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ONE MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

Grades: 9 and up

Time: 45 minutes to several weeks, depending on the detail, research and involvement of the students

Materials: Journals for each student; the “Power of One” PSA from the Earth Communications Office (www.oneearth.org/communications/power.htm) or a different short film that depicts past or current change makers; black/white board & chalk/markers

Relevant Subjects: Social Studies, History, and Language Arts

This activity is most effective when used at the beginning of a series of programs or unit in Humane Education.

1. Ask students to close their eyes and listen as you recite the following guided visualization to them, using your own words and modifying for your students as needed. Allow participants to fully engage in the visualization.

Visualization:

“Take a few deep breaths, allowing your belly and your chest to expand. Now, imagine that you are like an ancient Redwood tree reaching up to the light of the sun...your feet are like the roots of the tree...you’re surrounded by dark, rich soil...your legs and your stomach are like the trunk of the tree...your arms like the branches of the tree, your heart beating like the heart of the tree....Now imagine that your heart is connecting with someone else’s heart in this room...and now, that you are connecting with someone else in the community...and as you look into their eyes, you are also connecting with a mother and her baby on the other side of the world...and as you look into their eyes, you are also connecting with an Asian elephant mother and her baby mud bathing...and as you look into their eyes, you are also connecting with a tree in the Amazon rainforest....As you smell the fresh air, the soft drops of rain on your face and the distant calls of animals, you come home to yourself....”

Gently ask students to bring their attention back to the classroom, and when they are ready, to open their eyes.

2. Ask participants to use their journals to write down their experience of the visualization, using the following questions to guide them along:
Why look beyond self to others, community, and the world? What are the implications?
Then share as a class.

3. Take a tour of the neighborhood. Have students keep in mind that the neighborhood is a microcosm of the world. Explain “microcosm” if necessary. Have them silently contemplate the following as they walk:

- What do you notice?
- What do you notice that indicates that something in the community is working?
- What do you notice that indicates that there may be a problem in the community?

Alternative: This activity can also be conducted by allowing participants to tour their school halls while considering the same questions.

4. Upon your return, ask a volunteer to draw three columns on the board. Have this student write in the first column the class’s response to the question: “What did you notice that indicates that there is a problem in our community or in the world?” Then ask the class to ponder how these problems can be prevented and to suggest solutions to address these problems. Have the volunteer write these responses in the second column. Finally, ask if they believe *they* play a role in resolving these problems, and as a group, have them share specific actions they can take in their daily lives. Have the volunteer write these actions in the third column.

5. Ask students to think about who typically resolves problems in our society. As a group, explore who comes to mind when you hear the word “hero” or “heroine.” Why?

6. Show a video clip of past or current heroines and heroes in action (e.g., Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Cesar Chavez, Alice Walker, Wangari Maathai, Julia Butterfly Hill, Craig Kielburger). The public service announcement “Power of One” is a wonderful tool to use.

7. After the video, ask students whom they look up to & why. What qualities do these people embody? Do these individuals differ from those they selected as heroes before watching the video? If so, how/why?

8. Mention that the values we admire in others are often values that we strive for or already possess. How can all of these values together create a better world?

Extensions:

1. Discuss what happens when we don’t address problems. What are the consequences of witnessing and not acting? Does anything happen to us personally? How do we know?

Discuss commonly cited reactions and emotions for why people may not act: overwhelmed, fearful, lazy, don't know enough, assume someone else will take responsibility, etc.

2. Ask students to select a partner, or pair the students off yourself. Have them share with their partner one way they've made a positive difference to someone else (Note: leave "someone" ambiguous.). Also have them contemplate how they know that they made a difference.

3. Have students explore their talents, skills, and the things that make them unique. Have them share in pairs, encouraging them to push past any discomfort in verbalizing their own strengths and talents.

4. Have students explore a community-based or service learning project tailored around these talents and skills. Students can explore their circles of influence (school, religious community, sports teams, workplaces, study groups, or after school clubs) as part of defining the project's parameters.

Activity by Danielle Hy Dennenberg (M.Ed. Graduate)