Activities

Too Nice

By

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Journaling Prompts

Boundaries

When has being too nice or too mean or too anything felt uncomfortable? Describe one of those times including some of the following:

- Where did it take place?
- Who was there?
- What happened?
- How it made you feel?

After sharing the writing, ask students to write about at least one thing that could have been done differently if the situation happened today.

Seek Wisdom

Telling her grandfather how she felt helped Amy. Sometimes we gain wisdom about a situation by writing it down and then speaking it. Hearing ourselves tell our own story helps us understand them better. We can be more open to thinking of a solution after we've laid it out so someone else can understand what we're feeling or what we experienced.

- Think about times you faced challenges.
- List as many as you can think of and then chose one.
- Write the story from a neutral point of view, referring to yourself by your name or as "she" or "he."
- Write it again from the point of view of someone else who was there.
- Share and discuss how a shift in point of view can add to our insight.

Metaphors

Metaphors enrich writing and can serve as a means of self-discovery.

- What was a central metaphor in *Too Nice*? (The fence for good boundaries representing being just-right-nice and the open gate for a weak boundary, being too nice.)
- Ask students to think of metaphors that would help us understand how they are in the world (I am the sun, shining light into dark places. I am a hurricane that leaves a mess in its wake).
- Consider a metaphor for their family, for their relationship about school or siblings. (Watch out—siblings can be explosive, depending on age!)

Practice

Amy practiced being more assertive with her grandfather.

- Brainstorm things that you do better when you practice.

- Write them down.
- Write other things that help you reach goals, or do a thing better (practice, good mentor or teacher, a great attitude...)
- Which of those things could you schedule this week? Today?

Writing Craft
Details help the reader see what's going on. They make the story more interesting for the reader to read and easier for the writer to write. What details do you remember from *Too Nice*?

Detail Through Action and Description
Use the list of feelings gleaned from the Feelings Quilt activity below to ask students to act out a feeling so we can guess what it might be. For example, someone acting as Amy when she ended up cleaning the lunchrooms all by herself could take the behavior she might display right from the text; "While she worked, her mouth was a hard, straight line…." Do we know from the description how she was feeling?

After each student has the group guess his or her feeling, ask the entire group to write down the behaviors that caused us to believe the feeling. Those behaviors that we can see are details that support strong writing. Readers have come to expect good writers to "*show, don't tell.*" Details help the writer fulfill that promise.

Change
An important ingredient of any story is change. The protagonist, the person the story's about, should be different because of the events that take place in the story. That doesn't mean other characters can't stretch too! Describe who changed and how in *Too Nice*.

Creative Writing Springboard
Use the Feelings Quilt described below. Have each student take one of the similes that describe one of the feelings or have the whole class take the same feeling. Students write the story of how the character came to have those feelings, or how a character got rid of those feelings.

Integrate Art and Writing Craft: Create a feelings quilt
1. Read about how rotten Amy felt when she ended up sitting all alone on the school bus on page 18: "…Amy felt as rotten as a moldy peach at the bottom of a fruit bin..."
2. Discuss other feelings they noted in the book like confusion, pride and the happiness of having a friend.
3. Ask for other kinds of feelings and list them on the board.
4. Ask each student to accept one of the feelings listed and work on a simile to show what the feeling is so that we can see it, so it can be illustrated
5. As a group, decide ahead of time whether the squares should be created horizontally or vertically.
6. Each illustrates their feeling using glue and paper scraps on an 8 1/2 by 11" paper.
7. Write the simile on the page in marker.
8. Hole-punch quilt "squares" and connect with 2-inch lengths of yarn. For a longer lasting quilt, slip squares in plastic page protectors before hole punching.

Poetry
Write a poem about one of the emotions, using concrete images that we can see.

Example: “I hope that I could make a machine/that if you want something to happen/you just press a button/that has the picture/and you say the thing that you want to happen/and it happens.” Hope poem by Oumou, age six.

Marge Pellegrino's writing for children of all ages includes the books *My Grandma's the Mayor* and *I Don't Have an Uncle Phil Anymore* from Magination Press. With more than 100 published articles in regional and national magazines and in anthologies including Cup of Comfort for Women, she facilitates workshops for school, agency and community organizations including the Tucson Writers Project, ArtsReach working with Native Americans, KARE agency for children raised by grandparents, and the Hopi Foundation’s Owl and Panther: Writing from the Darkness program working with torture survivors and their children. She is on the artist roster of the Arizona Commission on the Arts. The teacher resource she co-wrote with Joan Daniels, *The Folded Spiral in the Classroom*, is available online at Exceptional Student Store. You can contact Marge at margepellegrino.com.