



Friendly Reminders!

This newsletter is late. It's technically on time as a November/December publication, but it's late. Our jam-packed fall training schedule was borderline overwhelming, but life begins its return to normalcy now.



We hope that's also true for you and your civil rights team. The beginning of the school year is a hectic time, but by now your team is probably settling in. As you settle in, then, here are a few friendly reminders about civil rights team activities and projects:

1. Don't forget our series of five expectations for all civil rights teams.
2. Keep in mind our guiding question for 2011-2012: *How is this increasing safety RIGHT HERE in our school?*
3. Keep me in the loop! Communicate with me so that I know what's going on.

That's all! Here's what you can expect in this month's newsletter:

Team Spotlight: Teams getting it together for Mix It Up at Lunch Day 2011 and the power of a 4 x 5 inch card.

Activity Ideas: More from the "Reporting Bias" workshop and how MYAN can help you do more.

Talking to Myself: I just read *Dear Bully*. Here's what both halves of me think.

Pop Culture Winners and Losers: The fall training schedule has prevented me from accessing much pop culture lately, but here's some news on what's on tv.

Relevant Resources: Three great resources from our fall trainings.

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This newsletter is written and distributed by the Civil Rights Team Project, a state-wide program under the auspices of the Maine Office of the Attorney General. The mission of the Civil Rights Team Project is to increase the safety of high school, middle school and elementary school students and to reduce the incidence of bias-motivated harassment and violence in schools.

Bill Schneider—Attorney General
Debi Lettre—Civil Rights Project Administrator
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Team Spotlight:



Schools Mixing It Up 2011

I had the great privilege of getting out to four schools in October to promote Mix It Up at Lunch Day on October 18. The civil rights teams at Glenburn School, Mount Jefferson Junior High School, Strong Elementary School, and Warsaw Middle School were active in organizing and promoting Mix It Up at Lunch Day in their schools. I visited their schools to support them in their work.



All four schools report that Mix It Up Day 2011 was a great success! I asked each of the civil rights team advisors for some highlights of the event...

“We got none of the negative response that we had two years ago. All of the tables were actively engaged in talking... One student asked me if we could do it again next week! Feedback from classrooms was very positive...I honestly think this will become an annual event here in Glenburn.”

-Glenburn School CRT Advisor Val Rich

“It went excellent!!!! All students participated and I received positive feedback from staff and students. A couple of staff participated and at the end of the lunch students asked if all staff would also mix it up with the students next month when we do it again. (We will be doing it monthly throughout the year).”

-Mount Jefferson Junior High School CRT Advisor Marie Hope

“The highlight for me was the aspect that students were all positive about the event, and in their reflections they were able to make the connections from the event to tolerance. Students embraced the event. They really seemed to enjoy the civility that came with eating and talking with a mixed up group of people. There were lots of smiles, and students really making the effort to start conversations with kids from a variety of social groups. Many students asked me if we could do this again.”

-Strong Elementary School CRT Advisor Crystal Knapp Polk



“What was the highlight of Mix It Up Day 2011? Everybody talking and communicating. Meeting new people. Teachers eating with students.”

-Warsaw Middle School CRT Advisor Donna Chale

The students on these civil rights teams and their advisors deserve a lot of credit; it's not easy to put something together so early in the school year. But what a great way to get things started!

Here are a few quick observations on what helps create success with a Mix It Up event:

1. Get some publicity for the event early.
2. Make sure students understand why they are doing it. This is really important.
3. Get adults to show their support. The easiest and most obvious way is to have them participate. This shows that the event is important.
4. Make it fun. Celebrate it.
5. Do it once and it will be easier the next time. And there's no rule that says that Mix It Up at Lunch Day has to be on October 18, or that it can only happen once a year!
6. Collaborate with me! This was my first experiment in having this official event sign-up process. I'm delighted with the results. Expect an opportunity to have me visit your school next fall to support your team's efforts to mix it up.

Job well done to all four of these schools and any other schools who participate in Mix It Up at Lunch Day!

You can get information on this event at: www.tolerance.org/mix-it-up/

And here is some student publicity for the event in Glenburn (left) and Strong (right):





The Mt. Ararat High School civil rights team has done a simple and brilliant thing: they printed cards featuring the school's harassment policy and reporting protocols. The cards are approximately the size of those ultra-annoying subscription cards that fall out of every magazine you've ever tried to read and are printed on thick-stock paper.

They are absolutely wonderful. Here's what I love about them:

1. The cards prominently feature the words "Mt. Ararat High School Civil Rights Team." This not only helps readers know that the school has a team, but also what they're about.
2. The cards include the statement of principle from the Board of Directors' harassment policy. This shows that the bias behaviors the civil rights team is so concerned about are potentially in violation of board policies. It gives the issue some weight and credence. It also offers people the opportunity to see that the school has a harassment policy.
3. The cards outline the four step process the school has for dealing with bias-based harassment. This encourages student reporting. It informs them of the process and communicates that the school truly cares.
4. There are clear statements indicating that harassment in school is not acceptable. As obvious as that might seem, our students need to hear this over and over again. Do they?
5. The size of this card makes it easy to hand out. The civil rights team handed them out to parents at an open house event.

This simple project simultaneously increases the team's profile in the school *and* addresses important civil rights issues. Bravo to the Mt. Ararat High School civil rights teams and advisors Lexine Mainwaring and Meredith Cass!

Now... why not do something like this with your team? You could include information about the civil rights team, your school/district harassment policy, reporting protocols, and anything else worth sharing. It's a great publicity and education tool.





Activity Ideas: Extension Opportunities

Reporting Bias in Our Schools

The Unseen, Unheard, and Unspoken



In looking at the feedback forms for our middle level/high school trainings, I feel that some students may have left our “Reporting Bias” workshop with an incomplete message. Many students said that they learned how important it is to report incidents of bias to a caring adult.

OK... but I don't buy it. I think that every single middle level and high school student who attends our trainings knows about the importance of reporting bias in our schools. (And in fact, every year when we do scenarios, the reporting option is always offered as a potential problem solver.)

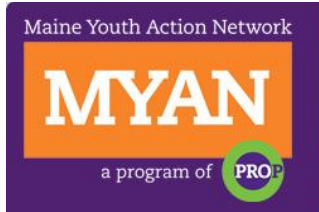
The “Reporting Bias” workshop was not intended to be a rallying cry for reporting. It was meant to be a conversation starter, in three parts:

1. We all know that reporting is really important...
2. So why isn't it happening?
3. And what can we do about it?

In reading through some of the feedback, it seems that some students got stuck on #1 and never advanced to the more important parts of the workshop, #2 and #3. Here are some follow-up questions you can ask of your team that will further the work we did on this important issue at the fall trainings...

Agree or Disagree Activity:

(Students should agree or disagree with the following statements about schools and reporting bias. There are five different gradation choices for agreeing or disagreeing with these statements. Recommended ways to ask these questions include: (1) a paper



(This isn't necessarily an activity, but it's a golden opportunity to help your civil rights team with an activity.)

If your civil rights team is planning some sort of event, you can get help from the Maine Youth Action Network in the planning and execution of this event. Our friends at MYAN are all about empowering youth, and they are offering 24 free trainings designed to help students make a difference in their communities. *They can help your civil rights be more effective.*

Get an idea of what your civil rights team wants to do this year and submit a proposal for a free training. MYAN covers the whole state, and these trainings are free! Do it!

For more information, visit: www.myan.org/?trainings



Talking to Myself: *Dear Bully* Review

Megan Granger from Blue Hill Consolidated School was nice enough to inform me about a new young adult book on the hot topic of bullying. The book *Dear Bully* was co-edited by Maine author Carrie Jones and features 70 contributors.

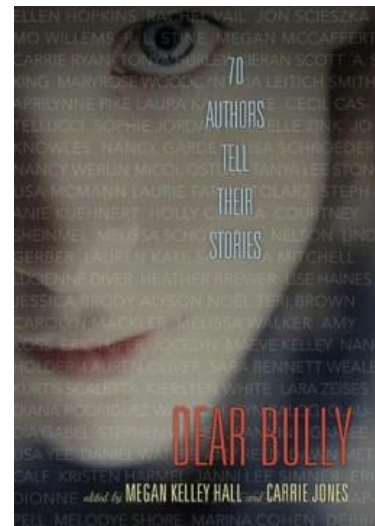
(Special Note: Carrie's story "If Mean Froze" is *really* good.)

So how is it? I've read it cover to cover and have mixed feelings about it. Seems like the perfect opportunity to talk to myself! Characters include Positive Brandon and Skeptical Brandon... both of whom agree that this trend of putting half-faces on young adult books is out of hand.

Ahem. Here we go...

Positive Brandon: This book would make a great resource for civil rights teams!

Skeptical Brandon: I'm not so sure about that...





THE TORCH (CRTP NEWSLETTER) NOV/DEC '11

Positive Brandon: Why not? Look at the format! It's a collection of short pieces from 70 different young adult authors. It is written for young adults by experts.

Skeptical Brandon: True... but I'm looking through the names of these 70 authors, and I've only heard of five of them. Keep in mind that I was an eighth grade literature teacher for almost a decade. Where are the big name authors?

Positive Brandon: They don't need to be big names. Kids don't care about your credentials. They care about your *stories*. And there are 70 stories here, all about bullying, told by adults who still remember what happened from childhood.

Skeptical Brandon: Well let's talk about the fact that these are written from an adult perspective. I don't think that's a good thing. Kids hear adults weighing in on these issues all the time. They don't necessarily care what a bunch of adults have to say.

Positive Brandon: But the adult perspective is really valuable. It shows how people always remember the stuff that happens to them in childhood. There are numerous stories that highlight how some targets never really forgive their tormenters, even years later in adulthood. Perhaps even more important are the stories that bystanders tell, where years later, they still feel guilty about what they didn't do. This is powerful stuff.

Skeptical Brandon: Not as powerful as we might think, though. Kids are developmentally egocentric. They want to hear from voices much like their own. This is why young adult fiction always has young adult characters, and the stories are almost always told in the first person. And it's why adults think that a book *like A Separate Peace* is great for adolescents; it's about adolescence, but it's told by an adult. That makes it an adult book about adolescence, and no adolescent wants to read about that. They are too in-the-moment; the narratives need to have an immediacy that only comes from adolescent and young adult voices.

Positive Brandon: Oh, give them some credit. They are entirely capable of looking ahead and seeing how damaging these bullying behaviors are to individuals. And they need to see that. They really do. Far too often we shrug this stuff off and make it seem like it's no big deal. *It is a big deal.*

Skeptical Brandon: I just wish they didn't have to look ahead to comprehend that it's a big deal. It's a big deal *right now*, regardless of what they remember as adults.

Positive Brandon: But as adults they can offer some perspective. They are all survivors of this thing we call adolescence. They made it to the other side. And looking at things from the other side, they can offer encouragement and support. They can tell their young readers that they will get through this, and things do get better later in life.



THE TORCH

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Skeptical Brandon: Oh yeah... the “better later” message. You hear this a lot these days after the great success of the “It Gets Better” campaign. I understand what they’re trying to do, but I hate the idea that the best thing we can tell our kids is that they need to just gut it out until adulthood. Sorry, but that’s not good enough. It’s almost as bad as the “This will make you a stronger person in the long run” message. That’s meant to be *encouraging*? Some miserable thirteen year old kid who’s getting bullied every single day at school is going to feel better knowing that years down the road, there are important life lessons to be taken from this misery? Really?

Positive Brandon: That’s not entirely fair. Yes, there are stories that make those points. And those points might be incredibly comforting to some kids. It’s a way of showing that someone understands what you’re going through. But it’s also worth noting that there are pieces in this book that contradict everything you just said. There are authors who mock the very words of consolation that you just lambasted. One author will say one thing and another author will say something completely different. There is incredible diversity in these 70 pieces.

Skeptical Brandon: There is diversity, and I’m usually all for diversity. Just not necessarily here. The diversity here means that young readers are going to hear all kinds of mixed messages, and some of the messages they hear in this book are just bad. Didn’t a few authors actually make the point that if you’re being bullied, you really need to stand up for yourself? I can’t imagine anyone actually writing that in 2011.

Positive Brandon: You can’t imagine an *expert on bullying* writing that in 2011. These aren’t experts; they’re authors. Their writing does a great job of capturing the public mood, thoughts, and opinions on the bullying problem we have in our schools. The 70 pieces are all over the place, offering different perspectives and ideas on what the problem is, what it means, and how to solve it. It mirrors American society.

Skeptical Brandon: It doesn’t really mirror American society in terms of its diversity, though. I looked through the list of authors and was able to identify five definitely male names. I’m sure that the book includes more than five male authors... but that’s out of 70 contributors! And the one page dedication says “For our daughters.” It seems like this book is going out of its way to alienate young male readers.

Positive Brandon: These stories are universal, though. Gender really shouldn’t matter.

Skeptical Brandon: But it’s not just gender. There are a good number of stories about sexual orientation, but barely any about race, religion, and disability. We know that student differences are often the basis of bullying in our schools. And we want our civil rights teams to focus on bias behaviors.

Positive Brandon: And there are some stories here that address those issues. Again, there are 70 pieces included in this book! Some of them are great.



Skeptical Brandon: Some of them are not.

Positive Brandon: But is this book useful for civil rights teams?

Skeptical Brandon: Is it useful for civil rights teams?

Positive Brandon and Skeptical Brandon: It depends on how you use it!

Pop Culture Watch: September and October

The Pop Culture Watch is where we offer our opinions on what's going on in popular culture from a civil rights perspective!



All-American Muslim: The Title Says It All

I was worried about this show because of TLC's track record with reality television. It seems like most of their reality shows are modern versions of freak shows, offering the viewing audience the opportunity to gawk at others and feel generally superior.

But *All-American Muslim* is different. The series follows five Muslim families in Dearborn, Michigan. The primary cast members are mostly second-generation Arab Americans. We get to see them live their lives, raising families, working, and worshipping. They are often seen as a group in a studio setting talking about important issues of Islam.

The show may not be perfect, but for many Americans, it probably offers the best opportunity to get to know some Muslim Americans. It has some real potential to reduce prejudice and challenge stereotypes. The show is hugely successful in highlighting three important ideas:

1. American and Muslim are not exclusive identities. You can be both. Many are.
2. American Muslims do a lot of the same stuff other Americans do.
3. Muslims are a diverse group. Not every Muslim agrees on every facet of Islam.

Any one-hour television show that can do all this is a pop culture positive.



The Numbers Don't Lie

Sometimes I think that television is becoming more and more diverse. Then I see these statistics from the 2011 Emmy Awards (compiled by Racialicious.com, and where POC stands for *people of color*):

- Awards Handed Out Sunday Night: 25
- POC Winners: 0
- Individual Acting Nominees: 81
- POC Nominees: 6
- Writing Nominees Outside Best Variety, Music or Comedy Series Category: 30
- POC Nominees: 1
- Individual Writers in Best Variety, Music or Comedy Series Writing Category Nominees: 97
- Individual POC Writers In That Category: 6

These statistics show that television is still *very much* a white world. There are exceptions, but those exceptions tend to prove the rule. The problem isn't so much the Emmy Awards; it's a deeply-rooted, systemic problem, and one that can't be fully addressed here.

But whenever there's evidence of this problem, you can expect to read about it here.



Please Stop Making This Movie

Jack and Jill: Yet another movie where we are encouraged to laugh at a masculine-looking female character because she's played by some unfunny dude. Ha ha.



Relevant Resources: From the Fall Trainings...



After my presentation on “Race and Racism in 2011” at the fall trainings for middle level and high school students, many of you asked me what presentation software I was using. The answer is Prezi, which touts itself as “The Zooming Presentation Editor.” If you attended my presentation, you know that this is an apt descriptor for what Prezi can do.

Prezi is like PowerPoint or Keynote, except that it’s dynamic. It zooms around and moves. Whereas PowerPoint and Keynote are often static, Prezi is dynamic. Done well, a presentation in Prezi format is a thing to behold.

Want a great example? Check out Ron Gutman’s delightful and short TED talk on the power of smiling. (He’s using Prezi, and it’s impressive.) See it at:

www.ted.com/talks/ron_gutman_the_hidden_power_of_smiling.html

The good news about Prezi is that it’s free... sort of. There is an online version that you can use whenever you want, and it costs nothing. It requires internet access, though. That’s fine when you’re sitting at your desk... but there’s real potential for disaster if you’re relying on an internet connection while giving an actual presentation.

You can upgrade your free Prezi account and add on some useful features, including a downloadable version of Prezi that you can use on your computer’s desktop without an internet connection. There is a cost attached, but as educators, we all get a discount. An upgrade to a Prezi Pro subscription gives you everything Prezi has to offer for \$59/year.

Ready for some more good news? If you have any level of tech proficiency, Prezi is relatively easy to learn. It is mostly intuitive. You can learn the basics pretty quickly.

Then things get tough. Creating a truly professional looking presentation in Prezi is a significant time commitment. I’m currently in the process of changing over my old PowerPoint presentations to Prezi. It’s slow. (But I’m also a perfectionist.)

One more piece of bad news which I’ll follow with a silver lining. Prezi is very much a work in progress. There are things it can’t yet do, like play music. It’s getting better all



the time, though. Every month or so Prezi adds a new feature. This month they added text editing so that there are more fonts and colors available. I am now able to highlight individual words in different colors. This is great... but it makes you wonder why this feature wasn't available before.

I like Prezi, mostly for its ability to wow audiences. There are some things I don't like about it, but it keeps getting better. If you are looking for a way to make more engaging and interesting presentations, check it out.

<http://prezi.com/>

Exposing Everyday Racism

My workshop session on Race and Racism in 2011 at the fall trainings for middle level and high school students wasn't everything I wanted it to be. Race and racism are complicated topics, and to effectively show this takes time.

More time than I had, unfortunately. Just as I was putting the finishing touches on my workshop, I rediscovered an incredibly useful resource. *Primetime Live* did a feature on everyday racism back in 1991. I saw it in college as part of a course on race relations in America. It stuck with me to the point that I've looked for it in the past (without luck).

I saw it referenced recently in a list of films a college professor recommends in teaching about issues of race and racism. In fact, this professor went so far as to say that if there were only one film he could show his students, he'd choose this segment, even though it's now twenty years old.

I decided that maybe I should search for it on YouTube. It's there, and it's amazing.

The feature uses hidden cameras to follow two men around St. Louis. One is white and one is black. We see how they are treated differently on account of race. I remember it as one of the most disturbing things I've ever seen, and it holds up well in 2011.

It's about 20 minutes long, but it communicates so much about racism. It's tempting to write all about everything it reveals; instead I'll only say that it helps show that racism is complicated and very much a problem. It's the perfect follow-up for anyone interested in exploring race and racism beyond my workshop.

You can watch Parts 1 and 2 of this *Primetime Live* feature at:

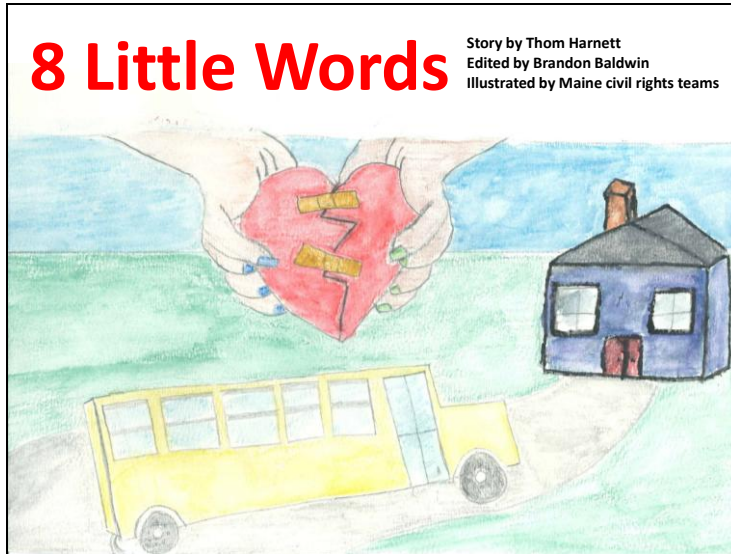
www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyL5EcAwB9c

www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOS3BBmUxvs&feature=related



8 Little Words

Story by Thom Harnett
Edited by Brandon Baldwin
Illustrated by Maine civil rights teams



Last spring I called on civil rights teams to volunteer artwork for a new version of our ubiquitous story *8 Little Words*. If you attended the student trainings until the very end, you got to see the final results.

And it's great.

It's so great, in fact, that many of you have asked me for a copy. It was never my intent to print copies of this story; I wanted to create something wonderful that I could use in my presentations.

Unfortunately, this means that the final product is a PowerPoint file, and it's so big that it can't possibly be sent through e-mail. But I did put a PDF version of it online that anyone can access.

But before you do, a word of warning...

I use this story to end almost all of my school presentations. It's important that it remain fresh for my audiences. Feel free to download it, but please limit its use to your civil rights team.

I thank you in advance.

<https://docs.google.com/open?id=oB6aDNihWmZ5TNjcwNTk5ODktNTQ5MiooMWI2LWEzZTQtNjQ3ZDA2ZWNjY2U5>