

CIVIL RIGHTS TEAM PROJECT NEWSLETTER

January 2006

Newsletter Editor: Amy Homans

Welcome to the first issue of the Civil Rights Team Project newsletter. The purpose of the newsletter is to help keep everyone informed of what is happening with teams around the state and to share information and ideas that support you, your students and the mission of the CRTP. This issue contains tips on how to address unacceptable language and behavior, suggestions for Black History Month activities, contact information on some great speakers and presenters, the Toolbox Tip of the Month, the Ice Breaker of the Month and more.



The Three Questions

Are you struggling to find a simple, yet effective way to address unacceptable language and behavior with individual students? Judy Moran, principal of River View Community School in South Gardiner, uses “The Three Questions” when she confronts students who have said or done something hurtful to a fellow student. The Three Questions are:

Was it truthful?

Was it kind?

Was it necessary?

If the answer to any of The Three Questions is “no”, then the student is asked what else he or she could have said or done instead of the hurtful act or statement. Principal Moran has The Three Questions printed on small cards that she hands out to her students to reinforce the importance of what they say and do to others. As basic as they sound, these three questions cut to the essence of respectful, effective communication of thoughts and feelings, regardless of the age of the speaker.

February is Black History Month



February is the month when we commemorate and reflect upon the history of black men, women and children in the U.S. It is also a time to foster discussions with our students about racism and the effect it has had and continues to have on our country and those who reside within its borders. Here are some ideas of things that you and your team can do to raise awareness of racism and celebrate the achievements of black Americans.

- Visit www.visibleblackhistory.com and click on “19th Century” to learn about the long history of black people in Maine and their contributions to our communities and then create a bulletin board or mural to share this information with others in your school community.

- **Obtain a copy of *Anchor of the Soul*** and sponsor a showing of it in your school or make it available to your history teachers. Produced by Shoshana Hoose and Karine Odlin in 1994, this documentary video is the most comprehensive history of Maine's blacks, told through the development of the black churches in Portland. The Honorable Barbara Jordon, former U.S. Representative from Texas to Congress, narrates the video which can be obtained for \$24.95 plus shipping from the

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Maine Historical Society Gift Shop,
489 Congress St., Portland, ME 04101,
(207) 774-1822.

- **Hold a Black History Month Bee** in your school. Each day during the month of February, have the school's daily bulletin feature facts about two famous persons, places or incidents. For example: *Macon Bolling Allen, Esq. (1816-1894) was the first black person in America to be licensed to practice law, and he was accepted to the bar in 1844 in Portland.* Post the daily facts on the Civil Rights Team's bulletin board or other designated space. Teachers can read and reinforce the facts with their homeroom students. At the end of the month, choose two students from each homeroom to participate in the bee. Hold the contest in a school-wide assembly if possible, with teachers calling out seven rounds of questions drawn from the daily clues. Award the top three winners certificates or prizes, and put their photos in the yearbook. Recognize all participants with a certificate.

- Order and distribute copies of **"And don't call me a racist!" A treasury of quotes on the past, present, and future of the color line in America** / Selected and arranged by Ella Mazel (www.ellamazel.org/yellowbook/request.htm). The book is free and is shipped in multiples of 36. You can order as many as you need and shipping is also free. Ms. Mazel wrote this book in order to "discomfort the comfortable," namely—those who are opposed to racism but who are also, by luck of the genetic draw, "the unwitting beneficiaries of racism." Provide copies to each homeroom teacher, your school's history teachers, and to your school and local

library and encourage discussion of the materials in the book. This book is recommended reading by Teaching Tolerance.

- **Inspire your students with a presentation by a black speaker or performer.** Some suggestions for speakers are: **John Jenkins** (1-888-737-8255; www.peptalk.com), a Bates College graduate and former two term mayor of Lewiston, State Senator, and U.S. Dept. of Labor Glass Ceiling Commissioner, and five time martial arts world champion who currently works as an inspirational speaker; **Michael Wingfield**, (780-0234), an interactive performer and teacher from Portland, has nearly 20 years of experience in the African-Caribbean percussion arts and culture which he uses to speak to today's issues around diversity, (*editor's note: I saw Michael Wingfield at Molly Ockett Middle School in Fryeburg last year and he had the eyes and ears of every student throughout his performance.*); **Takisha Staats**, (324-0735) a former Kennebunk police officer who works with young people on issues of racism and diversity.

- Have your students make an **Events in African-American History Timeline** and post it around your school. A great timeline highlighting events in African-American history from 1600-2000 can be found at www.gale.com/free-resources/bhm/timeline/index.htm.

- Dig into your Toolbox and sponsor a film festival beginning with a showing of *A Time for Justice: America's Civil Rights Movement*, a 38 minute film that won the 1995 Oscar for Best Short Documentary. Through historic footage and the voices of civil rights movement

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participants, this film gives students a powerful view of historical events from the perspective of the ordinary people who lived through them.

Free At Last: A History of the Civil Rights Movement and Those Who Died in the Struggle, is a 108 page teaching text that accompanies the film and it too is in your Toolbox, in the same box with the video. Follow up this film later in the month with *Mighty Times: The Legacy of Rosa Parks*, a 40 minute documentary film about the Montgomery, Alabama Bus Boycott of 1955-56. This film presents the Civil Rights Movement as a model for young activists who are looking to make positive change in their communities. A viewing guide accompanies this film, which can also be found in your Toolbox (Middle and High Schools).

Alternatively, offer these outstanding films, provided to us free of charge by Teaching Tolerance, to other teachers in your school for use in their lesson plans. Other commercially available films with a central theme of racism are listed in the updated Resource Guide that was provided to you earlier this fall. The list includes *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Mississippi Burning*, and *Radio*.

•**Read the book *The Story of Ruby Bridges***, by Robert Coles, a story about a six year old girl who started the first grade in a New Orleans elementary school as the only black student and how her spirit and determination helped lead to the integration of the New Orleans school system. Discuss with students how the courage of an otherwise ordinary little girl changed the lives of thousands of other children. A comprehensive lesson plan designed around this book can be found at

www.teacherlink.ed.usu.edu/tlresources/units/Byrnes-famous/rubybrid.html, and includes several sets of discussion questions and exercises that would be useful for discussions about Ruby and the issue of racism. Teams can read the book themselves and then read it to (and lead discussion groups with) younger students in their school or in a nearby elementary school. Ruby Bridges Hall is still living in New Orleans, or was until Hurricane Katrina forced her to temporarily relocate. Students can write letters to her and mail them to Ruby Bridges, PO Box 870248, New Orleans, LA 70187. Read more about the grownup Ruby Bridges at www.rubybridges.org. Perhaps the most poignant words in her website are those set forth at the top of the homepage: *Racism is a grown-up disease. Let's stop using kids to spread it.*

Toolbox Tip of the Month



Each month we will be including in the newsletter a Toolbox Tip of the Month to help you and your team stay in touch with your Toolbox and the resources that it provides to you. In keeping with the theme of preparing for a commemoration of Black History Month, this month's tip is: Go to the [Resources](#) folder in your Toolbox and check out the *Celebrate Black History Month* catalog of educational and promotional materials that can be used to help you and your team celebrate Black History Month in your school. Even though the catalog in your Toolbox is dated 2003, a visit to the website (www.greateventspublishing.com) confirmed that the catalog is still the same and the prices have not changed

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based on the spot check we did of some of the items. The individual posters and the poster sets offered by this company are especially good and range in price from \$12 to \$44.95.



Ice Breaker of the

Month

Sometimes the biggest challenge faced by a team is getting comfortable enough with each other to be able to plan projects and work together effectively over the course of the school year. Short ice breakers and team building activities at the beginning of each meeting can help team members become comfortable with each other so they can learn to function as a team. Whether you set aside an entire meeting or just five minutes each time you meet, using team builders and ice breakers will benefit your team throughout the year.

This month's Ice Breaker is: **The Human Knot**. Have all of the team members stand in a small circle and grasp the hand of a different team member with each hand. This will invariably create a "knot" of hands. Give the team five minutes to extricate everyone from the knot so that no one's hands are crossed. This exercise requires everyone to work together in very close quarters. It is also a great deal of fun due to the contortions some of the members will necessarily have to go through in order for the knot to be undone.



A HUGE THANK YOU to all of you who participated in our faculty and team regional trainings this fall. A total of more than 2,000 students, faculty and community advisors, and school resource officers attended the fifteen trainings that took place from Saco to Presque Isle. We fine-tuned the trainings over the course of the fall in response to your comments and our own critiques, and hope that you and your students had a positive experience that left everyone upbeat and energized.

We have had many requests for the songs that were written and performed by the elementary school students at the Augusta and South Portland trainings so we have included the South Portland song in this newsletter with the Augusta song to follow in the future.



[To the tune of *This Land is Your Land*]

Please do not bully
Even if you're angry
It hurts my feelings
Don't take it out on me
We can be friendly
We can cooperate
This school was made for you and me.

The Civil Rights Team
Will be your rescue
If you are bullied
The Law protects you
Just use your courage
We will stand up with you
This school was made for you and me.

This song was written by the students with able assistance from

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singer/songwriter Martin Swinger who has participated in many elementary school team trainings over the years. Anyone interested in having Martin visit their school can go to his website, www.martinswinger.com, for more information.



UPCOMING EVENTS AND SIGNIFICANT DATES

January 16: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Check the Portland NAACP chapter website, www.naacpportland.org for information on local events. Go to websites such as www.mlkday.com and www.infoplease.com for information on Martin Luther King, Jr., activities and more. Encourage students to use this holiday as a day ON rather than a day off by engaging in a day of service to the community.

January 23-27: No Name Calling Week

It's not too late to plan something in your school to recognize No Name Calling Week. For more information, go to www.nonamecallingweek.org.

March: National Women's History Month. It's not too early to start planning for this event. The website www.nationalwomenshistoryproject.org is great place to start looking for ideas. Next month's newsletter will have more resources and suggestions on how to commemorate Women's History Month.

May 8: Civil Rights Team Project Statewide Conference in Augusta. Save the date and book your bus now! Due to popular demand, the Statewide

Conference, a full day dedicated to diversity and exposure to different cultures, is coming back in 2006.



“Extra, Extra, Read All About It!” Has your team just completed a successful project, read a great book, had a good fundraiser, listened to an inspiring speaker, seen a compelling video, or done something that was just plain fun that you would like to share with other teams? Send in a blurb to The Newsletter and we will include it in a future issue in a column dedicated to what's happening around the State. Send your news to amy@maine.rr.com with the subject heading: Newsletter item.



And one more thing...speaking of name calling, we can't go on calling this *The Newsletter* so please help us come up with a clever name. Email your entry by February 1, 2006 to amy@maine.rr.com.

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.

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