

Tools Peace Games

SEEDS OF PEACE STAFF AND EDUCATORS HAVE HAD THE GOOD FORTUNE TO WORK WITH Peace Games, a Boston-based NGO, since the summer of 2007. In February 2008, the director of programs for Peace Games, Steven Brion-Meisels, and his wife and colleague, Linda Brion-Meisels, facilitated a three-day, USAID-supported workshop for Palestinian educators

on “peaceable schools” at the Talitha Qumi School, outside of Bethlehem. In June 2008 Peace Games staff member Casey Corcoran joined the Brion-Meisels duo to facilitate the Model Schools Initiative, which began with a seven day workshop for Palestinian educators in Jenin (again supported by USAID).

Seeds of Peace and Peace Games share a number of important values and goals. Both support the knowledge, skills, relationships and opportunities that children and young people need in order to stay safe and healthy and to contribute to their communities. Education is a tool for transformation. Teachers play a vital role in this transformation. They help shape the quality and success of any classroom. Just like their students, teachers need to be given tools and resources to succeed. Peace Games forms long-term partnerships with schools that touch every part of the community, including the development of school curriculum, staff and volunteer workshops, support and materials, family newsletters and events, and general school climate changes. Below, you will find a sample of Peace Games resources. We hope you find them helpful.

Peace Games & Peacemaking

Working with communities has become a central part of the Peace Games model, but it has not always been this way. Peace Games began as a one-day festival that brought together children from different schools and communities to create and play games with each other.

As successful as this was, the original festival organizers knew that the children who attended the festival lived and learned in a context that was much different than the one they had created together. Peace Games needed to be more than a one-day workshop. It needed to become a consistent part of children’s lives.

In response to this insight, they developed a three-week curriculum for fifth grade students about peacemaking and conflict—but they also knew that this, too, was not enough. They recruited teachers and wrote an 18-lesson curriculum for each grade from kindergarten to eighth grade.

This was better, but the more they taught it, the more they realized that they needed to provide teachers with resources to extend these lessons, to provide families with support for peacemaking at home and to invite community members into the school. And soon, what began as a one-day event became a fully-integrated, whole-school, community-wide approach to peacemaking.

Looking back, it could not be any other way. Peacemaking is a complex and sometimes fragile combination of knowledge, skills, relationships and opportunities.

Like other important life skills, peacemaking must be taught—because it is a remedy to the violence that children learn from the larger society, and because it is critical to the health of our communities in the future. In order to connect our day-to-day activities to

the larger context, Peace Games has articulated the following **principles and foundations** to guide our work with teachers, students, families and communities:

- Peacemaking is more than the prevention of violence; peacemaking promotes fairness, justice and active civic engagement through service.
- Young people must be seen as peacemakers and problem-solvers.
- Violence is institutional as well as interpersonal.
- Since violence is learned, peacemaking can and must be taught as an alternative.
- Peacemaking requires knowledge, skills, and relationships that are developmentally and culturally respectful.
- Because relationships are at the heart of our work, peacemaking requires collaboration within the school and community.
- Peacemaking is active and involves student choice.
- Peacemaking is both a personal and a national responsibility.
- Peacemaking is hard work; peacemaking requires patience, persistence and a sustained commitment.
- Peacemaking is fun.

These principles help Peace Games—and all of us who teach peacemaking—define the context in which our work takes place, the scope of the tasks and the urgency implicit in a culture of violence, the process by which we may find some success, and the motivation to stay engaged in what is difficult but vital and wonderful work.

Peace Games & Seeds of Peace

The work of peacemaking is humbling, but hopeful. After more than a decade of collaboration with urban schools in four communities in the United States,

as well as two years of supporting rural educators in Colombia, Peace Games is grateful to have the opportunity to share what we have learned with educators affiliated with Seeds of Peace—and, unquestionably, to learn from your creativity and courage.

Teachers have much in common, regardless of whether we work an inner-city in the United States, in a small private school in Bethlehem, or in a one-room rural school in the jungles of Colombia.

We all want our students to succeed, but often struggle with how best to help students who come to our classrooms with such vastly differing abilities. We constantly seek more and better resources to help our students learn. And we have much to learn from each other.

As part of our partnership with Seeds of Peace, Peace Games will offer some of what we have learned, understanding that our strategies are not the only ways to support peacemaking. We will listen well and seek your wisdom too. And with your permission, we will share what we learn from you with others.

In this supplement—and the ones that will follow—we will offer you resources in three areas: **cooperative games** that you can use with your students and the adults who support them, **classroom practice** (including tips on creating a participatory environment for your students and practical activities for integrating peacemaking into your lessons), and **personal reflections** that will explore what we have learned from our work together and encourage us to think about what it means to do the work of peacemaking in schools.

We encourage you to experiment with these activities, to talk with each other about your teaching practice, and to challenge or adapt those activities that you think need changing.

Part I: Cooperative Games

Why Games?

Relationships are at the heart of peacemaking. Learning how to develop and sustain supportive relationships in all aspects of our lives allows an individual or a group of people to practice and promote peacemaking more effectively.

However, relationships take time and practice; they are not taught the way mathematical formulas are taught. They are taught through our interactions with each other, through practice. Cooperative games allow us to teach the skills of relationships—communication, trust, problem-solving, empathy and cooperation, among others—in a way that is fun, engaging and real.

Why These Games?

Not all cooperative games are right for every situation. In this edition of *The Teacher's Guide*, we have chosen games that focus on a variety of peacemaking skills, but that also share some other important qualities: these games do not rely on a shared language to be played successfully (although they are not necessarily *silent* games), they have limited physical contact between participants (but still allow for group interaction), and they are appropriate for a wide range of ages (from upper elementary school through adults).

Debriefing Games

Although the games in *The Teacher's Guide* do not require fluency in a com-

mon language, it is important to find a way for the group to share their experiences of playing the games together.

Debriefing games or reflecting on the experience in some way is essential to helping students understand the meaning of the game and apply these skills in their own lives. A game is most successful when players are able to make a connection between the game and their own life experience.

If players do share a language, engaging them in a short discussion about the game is the easiest way to debrief. Conversations invite a self-awareness that extends beyond the game and into everyday interactions—and they can be good gateways to more in-depth explorations about peacemaking and conflict.

To debrief a game, start with these three simple questions:

- **WHAT?** Questions that help players think about **what** they learned.

Examples: *What happened during the game? How did it make you feel? What was hard about this game? What was easy? What did you like or dislike about the game?*

- **SO WHAT?** Questions that help participants think about **why** they played the game.

Examples: *So what does this teach us? Why would we play this game? Why is it important to practice teambuilding, communication, or inclusion?*

- **NOW WHAT?** Questions that help players to think about **how** the game **applies** to our lives in their communities and the world.

Examples: *How can you use what you learned in real life? What did you learn about yourself and your fellow players? How can we use these skills in other situations?*

In groups that do not share a common language, debriefing is more difficult (and bound to be less in-depth).

Regardless, spending a moment “taking the pulse” of the group is important. Use non-verbal ways to assess participants’ experience with the game. Some ways include the following:

- **Five Fingers.** Hold up one to five fingers based on your experience of the game: One finger means the game was not good or was difficult and five means it was very good. All the numbers in between represent intermediate experiences of the game.

- **Thumbs Up, Down or Flat.** Hold thumbs up if the game was positive, down if it was difficult, or to the side if it was mixed.

- **Four Corners.** Put signs in four (or more/fewer) areas of the classroom. On the signs, put symbols that reflect a person’s potential reactions to the game like faces with different emotions, or plus (+) & minus (-) symbols, or weather symbols (sun, clouds or storm).

Human Bingo

Purpose: to learn names; to find qualities that friends share	Group Size: 10-25
Skills: investigation, communication, appreciating diversity, identifying similarities and differences	Space: small- to medium-sized room, with some open space in which to mingle
Ages: 8 & up	Supplies: Bingo sheets, pens or pencils

DIRECTIONS Before beginning this activity, give everyone a “Human Bingo” Sheet (see sample on page 13). In each box will be a characteristic or description of something a person possesses. Examples include, “can sing,” “has a brother,” or “has the same birthday month as me.” Once everyone has a Bingo Sheet, people should mingle with each other and try to fill up their entire sheet with sig-

natures of people who match the different boxes. There is one rule, though—no one may sign more than one box on any person’s sheet.

Once a player has filled their sheet, tell them to find a seat and wait for the rest of the group to finish or until time runs out.

When everyone has their sheets completed, bring the group together to share some things that people have learned about each other.

VARIATION Use a different kind of “Human Bingo” sheet. On this sheet, each box should have a sentence stem that people can complete. For example: “My favorite food is _____,” or “I was born in _____.” Have people mingle and then choose a question on another person’s sheet to answer. After they have had a short conversation with each other, they sign each other’s sheets.

HINT Human Bingo is an excellent activity to begin a workshop, while participants are trickling in. It does not require everyone to be present to start and it can last as long as needed.

HINT Create a new Bingo sheet that responds to the needs, interests or shared goals of the group. Use the template on the next page to start.

Human Bingo (continued)

DIRECTIONS Find a person who matches a description from one of the boxes below. Have that person sign your Bingo Sheet on the appropriate box's line. Each person can only sign one box per sheet. Try to find a person who matches the description in each box. Note that the "Free" box is automatically signed—no one has to sign it. It's a gift to get the game started.

B	I	N	G	O
Can SWIM _____	Likes POTATO CHIPS _____	Eats VEGETABLES _____	Plays SPORTS _____	Has a DOG _____
Has TRAVELED to another COUNTRY _____	Has a SISTER _____	Is a MIDDLE CHILD _____	Has FAMILY member BORN in another COUNTRY _____	Likes CHOCOLATE _____
Can WHISTLE _____	Has a PET other than a CAT or DOG _____	FREE	Can ride a BIKE _____	Has the same BIRTHDAY MONTH as you _____
Likes FLOWERS _____	Likes to DRAW _____	Can READ _____	Runs FAST _____	Likes ICE CREAM _____
Does their HOMEWORK _____	Likes MATH _____	Has the same favorite COLOR as you _____	Has the same EYE COLOR as you _____	Has a BROTHER _____

Silent Line Up

HINT This game is particularly useful for transitions, either before or after other games, since it requires participants to work in silence and at the end, the group—hopefully—is lined up and ready to move on to the next activity.

Purpose: to complete a task collaboratively using non-verbal communication	Group Size: 10-25
Skills: communication, problem solving, cooperation, leadership	Space: a large space with room to move around and make a long, straight line
Ages: 9 & up	Supplies: none

DIRECTIONS Tell participants that they are going to line up, but that they will need to do so in a particular order. The first time the group tries it, challenge participants to line up in order of their birth dates (month and day). One end of the line should be marked Jan. 1 and the other end Dec. 31. In order to make the game more challenging, have people line up in silence. If successful, future line-ups could be based on topics like shoe size, height, number of brothers and sisters, and years in school.

Hula Hoop Balance

Purpose: to work together to complete a task	Group Size: 10-25, broken into small groups of 5-6
Skills: cooperation, coordination, problem solving, leadership, communication, gross motor movement	Space: enough space to form several small circles
Ages: 8 & up	Supplies: enough Hula Hoops for each small group

DIRECTIONS In this game, small groups work together to lower a Hula Hoop (a meter-wide round tube)—or an alternative material—to the ground. Before splitting into groups, demonstrate how the game will work. Ask for enough volunteers to form a small circle (four or five people). Have

them stand in a close circle and tell them to put both hands in front of their face like they are pointing at something straight ahead of them (so that their index fingers will be horizontal).

Make sure everyone’s hands are level and then rest a Hula Hoop on their fingers so that the hoop is sitting steadily on their fingers at approximately eye-level. Explain that the group must lower the Hula Hoop to the ground, but they must make sure that *everyone’s fingers are touching the Hula Hoop at all times*.

Ask if there are any questions, then split the rest of the group into teams and have everyone begin. Have “monitors” to walk around the groups checking to make sure that each player’s fingers are touching the hoop. If a finger is not touching the hoop, tell the group to begin again. After a group has completed the task successfully, have them try it a second time without talking.

HINT If you do not have a hula hoop, try anything long enough and sturdy enough for a group to gather around. For example, a length of wood, like a measuring yard-stick, or a rolled-up piece of posterboard.

Cup & String Game

Purpose: to work together to complete a task	Group Size: teams of 2-4 people
Skills: cooperation, problem solving, negotiation, coordination, self-control, communication	Space: tabletop space for multiple teams
Ages: 8 & up	Supplies: six paper or plastic cups per team, medium-sized rubber bands, spool of string or twine

DIRECTIONS Before playing, prepare enough rubber band tools for the group. Split the group into teams; plan for four players per tool and one for each string. (Depending on the number of people in the whole group, it is also possible for pairs to play together or to use four players with an observer or two.)

This game is easier to demonstrate than to explain, so use four volunteers and invite the rest of the group to gather around the group to watch. Place six cups and the rubber band tool on the table—or floor space—in the middle of the volunteers. Give each volunteer one string and explain that they must use the tool to stack the cups into a tower. Have the group try to move one cup, and point out how each member of the group must adjust the tension they place on the string in order for it to work effectively. After the group moves one cup, have them stop. Explain that each group will first try to stack the cups into a tower before being given additional challenges. Ask if there are

questions. If not, space groups evenly around the room and distribute supplies. Rotate around each group observing different strategies and giving new challenges, when appropriate.

VARIATIONS Each group will finish at a different pace. Be prepared to have additional challenges ready. It is also possible to spread the variations out over time, so that each time a group plays they will have a new challenge.

- Some variations include the following:
- Stack cups in a tower.
 - Stack cups in a pyramid: three on bottom, two in the middle, one on top.
 - Have the group create a unique structure, then recreate it using the rubber band tool.
 - Stack cups without talking.
 - Stack cups with one or more players blindfolded.
 - Stack cups with all players blindfolded, guided verbally by observers standing behind them.

Each variation will have its own unique challenges and will require a different set of skills. Make sure to call attention to these differences during the debrief.

HINT Make the rubber band “tools” before playing. Cut four arm-length pieces of string and tie them to a rubber band, spaced evenly. See photo:



Part 2: Classroom Practice

There are multiple paths to peacemaking, and teachers are incredibly inventive when it comes to adapting their lessons to incorporate peacemaking themes. Regardless of the activity, it is important to create a structure in the classroom that encourages safe risk-taking and discourages blame or judgment. Conversations may get heated and lead to name-calling. A game may lead to an inadvertent nudge that can escalate quickly. In classrooms where structures and resources vary so widely, it is important to have a system in place to respond when a student misbehaves. However, in a climate where peacemaking is being taught in addition to academics, it is important to consider how this system reinforces our core principles and pedagogy.

Using Peaceable Discipline

The Peace Games approach to classroom management and discipline shares much with the work done by educators like Ruth Charney and the Responsive Classroom group.¹ Keeping a classroom safe and teaching children to be ethical and caring adults are both critical and connected goals. If we want to promote peacemaking, we must make our discipline procedures reflect this priority to the extent that we can.

Here are a few key principles:

1. **Peaceful discipline is educational rather than punitive.** It seeks to teach children how to develop peacemaking skills that will help them avoid behavioral problems in the future. Discipline is sometimes necessary—as a way to teach children about the consequences of their behavior. But punishment *alone* is not effective.

2. **Peaceful discipline is respectful, and it does not shame children.** Too often, discipline strategies isolate and shame students—whether by design or by accident. We all get angry and we are all capable of hurting others, in our words as well as our actions. However, the goal of peaceful discipline is to reduce these outcomes, especially to reduce the ways in which adults publicly belittle or shame children since there is solid research indicating that shame breeds more violence than it controls. Peaceful discipline models respect rather than violence.

3. **Peaceful discipline understands the roots of misbehavior.** Many children act out for one of *four motivations*: revenge, power, attention

or avoidance of failure. All of these are natural, human motivations. They do not make children evil, abnormal or any different from adults! Understanding these motivations can help “normalize” misbehavior. Understanding misbehavior as a natural part of development, and as an opportunity to teach, can reduce your own anger and improve your capacity to teach peacemaking through discipline.

4. **Peaceful discipline is democratic.** Effective discipline requires the cooperation of children. In the short term, a loud adult voice and a serious punishment can control children, but these strategies will not create long-term, sustainable self-control. It is useful to share responsibility with children for a well-functioning group—and this means sharing responsibility for discipline. It is also important to share power with children. Sharing power to create and change rules, in consultation and collaboration with the adults who lead the group, is one way to strengthen self-discipline, improve mutual respect and teach peacemaking.

5. **Peaceful discipline builds community.** The goal of peaceful discipline is to strengthen the sense of community in our group, classroom or program. Preventive discipline measures help to create and protect a safe community for all involved. Discipline strategies that are rooted in restorative justice practices help to re-connect individual children to the community. In this approach, misbehavior or hurtful actions (like teasing, fighting or stealing) violate the community’s health as well as its rules—and the goal of discipline procedures is to heal the community by re-connecting the violator to the community. Communities that care about their members are healthy, safe, and peaceful—and they support the development of peacemaking skills.

6. **Peaceful discipline is preventive.** Prevention is the key to effective discipline. If we only react or respond to behavior problems, we find ourselves chasing after safety rather than promoting it.

Prevention First

Here are a few simple preventive measures can help promote peaceful discipline.

• **Expectations should be clear,** but they should also be developed *with*

children rather than for them.

• **Guidelines and expectations should be posted** in the classroom so that they are visible, and are reviewed frequently – just like any other peacemaking or academic skill you want to teach.

• **It is useful to teach and model the kinds of behavior you want to see from children**—before the behavioral problems arise. You can do this through role play or by exploring examples of positive, peaceful actions: What can we do when we are angry? How can we share materials? What do I expect you to do when I give the quiet signal?

• **Rituals and routines help.** Create a quiet signal. Designate a space in the room where students can go to separate themselves from the group or cool down. This is sometimes called a “Time Out Space” or “Quiet Space.” Practice key phrases you will use to signal the need to change behavior. Create rituals or systems that allow a child to re-join the group after a behavioral problem.

• **Provide ways for students (and for you) to save face.** Especially as students approach adolescence, they are keen to avoid losing face (being shamed) in front of their peers. They may escalate a confrontation or dig in their heels in order to save face. Name this as a natural part of conflict, and create a strategy that helps everyone save face.

• **Create activities that are likely to succeed.** Children act out or misbehave for several reasons, as we said above; one of the most powerful reasons is to avoid failure. Peaceful discipline is supported if you create activities that are likely to be enjoyable and successful, decreasing students’ fear of failure.

The Activities

The activities included in this supplement are designed to integrate peacemaking themes into literacy and the visual arts. They are a small sample of the many ways that using reading, writing and creative expression can be a means to explore what it means to practice peacemaking and to be a peacemaker.

¹ Charney, 2002; see www.responsive-classroom.org for more information.

Friendship Chain

HINT Encourage students to use complete sentences. One sentence is enough, but it is good practice to do more. Give them a template or sentence stem if they need help.

Purpose: LITERACY	Group Size: 10-15
Skills: appreciation, communication (written and verbal), cooperation	Space: a large space with room to move around and make a long, straight line
Grades: K-2	Supplies: construction paper, scissors, stapler or tape

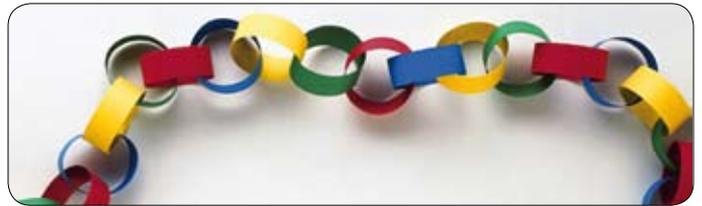
BEFORE YOU TEACH • Cut up the pieces of construction paper into lengthwise-strips about 2-3 inches wide. Make sure that there is a variety of brightly colored strips, enough for about three or four per student (and the teacher, too!).
 • If you have some students who may need help with writing, consider creating a series of sentence stems that they can respond to: “_____ is my friend. Together, we _____” or “_____ is my friend. We both _____.”

CONTEXT Friends usually have things in common—games they like to play, foods they like to eat, other friends—but each friend is unique. This activity can be preceded by a conversation about friends and friendship in which students share some of the things that they like to do with their friends and some of the things they have in common with their friends (For example: we both like to color, we ride the same school bus, our favorite food is pizza.)

INSTRUCTIONS 1. Pass out 3-4 strips of construction paper to each student.
 2. Explain that on each strip, students should write the name of a friend (either in the group or outside of school) and one thing that they like to do together. For example, a strip might look like this:

John. I like to color with John.

- If students finish before the rest of the group and they want to make a friendship strip for another friend, encourage them to do so. Don't forget to make your own friendship strip to share!
- After each student has finished at least one strip, bring the group together. Explain that each person will have a chance to share what they wrote and that together we are going to create a long Friendship Chain.
- Begin by reading the sentence you wrote. When you have finished, show the group how to tape the ends of their strip together so that it makes a circle.
- Have each student read their sentences aloud. When they finish, help them to tape their strips in a way that they interlock with each other, so that they make one long chain:



- When the chain is finished, decide on a public place to display it—either in the classroom or in the school.

HINT If students are reluctant to read aloud, offer to help them—or have them choose another person in the class to read for them.

Helping Hands

Purpose: VISUAL ARTS	Group Size: 10-15
Skills: communication (written), cooperation, engagement	Supplies: construction paper, scissors, markers, roll of butcher block paper—or large poster-sized paper (optional)
Grades: K-2	

BEFORE YOU TEACH • Make enough pre-cut “helping hands” for the class. Do this by tracing both of your hands on a piece of construction paper. Make hands in lots of different colors (but only use colors on which markers will show up well).

- Think about the different ways that we can help each other—in class, at home, in our neighborhood. Make a short list to help you remember.
- Talk with teachers, parents, or other staff members to identify some ways that children have been helpful in your school or program.
- Prepare one sample hand that you can show the group: a colorful cut-out hand that has written on it one way that you have helped someone.

INSTRUCTIONS 1. Explain to the children that you are going to make a large mural about the ways that people are *helpers*, and that you are going to use hands to share how we help each other.

2. Sit in a circle or around a table and ask your students: Who has seen someone help another person in our school or community? What did the helper do? How did this make the community more peaceful?
3. As students volunteer ideas, write what they say on a pre-cut hand. Keep each sentence short so that people will be able to read them from a distance.
4. After a few examples, distribute hands to each student. Some may need help with their ideas or with spelling, but circulate around the room (or find an older student to help you) to ask each student about ways that they have been a helper. Use different colors of paper to make the mural bright and warm. If you like, you can start a rainbow pattern (violet on one end, red on the other).
5. As students finish, have them come up and add their “helping hands” to the mural. Choose a space on a blank wall and place a piece of paper in the middle of it that says “OUR HELPING HANDS.” Tape students’ hands around the edge. Ask students to show you where they want to

HINT Make sure that the mural space is large enough to add more hands over the course of a week or month—or even the school year. Keep extra cut-out hands close so that anyone can add a new one whenever they see an example of a helping hand.

put their work.
6. Share the mural with others in the school or community by hanging it in a place that is prominent and visible. Ask the students for ideas about a place where others will see it and will be encouraged to be helpers.

VARIATIONS Have students trace and cut out their own hands. This may be done in advance of the rest of the lesson, possibly during another lesson or in spare time. This gets them more involved in the activity, but requires more supervision.

Appreciation Cards

Purpose: LITERACY	Group Size: any
Skills: appreciation, communication (written and verbal), conflict resolution decision making	Space: a large space with room to move around and make a long, straight line
Grades: K-2	Supplies: blank paper crayons and markers (other crafts material optional)

BEFORE YOU TEACH • Make a sample Appreciation Card—or have a community helper or peacemaker in mind, so that you can make a card with students.

- This activity will be more effective if you can link it to a concrete example of showing appreciation for someone. One way to do this is to read a book about appreciation. Another way is to invite a Community Helper or Peacemaker from the school to talk about what they do to make it a more peaceful community. (Some good, and often overlooked, community helpers are people like custodians, cooks, letter carriers, or even a dentist. Draw on who you know and what you know about what they do for their community.)

INSTRUCTIONS 1. If you are reading a book or having a guest speaker, explain why. One good way to frame the conversation is to talk about how people are a part of a community and the things that each of us do to make our communities more peaceful places.

2. Ask students to think about a peacemaker they know or someone who helps their community be more peaceful. Gather some suggestions and write them on the board or a piece of newspaper.

3. Pass out paper or card templates and crayons or mark-

HINT It is also okay to tell students that they are making cards for someone “just because.” Think of someone who could use a card and tell students why, so they can write something specific and sincere. Remember: details make the difference.

ers. Circulate around the room to ask students about the peacemaker they have chosen and why before sitting with some students to make your own card.

4. When you have finished, circulate some more and notice the details that students include in their cards. Encourage them to be specific and add as many details as they can. What does their peacemaker *do* that makes them a peacemaker?

5. If students have made cards for a specific peacemaker in your community, collect the cards and make a plan for distributing them to those peacemakers. If they have made cards for people that they know, tell them to remember to give them out.

VARIATIONS • Create a reflection on the exercise of appreciations, either as a group discussion or in writing. When the students gave their card to their peacemaker, how did it feel? What was the peacemaker’s reaction, if they saw it? Who are some other overlooked helpers in our community? Why are they overlooked?

- Develop “appreciation rituals” in your group. As part of a community meeting, encourage students to share appreciations for each other—and encourage specificity and details about why she/he appreciates someone else. Another alternative is to have a “compliments box” where students can write anonymous thanks or appreciations for each other. Choose some to read each week. Remember that the best way to teach appreciation is to model it well.

“I Am From” Poems

HINT If you have written your own poem, share what it was like to write it and think about your own “culture.”

Purpose: LITERACY	Group Size: 5-20
Skills: communication (written), creativity, self-expression	Space: a large space with room to move around and make a long, straight line
Grades: 6-8	Supplies: blank paper for each person and pens or pencils

BEFORE YOU TEACH • “I Am From” poems are a good way to connect to activities or themes related to identity or culture, not to mention a good introduction to poetry writing. Poetry can seem intimidating to read or write, but these are simple while still leaving room for ample free expression and creativity.

- Write your own “I Am From” poem. It’s a good idea to write *with* your students—so don’t be afraid of writing more than one poem! It’s also helpful to have an idea of what you are asking students to do.
- Think about what you already know about your students. This activity is a chance for them to share more with you and with each other, but it may be helpful to them for you to help them jog their memories. What do you know about their families, their cultures? What from your traditions can you share to help them get their minds going?

INSTRUCTIONS 1. Explain that each person in the group comes from a unique culture. Culture can mean a lot of different things, from the place where they or their parents were born, to the languages they speak at home, to the kinds of traditions they keep.

2. Tell students that they are going to start to explore culture in more detail by thinking about our own cultures by writing “I Am From” poems.

3. Copy the “I Am From” template on a piece of newsprint or a white board. Explain that these poems have a simple

refrain—“I am from...”—which is followed by short lists of 3-4 words, phrases, or descriptions from their own lives.

4. Encourage students to use descriptive language and be as illustrative as possible in their poems.
5. Ask if students have any questions and then begin writing. Don’t forget to write *with* the students.
6. When the group has finished, invite people to share their work. Make sure to appreciate and thank each person who shares.

VARIATIONS When students have finished and shared their poems, invite them to create a visual representation of what they have written. It can be an illustration of some of the experiences, foods, or family members—or it can be a collage that represents themselves. With students’ permission, display the poems and the illustrations together.

“I Am From” Poems

To help us access the sometimes ambiguous and complex concept of our own cultures, think about how we respond to the experiences that helped to shape us. For each stanza, list words, phrases or descriptions that respond to the category in parentheses.

- I am from ... (sounds, sights, and smells from childhood)
- I am from ... (familiar foods or meals from growing up, especially associated with holidays)
- I am from ... (familiar verbal expressions, in any language)
- I am from ... names of family, friends, ancestors, legacy)
- I am (name).

Part 3: Reflections On Listening and Peacemaking

“Where, after all, do human rights begin? In small places, close to home, so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world ... Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.”
— Eleanor Roosevelt

Why does listening matter?

The wise voice of Eleanor Roosevelt, an American feminist leader and wife of US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, reminds us of an important part of our peacemaking work: Like other human rights, peace and justice begin close to home—in our families and friendships, on our playgrounds and schools. She echoes the wisdom of another

oft-forgotten voice: the Swiss biologist turned psychologist Jean Piaget, who wrote that children learn their sense of justice from each other. How do these ideas shape our work as teachers and citizens?

Peace Games has worked in many schools over the past 15 years. In most instances, those who invite us in do so because they are worried or angry or under pressure to “reduce the violence.”

In our hurry to fix things, we often forget to stop and listen. The Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh writes: “We often say ‘Don’t just stand there, do something.’ I say, ‘Don’t just do something, stand there.’”

Listening is the first step in peacemaking

We learn this by watching young children, who ache to have someone who will listen to them: not pretend to listen, not listen while we do something else, but just listen. To them and just them. Children have important things to say, but adult lives are so busy that those important ideas often get lost or trampled or pushed aside.

In fact, as we suggest earlier, children often act up because we have not listened; their behavior communicates a human need for attention or power or avoidance or even revenge.

We also learn this by watching adults—especially those who have been mistreated or marginalized. They have learned how to listen, in part because their survival depends on it. And we in power have learned to speak: to give direction or guidance or command, to be sure the “Other” knows what we think is right.

Adults need someone who will listen as well.

Without it, they too will act up in ways that are often mutually destructive.

To listen does not mean to do nothing. Listening is an important act—the first act. To listen does not mean to agree. With children, as with adults and communities, peacemaking involves listening to multiple perspectives, taking them in as deeply as we can, considering them before we judge them, and then deciding on our own course of action.

The skills involved in listening start young, but we can—and must—carry them along with us our whole lives.

How can we listen well?

How can we listen to children in our classrooms and schools? Here are a few simple ideas.

1. Make time to listen. Make time each week (at least) when your classroom can come together in community. There are many structures to help this happen, and a good structure is important if we are to keep these times safe, inclusive, and democratic.¹ We can also make time in the small moments of the school day to listen: walking to and from lunch, getting our students in the morning and sending them off as they leave in the afternoon.

2. Listen in different forms. We can listen through words or pictures. Invite young children to draw their worlds.

Invite older students to write to you in a journal.

Give writing prompts that encourage sharing and reflection, that ask questions which have no easy answer. Instead of asking, “Where was your mother born?” we might ask “What do you love most about your parents and what makes you mad at them?”²

¹ For more information and resources, see the work of Ruth Charney and Responsive Classroom: www.responsiveclassroom.org.

² These are just some of the simplest ways to do this and incorporate an ethos of listening into our work on a day-to-day basis. For more structured activities, see the activities in this and upcoming editions of *The Teacher’s Guide* from Peace Games.

3. Listen actively. One of the core skills of peacemaking involves what is called active listening, which involves eye contact, affirming what you have heard, feeding back the information you receive, listening more than you speak and, importantly, withholding judgment.³

4. Listen without judging ... at least not right away! This is a particularly difficult one for those of us who care about our values—especially when we are adults working with children.

We are eager to try to fix things that we are often too quick to judge.

We can and should be slow to judge even when we disagree—especially when we disagree.

Sometimes the space that this action allows makes all the difference in resolving a conflict, or healing a wound, or forging a friendship.

5. Keep the loop alive. Sometimes children don’t realize that we are actually listening—because they are too stressed, too busy, or too distracted. The listening loop involves letting the other person know that we have heard, that we are taking it in, and that we care enough to be in relationship—even when staying in relationship is challenging.

From the personal to the international

Fortunately, more and more individuals and institutions are focused on the skills of active listening and on its role in promoting peace with justice. It is impossible to begin cataloguing these efforts now.

However, we can pause for a few snapshots.

• In the classroom, teachers make time for a morning meeting or circle conversations. Teachers protect this time from the ravages of testing and schedules, and their students respond not only with appreciation but also with cooperation.

• In the school, principals create educational approaches to discipline that involve listening.

These might involve a structure where students can reflect on their own behavior as part of the process of resolving conflict.

Principals support programs like peer mediation and restorative justice circles—both of which encourage young people to work democratically with each other to resolve conflicts with their peers before things escalate and try to heal hurts that have been done by individuals.

• In communities, neighbors use restorative justice practices when the community norms have been violated or harm

³ Richard Cohen, *Students Resolving Conflicts: Peer Mediation in Schools* (Glenview, Ill: Scott Foresman, 1995).

has been done.

In many US cities, restorative justice circles have begun to replace legal courts as a way to deal with crime; these strategies not only restore the community, but they also build the community’s capacity to prevent future crime. Hidden behind the horrors of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia were imams and priests, village leaders and housewives who led creative and powerful justice projects that helped prevent and heal violence.⁴

• Across national boundaries, citizens use listening practices to create bridges where violence chasms have formed.

Our colleague Meenakshi Chhabra reports on many examples from her work in Pakistan and India, as do Seeds of Peace staff members and Seeds themselves.

In the Middle East, young people do this work through Seeds of Peace and other community programs.

Educators do this work when they teach in their classrooms.

Civic leaders do this work when they seek reconciliation rather than continued escalation.

Families do this work when they come together to mourn the loss of their children to the violence, to listen with open hearts, and to forge bonds that help with personal as well as ethnic reconciliation.⁵

So we come “back home” again: to families and friendships. This work is local and modest. As Mother Theresa wrote, “There are no great things... only small things with great love.”

At Peace Games, and at Seeds of Peace, our deep belief is that a compassionate ethic works in classrooms and in life. We must begin by listening.

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If you are interested in learning more about other organizations with similar missions, IPCRI has a useful resource page: www.ipcri.org.

⁴ Glen Stassen (Ed.) *Just Peacemaking: Transforming Initiatives for Justice and Peace* (Westminster: John Knox, 1992).

⁵ For more information, see the Parents Circle-Family Forum (PCFF), featured in the documentary “Encounter Point.” Learn more at www.theparentcircle.org.