ever make me turn back;
This land was made for you and me.

This school year's theme for *With Eyes to See* is **"Building Community from the Classroom to the World."** The first edition focused on "Community in the Classroom," and the second on "Community in the School." This third edition looks at the "School and the Community," and *This Land is Your Land* can be a great starting point for looking at the community around the school and what needs to be done to make it a better place. Woody Guthrie reminds us of the importance of celebrating each other and our blessings while working to make our community/country better for all (see page two for activity ideas using *This Land is Your Land*).

The following pages give ideas of classroom activities and resources to bring the students into the community, and vice-versa, focusing on activities that can be easily done with most classrooms and in most communities. Don't stop here! Though this newsletter, due to space limitations, does not explore more possibilities for school-community collaboration (parent-teacher associations, parent involvement in classes, school-community partnerships, etc.), creating closer ties between students, parents, and the community makes for a better education, for everyone.

CONCERN AMERICA

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IDEAS: SCHOOL AND THE COMMUNITY

The School and the Community

The first edition of *With Eyes to See* this school year centered around Mara Sapon-Shevin's five characteristics of community in classrooms (paraphrased). The five characteristics, adapted here to reflect this edition, can help guide our work towards building ties between the "School and the Community":

1. SECURITY: a safe place to be oneself
2. OPEN COMMUNICATION: among schools, students, parents, and community members
3. MUTUAL LIKING: opportunities for schools and the community to work together, support each other, leading to mutual respect and understanding
4. SHARED GOALS AND OBJECTIVES: a sense of ownership in the community for "our school," and in the school for "our community"
5. CONNECTEDNESS AND TRUST: students feel part of and trust the greater community, while the community feels part of the school, and trusts the students

"All any kind of music is good for anyway is to make you and me know each other a little better."
Woody Guthrie

"We need more light about each other. Light creates understanding. Understanding creates love, love creates patience, and patience creates Unity."
Malcolm X

This Land is Your Land Activities

- What verses of *This Land is Your Land* do your students know? Is the song sung as part of your school's music program (if there is one!)? What verses are used? If the students and/or song books used at school do not have all six verses, discuss why this might be (to make a shorter song for children? to keep it "positive"? other reasons?).
- After learning/singing the entire song, have the students talk about why they think Woody Guthrie wrote this song. How do they feel after singing it? Does the music match the words? Why has this become one of the most popular songs in this country?
- Looking at their own communities, have the students write their own verses to the song to make it local. Put them together to make a new song, and sing it as a class. What reoccurring themes can be found in the students' lyrics?

The Invisible Members of Our Community

When children are asked who makes up their community, they often say fire fighters, police, teachers, parents, etc. Within a community there are numerous people who often go unnoticed and unappreciated like garbage collectors, grocery store workers, secretaries, custodians, elderly neighbors, and many more. After students brainstorm and make a list of the "invisible" members of their community, have each choose a person to recognize. Each student will create a postcard to honor that person, writing a note on one side and decorating the other. Send the postcards with the students' names and return addresses (using the schools address) to see if they get any responses. Make copies of each postcard before they are sent to decorate the classroom and keep "visible" each person. (adapted from teacher Leah Lambert's "You Scratch My Back...I'll Scratch Yours!" exercise)

Honoring Community Heroes (from *With Eyes to See*, Winter 2002)

An elementary teacher honors local heroes with her students by bringing in "elders" from the community, all of varied ethnicities, to share their culture. Children are able to ask questions and interact with the guests (a Native American man with drums; a Monk with a blessing for the children; a woman in a wheelchair; etc.). The idea is to help the students be less afraid of differences, to learn about others who are in some ways not like themselves, and to learn about the diversity in their community and beyond. As a final part of this unit, all of the elders came together to dine with the children during lunch. (from *Starting Small: Teaching Tolerance in Preschool and Early Grades*, by Teaching Tolerance, www.teachingtolerance.org)

Out Into the Community

6-12

• **Videoring the Good and Bad:** For a homework assignment, have the students make a list of the things they like and dislike in their neighborhoods. Using video cameras, in teams, the students will then film examples in the community to accompany their lists. The students will create a short piece, with narration, to present their views of their community. The final results can be used to encourage class action projects, or to present to school boards, parents, and community councils. (adapted from Gregory Michie's *Holler if You Hear Me: the Education of a Teacher and His Students*)

• **Framing the Neighborhood:** Taking pictures can be great fun, yet it can also be a powerful tool for creating critical thinking skills, making social commentary, exploring community issues, and highlight what goes unseen by others. Begin by looking a books of photographs to talk about who took each picture, the subject, what message is being conveyed, and technical components like framing and composition. Then, depending on one's budget, using disposable (or other) cameras (black and white), the students go out and take practice shots. Through peer critical feedback, students can discuss their photos and what to improve before going out again to take their final shots. Each student will choose their favorite, title it, and write an accompanying narrative. The photos can be put together as an exhibit for other classes, parents, and the community at large. (Good books of photos are *Americanos: Latino Life in the United States*, preface by Edward James Olmos, and *Material World: A Global Family Portrait* by Peter Menzel; for teaching photography, try *I Wanna Take Me a Picture: Teaching Photography and Writing to Children* by Wendy Ewald.) (adapted from teacher Lisa Espinosa's "Framing Pilsen" exercise)

• **Community Mapping:** What services, open spaces, entertainment, etc. exist in your community? While we often focus on the negatives of our communities, there can be many resources that go unnoticed. Have the students make a resource map of the community around the school (if a neighborhood school), or in their neighborhoods (if they come from various communities). Using the phone book, talking to neighbors, and hitting the pavement, students will catalogue the parks, community organizations, public services, and other resources in their area. The maps can be distributed to the rest of the school and sent home to parents/care givers.

• **Community History:** What is the history of the community around the school? Most communities have long-time residents who are treasures of information, and many would love to tell stories about themselves and the area. Together, students can create interview scripts and search out neighbors with whom to talk. Transcripts/summaries of the interviews can be brought together to write a community history, and/or each interview can be part of a narrative history exhibit the students create. The exhibit can be used to educate other students in the school, displayed during school events, and installed in local buildings like the post office, community centers, banks, etc.

"This is the duty of our generation as we enter the twenty-first century -- solidarity with the weak, the persecuted, the lonely, the sick, and those in despair.

It is expressed by the desire to give a noble and humanizing meaning to a community in which all members will define themselves not by their own identity but by that of others."

Elie Wiesel

K-12

Ten Tips for Taking Social Action (from *With Eyes to See*, February 2001)

The above activities may get the students energized to make some changes in their community. The following tips can help them make things happen.

1. Choose a problem.
2. Do your research.
3. Brainstorm possible solutions.
4. Build coalitions of support.
5. Identify your opposition.
6. Advertise.
7. Raise money.
8. Carry out your solution.
9. Evaluate.
10. Don't give up.

(Lewis, Barbara A. *The Kid's Guide to Social Action*. Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing. 1991. 12-13)

RECOMMENDED

"Gardens, scholars say, are the first sign of commitment to a community. When people plant corn they are saying, let's stay here. And by their connection to the land, they are connected to one another."
Anne Raver

"If I can't dance I don't want to be part of your revolution."
Emma Goldman (a paraphrase)

RESOURCES

1. Gardens are an amazing way to bring people together. In communities with vacant lots, they can also transform landscapes into living, hopeful spaces. A wonderful book about a vacant lot turned garden in a diverse neighborhood in Cleveland is great for any class, especially if you are working on community gardens and/or community building in general. **Seed Folks** by Paul Fleischman brings the diverse voices of 13 different people together to tell the story of a garden that transforms their neighborhood. Great for grade three to adults.

2. A beautiful book for talking about Woody Guthrie's *This Land is Your Land* is a book by the same name, illustrated by Kathy Jakobsen. Using the lyrics to *This Land*, the book follows the footsteps of Woody and the images of the song. The book includes a CD with 9 songs performed by Woody and his son Arlo Guthrie, and includes a tribute by Pete Seger.

3. A wonderful musician who combines influences from Mexico (including her indigenous roots) and this country is **Lila Downs**. Her most important release, entitled *La Linea* (The Border), includes many provocative and beautiful songs (most in Spanish) which highlight the lives of immigrants and "unseen" members of our world. For some, Lila Downs is best known for her role as a singer in last year's movie *Frida*.

CONCERN AMERICA

is an international development and refugee aid organization that sends doctors, nurses, engineers, educators, and nutritionists as volunteers to train and empower the materially poor in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guinea, and Mozambique.

In support of these projects, Concern America offers educational services in Orange County which include:

- * The St. Nicholas Project
- * Walk Out of Poverty
- * Infusion Method Workshops for teachers
- * "Training for Transformation" Workshops for adults
- * School and parish consulting for the implementation of the Bishops' Pastoral: "Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions" (June, 1998)
- * Lending library for resources of peace and social justice

Feel free to contact the Education Coordinator at Concern America for more information on any of these projects.

We hope you join us for Concern America's Next WALK OUT OF POVERTY, April 3, 2004. Call Janine or Eli at Concern America to get information, walk packets, posters, flyers, and/or to schedule a presentation for your group. The Walk provides education for the participants and a sense of solidarity with our brothers and sisters around the world, while raising money for Concern America's development work in Latin America and Africa.

Get Political! An excellent way for youth to learn more about community issues, meet neighbors, and experience first hand the electoral process and politics is to volunteer on a political campaign, either for a candidate or an issue on the ballot. Research candidates/issues on the local, state, and national levels, and find one that excites you. You can knock on doors, make calls, and volunteer at a polling place. Connecting with neighbors in this way brings you closer to your community.