

THE TORCH

CIVIL RIGHTS TEAM PROJECT NEWSLETTER

November 2006

Newsletter Editor: Amy Homans

Whew! Eleven trainings down and one to go. We have met with dozens of faculty advisors and nearly two thousand team members and it's only November. If the energy we have seen at the trainings is any indication, this is going to be a bang up year for the Maine Civil Rights Team Project. Go Teams!

In this issue of *The Torch*, you will find articles on the new Spotlight School, what a Community Advisor can do for you, the Performer of the Month, some ideas for honoring Native American Heritage Month, the Toolbox Tip of the Month, and more. As always, we try to include a little something for everyone and we hope we have succeeded on that score again this month.



November is Native American Heritage Month

There is a certain irony to the fact that November is Native American Heritage Month. November is the month in which Americans celebrate Thanksgiving and the colonization of North America with white Europeans, an event that ultimately led to the death, defeat and repression of millions of Native Americans. Perhaps that makes November an even more poignant time in which to discuss current issues relating to Native Americans.

As always, Teaching Tolerance has a wonderful segment on ways to acknowledge and celebrate this month in your school, including a piece on the racism inherent in the use of Natives as school mascots. The

Teaching Tolerance materials also include ideas on incorporating Native perspectives in your Thanksgiving activities as well as heritage and justice activities that showcase the history of Native resistance to the dissolution of their cultural heritage and the fight for social justice in America. There are also additional ideas for those interested in teaching about Native American issues beyond the month of November.

To access the Teaching Tolerance materials on Native American Heritage Month, go to www.tolerance.org/teach/activities/activity.jsp?ar=750&ttnewsletter=ttnewsgen-11022006.

For other resources and information, check out some of the many educational web sites devoted to the preservation of Native American culture and language. One terrific site is maintained by the University of Maine and can be found at www.umaine.edu/ld291/. At this site, you will find a curriculum designed to meet the requirements of the Maine Learning Results with age appropriate lesson plans regarding Maine's Native Americans. This site was specifically constructed to assist Maine schools in meeting the statutory requirement that they teach students about Maine's cultural and ethnic history, including Native American studies. The site also contains many links to Maine tribal web sites, Maine Indian resources and general Indian resources. If you are looking for a wide breadth of resources on Maine Native American history, culture and language, this is the best place to start.

Another site to check out is http://www.geocities.com/bigorrin/abenaki_kids.htm. This site contains facts for kids interested in learning about the culture,

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history and language of all Native Americans. Among other things, this site recognizes the significance of preserving native languages, some of which are no longer spoken and others that are on the verge of extinction. This is not a particularly glamorous site, but it is full of information and useful links to other resources.

For a quick activity, click on <http://www.bluegrass.kctcs.edu/LCC/LIB/NATIVE%20AMERICAN/nativeamericanbookmarks.pdf> for a series of five bookmarks with quotes by historical Native leaders whose philosophical statements are as true today as when they were first spoken.



And in the Book Corner: Check out *Code Talker: A novel about the Navajo Marines of World War Two*

Code Talker, by Joseph Bruchac, is a 2006 Maine Student Book Award Book that tells the story of the Navajo "Code Talkers" who helped to secure victory for the United States and its allies in World War Two. Told through a fictional Navajo character, this book describes how young Navajos risked their lives to send messages back and forth between American and allied units in a code that could not be broken -- their native language. By transmitting crucial information in the Navajo tongue, it was virtually guaranteed that war plans and strategies could be communicated without possibility that the enemy would be able to

translate the information if the message was intercepted. As a direct result, countless American lives were saved throughout the war.

The story of the Navajo Code Talkers remained classified for more than twenty years after the war ended and, as a result, the contribution of these Native American heroes was not recognized publicly or privately until the late 1960s. *Code Talkers*, which brings to life the experiences of these Native men who participated in some of the heaviest fighting of the war, is a recommended read for Native American Heritage Month.



TOOL BOX TIP OF THE MONTH:
OUR HANDS ARE TIED!

Our Hands Are Tied! is a great team building activity that can be found in your Tool Box in the folder labeled "Team Builders." For those of you who do not yet have Tool Box, not to worry, everything you need to know about this activity is included here.

The objective of *Our Hands Are Tied!* is to help one another when presented with a challenging task. It can be done with a group of three or more and requires no special materials. In fact, the only thing it requires is your team members' shoes!

First, team members take off both of their shoes, place them in a big pile and then stand in a circle around the shoes. Then, challenge your group to hold hands in a circle and, **without anyone letting go of the hands they are holding onto**, retrieve his or her own shoes, put them on and tie or buckle them. This team builder

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can be done in separate teams as a race if you have a large enough group.

After the activity has been completed, use the following prompts to help team members discuss and process what they did.

1. Did your teammates work with each other or against each other? Why?
2. What was the hardest part of this activity?
3. How was communication a factor in this activity?
4. Why is communication important when working with others?
5. Do you feel that you communicate well with others? How does this affect your life?

Our Hands Are Tied! works well with every age group and helps team members become accustomed to working collaboratively with each other.

This is an especially good activity for teams with members who are not very familiar with each other and are somewhat reluctant to interact with each other. Like many things that are good for us, this extremely fun activity is actually a multi-faceted learning exercise that team members will talk about for days.



Does your team have a Community Advisor? Read on to find out what a Community Advisor can do to help support your team.

The staff at the Civil Rights Team Project encourages teams to recruit a member of their community to act as a Community Advisor. The Community Advisor can be a

parent or a community member with an interest in civil rights issues and a willingness to pitch in and help out in whenever the need arises. Many schools have only one teacher or staff member who acts as a Faculty Advisor and having an additional adult available to support the team can be invaluable.

So what can a Community Advisor do for you and your team? Community Advisors, or “CAs,” can fill any number of different roles for your team. A CA can attend and help out at meetings, chaperone trips to trainings and conferences and make phone calls to prospective speakers and outside organizations. A CA can come in and help with discrete projects, recruit and coordinate other parent or community volunteers, and participate in meetings with administrators. A CA can also be your liaison to the local press, making certain that your activities and events receive the coverage they deserve in your local daily or weekly paper.

Many FAs do not have co-advisors to help them with these and many other things that come up over the course of a school year and a CA can act as a much needed adult to whom tasks can be handed off with a guarantee they will be completed. There is great value in simply having a member of your community actively supporting the efforts of the Civil Rights Team. It demonstrates to the team members and to the school community that people outside the school believe in the importance of the Civil Rights Team.

If you do not have a parent interested in filling the role of Community Advisor, look to your community for someone who might be thrilled at the opportunity to work in a pro-active way with students committed to

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the goals of the Civil Rights Team Project. All of our communities have action-oriented folks who are engaged in efforts for social change. Getting the word to those people is key in recruiting a Community Advisor for your team. So, take advantage of the resources in your own community and contact people who you think share a common interest with you and your team members. With some perseverance, you'll end up with a committed person to help share the work and the joys of being part of the Civil Rights Team Project.

PERFORMER OF THE MONTH: SHAMOU



Maine is fortunate to be home to the highly acclaimed Iranian-born musician Shamou. Standing six feet seven inches tall and surrounded by a boggling assortment of percussion instruments from around the world, Shamou has a gift for captivating listeners of all ages. This was proven over and over again as he performed at our regional team trainings this fall in Brewer, Augusta, Saco and Farmington.

Shamou was born in Iran and was attending school in England when the revolution in Iran took place. Unable to return to Iran, Shamou came to the United States and attended the renowned Berklee College of Music in Boston. After living and performing for years in San Francisco and Las Vegas, he ultimately brought himself and his music to Portland.

In addition to working with college students and adults around the country, Shamou has worked with K-12 students in Boston, San Francisco, Florida, and Maine. After viewing him on multiple occasions this fall, it is clear that not only does he immensely enjoy his work, Shamou is a natural teacher and has a terrific rapport with students of all ages. While clearly a highly accomplished musician and performer, he is also, without doubt, part goofball, a feature that was evident throughout his performances and delighted the students in his audiences.

In addition to performing, Shamou offers several music and dance workshops to students and schools. His workshop *Getting on the Groove-Understanding Rhythm* involves a hands on exploration of various percussion instruments and vocal

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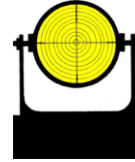
sounds and is appropriate for all ages. *Drums of the World* involves various percussion and melodic instruments from around the world. His performance pieces are accompanied by geographic and cultural information to help students identify the instruments and their origin on a large map of the world. Students have an opportunity to have a hands on experience with these instruments. This workshop is appropriate for K-12 students. Shamou's workshop *Body Music* uses clapping, stomping and vocal exercises, experimenting with various parts of the body, and found objects to create performance pieces in the mode of *STOMP*.

Shamou also has a five member band called *Loopin'* that plays multi-cultural music that makes it difficult for the most dance-phobic person to resist getting up and moving to the music. *Loopin's* musicians play a wide assortment of percussion instruments to re-create the sounds of American mountain music, Afro Caribbean, the Middle East and jazz, layered over an irresistible electronic dance beat.

Shamou and *Loopin'* would be outstanding additions to your school's multi-cultural offerings and could be a highlight to a Diversity Day program. If you would like to contact Shamou

or would like more information about Shamou and *Loopin'*, visit

www.shamou.com.



SPOTLIGHT ON STEARNS HIGH SCHOOL

Stearns High School, located in Millinocket, designed and executed an original project around the issue of assigning labels to those around us. FA Sue Buzzell recently contacted *The Torch* in order to share this project with other schools.

Team members created a list of all the derogatory names that they hear in their school's hallways every day that are used to label students. The list included words such as slut, fag, Jew, and retard. Team members then took paper bags and wrote one derogatory name/label on each bag until they had a collection of bags representing all the names on their list.

Team members placed the bags on their heads and went into individual classrooms, which immediately caught the attention of the students in the classrooms. One team member who did not have a bag on her head then read a story that the team wrote about a girl who constantly labeled others. At the conclusion of the story, the reader stated, "When we label others, we see the label, not the person." At that point, the other team members took the bags off their heads and facilitated

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a discussion of how labeling hurts everyone. According to Sue Buzzell, "it was a great presentation."

This project is simple to plan and execute and does not require any expenditure of funds. It also can serve to generate some interesting and constructive discussions around the issue of labeling. As Fred Lipp said repeatedly throughout our trainings this fall, "We all just want to be seen for who we are."

The Stearns team also created a Student Bill of Rights, which it posted around the school. The Bill of Rights states: **Students at Stearns Have a Right :**

1. **To NOT be harassed, abused, intimidated or ridiculed.**
2. **To feel SAFE.**
3. **To be treated with RESPECT.**
4. **To learn in a SAFE ENVIRONMENT.**
5. **To express their INDIVIDUALITY without feeling threatened.**

The Stearns team helped to ensure that faculty members would do their part to enforce the Bill of Rights by conducting a training for their faculty members by using a series of scenarios that they created. The scenarios highlighted issues to which team members wanted faculty members to be especially sensitive. Team members held small group sessions with faculty members during which the scenarios were read and discussed. During the small group sessions, the teachers were given **5 Tips for the Teach**, which included:

1. **When you see someone getting picked on... say something.**
2. **Verbal Violence is Violence: a/k/a mean.**
3. **If you see someone being picked on and they don't say anything about it, ask them if there is something you can do to help.**
4. **Never force anyone to apologize.**
5. **Tell the harassing student that you saw their action.**

Team members asked teachers to use **5 Tips for the Teach** when faced with inappropriate behavior by their students.

Sue Buzzell reported that each session lasted about 30 minutes and were quite effective in communicating the team's message to faculty members.

This is another example of a project that involves good brainstorming by team members, does not require an expenditure of funds and, in the case of the Stearns team, served as a good kick off project for their school year. Keep up the good work Stearns High School!

"Today, I Pledge to"

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It has become common knowledge of late that in order to promote a climate of kindness and acceptance in a school, the message must be integrated into the curriculum itself and reinforced daily by faculty, staff and students. Schools that undertake this task seek to accomplish their mission in different ways. Toward this end, some schools have a pledge or credo that speaks to their values and goals. The following article that appeared in the Christian Science Monitor, written by Todd Nelson, principal of Adams Elementary School in Castine, is a reminder that there are lots of opportunities to celebrate each day with a new commitment to the things around us that are important

One school swears allegiance to planet, flag, and fruit bats

By Todd R. Nelson

Last August, at our faculty meeting before the new school year, we asked, "Do the kids really know the meaning of the Pledge of Allegiance, and should we repeat it every day? Do they even know what it means to pledge, to swear an oath?"

As we discussed the rationale for the school's longstanding tradition,

a new idea arose. Why not begin each day of the week with a different pledge? Perhaps our students could even write one.

Certainly, there were many things to which we as a school and as individuals could make a daily commitment. And by writing our own pledge we could study the very reason people make pledges, and learn firsthand the difficulty in coming up with language that feels representative and inclusive. Most of all, we wanted a school ritual that felt personal, local, and instructive, rather than rote.

We decided to begin the week with the customary Pledge of Allegiance, and follow it on successive days with texts that were new and different.

A pledge I remembered hearing at another elementary school, written by Chicago educator Marva Collins, started us off on Tuesdays: "This day has been given to me fresh and clear. I can either use it or throw it away. I promise to use this day to the fullest, realizing it can never come back again. I realize this is my life, to use or to throw away."

Wednesday is art day. To embrace our work in art and music, we affirmed: "I will pursue truth, beauty, and good with compassion, courage, and respect." Short, but sweet - and inspirational to the

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fourth-grade papier-mâché fish project.

An Iroquois prayer, familiar to some as a folk song, became our Thursday pledge, one that helped us think long term - of the planet and our fellow man: "Let us know peace. For as long as the moon shall rise, For as long as the rivers shall flow, For as long as the sun will shine, For as long as the grass shall grow, Let us know peace."

Our last pledge was drawn up by Mrs. Pelletier's second- and third-graders, who'd studied both the Bill of Rights and the garbage problem at lunchtime. They gave voice to our own local aspirations, the hopes and commitments we had as a school: "I pledge to do my best for Adams School. I will show respect for my school and community. I will help to keep it clean and obey the rules. I will work hard in class. I will be kind at all times. I will do my best to make Adams School a happy place, even if it takes all I have."

Our pledges were printed in large type and posted for the all-school meeting that starts each day. After announcements, teachers and students from kindergarten through 8th-grade recited that day's pledge in unison. As the year progressed, we even referred to the various pledges when current events or school problems caught our attention. In other words, the

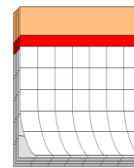
pledges guided us, and we tried to make them feel alive and relevant to our work as individuals and as a school community.

On the last day of school, I added a touch of whimsy from "Stargirl," a young adult novel by Jerry Spinelli: "I pledge allegiance to United Turtles of America and to the fruit bats of Borneo, one planet in the Milky Way, incredible, with justice and black bean burritos for all."

It's a good idea for the school principal to deliver an occasional reminder that daily humor is a worthy credo, and - lest we take ourselves too seriously - that we are one small planet in a medium-sized galaxy.

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This article can serve as inspiration to civil rights teams to come up with one or more pledges for your school that speak to the issues of kindness, acceptance, friendship, and community. This is just one more way to encourage reflective thinking and positive behavior in a fun, innovative way.



UPCOMING EVENTS AND SIGNIFICANT DATES

January 15: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

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January 22-26: No Name Calling Week.

For more information, go to

www.nonamecallingweek.org/cgi-bin/iowa/home.html.

February: Black History Month

March: Women's History Month

Monday, May 7, 2007: CRTP Statewide Conference, Augusta Civic Center

Save the date and book your bus now.



“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? If we don't hear about it, we can't share it with other teams. Send in a blurb to *The Torch* and we will include it in a future issue. Send your news to amy@maine.rr.com with the subject heading: **Newsletter item.**

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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