



THE TORCH

(CRTP NEWSLETTER) APRIL/MAY '11



We are all battling the same thing right now. We've removed the snow tires. We've enjoyed the crocuses. We've spotted robins. We've convinced ourselves that the Red Sox are both the best and worst team in the league. Oh yes... it's spring.

Spring in schools, especially the period marked by the return from April break, can be a struggle. There is a powerful force urging all of us to *wind things down*. There's almost a feeling of inevitability to the 2010-2011 school year. It is well on its course, and what's done is what's done. The eyes and mind wander ahead to next year.

But we can't afford to do that, because civil rights issues don't respect the school calendar. Consider the following major news and pop culture stories from the past two months:

1. AFLAC fired Gilbert Gottfried, the voice of their advertising duck, for offensive Tweets following the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Gottfried's jokes were some of the many awful online comments about the terrible tragedy.
2. UCLA student Alexandra Wallace recorded a three-minute YouTube rant now known as "Asians in the Library," where she wielded ignorance and privilege like weapons. Her racist rant made her into a target for legitimate criticism and hateful misogyny online. Ultimately, she received death threats, issued a tepid apology, and got expelled from school.
3. In a moment of childish anger, Kobe Bryant of the Los Angeles Lakers screamed "F___ing faggot!" at a referee. The moment was caught for everyone to see on television. Gay rights organizations protested and the NBA issued a strong statement and \$100,000 fine. Bryant apologized by saying that he didn't mean it literally, and that his use of the slur didn't have anything to do with his feeling for gays and lesbians.



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All three of these stories had direct civil rights connections, and could serve as excellent learning opportunities for civil rights teams and school communities. But if we're in the process of *winding things down*, we miss out on opportunities like these.

Civil rights issues don't respect the school calendar. This is even more true for school-based civil rights issues. At the same time that schools are battling the temptation to wind things down, civil rights issues and bullying/harassment behaviors are probably winding up. It's an unfortunate cycle that we're all aware of: spring brings with it some terrible behaviors that have an adverse affect on school climate.

It doesn't matter what month it is. It doesn't matter how many meetings you have left with your team. It doesn't matter if or when the spring conference is happening. Your civil rights team needs to remain active and visible through the end of the school year.

That's our theme in this April/May edition of *The Torch*. Keep engaging in important work.

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

Team Spotlight: Two whole months of team activity to report on!

Activity Ideas: I need your help in updating a classic civil rights story. You are also encouraged to look ahead to next year and educating students and staff about your school's harassment policy.

Pop Culture Winners and Losers: Two months and just three pieces of pop culture.

Relevant Resources: A great government publication on cyberbullying and cybersafety and a great short story on bystander behavior.

Upcoming Events: A few things here and there.

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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

Brandon Baldwin—Schools/Curriculum Coordinator



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Team Spotlight:

I've seen plenty of great civil rights team action in the last two months. Here are some of the many highlights...



- The students at **Madison High School** conducted workshops as part of their second annual "Core Values Day" events.
- Members of the civil rights team at **Gardiner Area Middle School** helped introduce their Diversity Day event by recounting incidents of harassment they'd seen in their school during an introductory assembly.
- The **Maranacook Middle School** civil rights team chose the three most relevant civil rights issues for their Make a Change Day, invited outside presenters to address those three issues, and created an introduction that included poetry reading and skits.
- Three members of the **Maranacook Middle School** civil rights team also served as a student panel of experts on the topic of cyberbullying during a parent night organized around issues of teen health. While co-presenting with super-expert Brandon Baldwin, they completely stole the show.
- The civil rights team at **Brunswick Junior High School** has been super-active. They recently hosted classroom discussions about the school's harassment policy and its connections with the Maine Civil Rights Act, which previewed a week of activities addressing the use of hateful and hurtful language.
- The civil rights team at **Veazie Community School** accumulated information from a school survey and shared tidbits with both students and staff before a presentation on the power of words from yours truly.

Allow me to share two simple observations about what makes these civil rights team activities so effective:

1. The civil rights team is highly visible. They are up there in front of the whole school, directly addressing issues they see right there in their school.
2. The civil rights team is coordinating activities and working together with the Office of the Attorney General. We are in contact and making certain that my school visits are visibly connected with the work of the civil rights team.

So there you have it. Keep up the good work, and keep letting me know about it.



Activity Idea: Let's Update *Ten Little Words*



If you've been active in the Civil Rights Team Project for any amount of time, there's a significant chance that you know the story of Jasmine and *Ten Little Words*. It's a powerful story worthy of sharing, as it effectively highlights the power of the individual to make a positive difference.

Thom originally created the text in response to an incident he learned about through a parent phone call. The text made its debut at one of our first fall training sessions for elementary students, where they had the opportunity to provide illustrations. But the story of Jasmine and *Ten Little Words* was never limited to our fall trainings. Thom always used it to conclude his speaking engagements. I soon followed suit, and continue to use the story as part of my "How We See Our Schools" and "The Power of Words" presentations.

But an interesting thing happened recently: I grew tired of telling the story. It kept getting longer and longer with each telling, and I began to bore myself with it. What should have been a simple story was becoming long, tedious, and overcomplicated.

In a moment of desperation/inspiration, I decided to stop telling my own version and instead use an illustrated version we had on our hands. I would use Thom's text and pictures from elementary school students. It gave *Ten Little Words* new life, and more importantly, kept the story simple.

This recent switch in my presentations has inspired me to challenge you and your civil rights teams: Let's create the ultimate illustrated version of *Ten Little Words*! The impact of this story is already great, but I want something so beautiful and wonderful that audiences have no choice but to leave my presentations excited and inspired.



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Here is my proposal...

The story of Jasmine and *Ten Little Words* is 29 pages long. I want 29 civil rights teams at *all age levels* to volunteer one page of artwork for the ultimate version of this story. Since each team will be contributing just one page, it should be excellent.

If you and your team are interested in contributing a page to this project, let me know. Send me an e-mail and I will then write back to you with a complete copy of the text and the page that your team will be responsible for bringing to life. Please make sure that you and your artists *read through the whole story*. Know and understand the whole story before adding visuals to your assigned page.

I will include specific information in terms of requirements and instructions for submittal. We need not worry about that now. You and your team will have until June 1 to complete your page.

How you and your team add visuals to your individual page is up to you. It can be a group or individual effort. It can be cooperation or competition. Just make sure that your civil rights team creates a page you can be proud of. It will be seen by many.

What will we end up with at the end of all of this? Ideally, we'll end up with a great variety of art styles. The pages of the book itself will reflect the wonderful diversity we have in our state and amongst our civil rights teams. Different art mediums and materials are encouraged: pencil sketch, charcoal, crayon, markers, painting, photography, collage, mixed medium, or anything else you and your team can think of.

I plan on using this version of *Ten Little Words* over and over again. I'm excited to put it together. If you think you and your team can contribute one great page, send me an e-mail and I'll get you started!

Yet Another Activity Idea: Work with Policies

We want you to keep engaging in important work this year, but you're certainly allowed to think about next year, too. Planning ahead and winding things down are two very different things.

A major theme for our 2010-2011 Civil Rights Team Project school year has been the important of harassment policies. Ideally, harassment policies are an important part of the opening days of school. Civil rights teams can help make this happen.

Now is the time to put a plan in place for education around school policies for the fall of 2011. A joint session from administration and returning members of the civil rights



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team would be a great way to educate and inform students and staff alike about the policies your school has in place.



Some ideas for you and your team:

1. If your harassment policy is incomplete and does not include sexual orientation as a protected category, approach administration and inform them that the policy is incomplete. We often hear about how it's too late to change policies for the current school year. Policies need to be changed before they are widely distributed and disseminated. So the time to get policies changed is now.
2. If the harassment policy is not included in staff and student handbooks, create change and make sure that it is.
3. Approach administration and ask them to co-present the school's harassment policy to students at the beginning of next year. Get a firm commitment. It is not the civil rights team's responsibility to share policies. *Administration absolutely must be a part of this.*
4. Rewrite the school harassment policy into something that students can actually understand: kid-friendly language.
5. Create common examples of what a violation of the school's harassment policy might look like.
6. Create scenarios where some are violations of policy and some are not.



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7. Create surveys or questions about harassment policies. Are the policies violated? How so? How often? Where? Do adults consistently enforce policies?
8. Create a bulletin board and/or posters about the harassment policy.
9. Accumulate stories and evidence about how it feels for targets and victims who are subject to in-school harassment.
10. Plan activities or lessons about the harassment policy for teachers to use at the beginning of the year in reviewing policies/handbooks, advisor groups, or civil rights team classroom visits.

There are plenty of other things you and your team could do, but what's most important is that *something should be in place so that all staff and students understand the school's harassment policy*. I visit a lot of schools all around the state, and my experience has been that most schools do not have something in place. The civil rights team can make sure that this happens and be an active part of the education process.

For this education process to really be effective, though, it needs to happen early. And for it to be early, you need to plan for it.

If you and your team would like assistance with any of this important work, please contact me and I can help you with the process.

Pop Culture Watch: March and April

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



Mars May Need Moms, But We Could Do Without the Gender Stereotypes

You only needed to see the trailer for Disney's Mars Needs Moms to know that this movie has some serious gender issues. The title feeds off the ongoing cultural expectations that mothers provide parenting while fathers get a free pass. That's not a good start.



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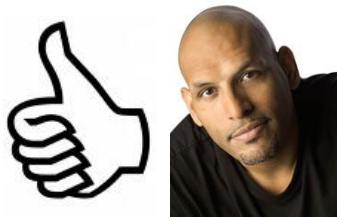
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When the young protagonist has to explain what a mother is to an alien inquisitor, he identifies her as the one who feeds him and vacuums. Did he grow up in the 1950's?

But the worst offense in the trailer was the actual use of the line "You march like a girl" as an insult. Seriously.

You can watch the extendedly awful trailer at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBFUAW6jC_M



Someone Who Totally, Totally Gets It

I'm not sure if this qualifies as pop culture or not, but John Amaechi is both gay and a former pro basketball player. He blogs for the *New York Times*, and his thoughtful response to the Kobe Bryant language controversy is one of the best things I've read online this year.

<http://offthedribble.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/04/15/a-gay-former-player-responds-to-kobe-bryant/>

This is a highly usable piece for you and your civil rights teams.



Effectively Mocking Racism

Dissent is good, but we've seen some horribly racially-themed attacks on President Barack Obama. GOOD, a quarterly magazine devoted to "moving the world forward," recently created an online slideshow called "Ways to Insult Obama without Being Racist." Now, don't worry: we are not moving into the territory of politics and offering commentary on the presidency. No way.

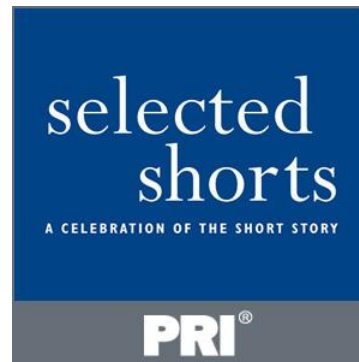
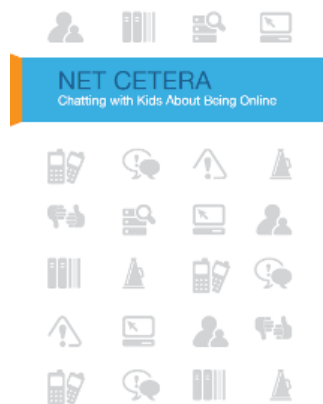


But this online slideshow offers some great insight on some of the actual racialized attacks on the president and *why they're considered racist*. It actually offers some intelligent commentary, to the point where it would be on my syllabus for Racism 101 (a class I'm dying to teach someday).

Check it out. Just understand that the slides have racist imagery. The imagery is terribly offensive, but it's all real stuff that has been in the news. The site deconstructs it, lampoons it, and uses it as a teaching tool. If you were to use any of this with students, it would need context and support.

www.good.is/post/slideshow-a-guide-to-attacking-obama-without-being-racist

Relevant Resources: Free Ways to Address Cyberbullying and Bystander Behavior



I was always reluctant in addressing the issue of cyberbullying. Most cyberbullying behavior that we see in schools has nothing to do with prejudice and bias-based harassment. It's undoubtedly cruel, but usually not a civil rights issue.

But I kept getting asked questions about cyberbullying. I thought that the solution might be to recommend resources, but didn't like anything that was available. I decided that since I couldn't recommend any resources, I needed to become one.

I'm no expert, but I think this is an advantage. My approach focuses more on kids and behavior and less on technology and the law. It reeks of common sense, but it's an approach that I don't see all that often. At the end of my workshop sessions with parents, teachers, and administrators, I offer what might be both refreshingly and disappointingly simple advice: *We have to talk to our kids about cyberbullying.*



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I recently had the good fortune of discovering a government publication that agrees with my whole approach. Of course this means that I whole-heartedly recommend it.

Net Cetera: Chatting with Kids about Being Online is a free booklet for parents and other adults about the best tool we have for preventing cyberbullying behavior: communication. I fell in love with this resource on the first page, where in separated and bold lettering, it simply states...

The best way to protect your kids online? Talk to them.

The *Net Cetera* booklet is the single best print resource I've seen that addresses cyberbullying. It's professional looking and well organized. The information is exceptionally clear and practical. It refuses to dole out easy answers.

But the best part... it's free. You can download it online. You can also bulk order up to 1500 print copies for distribution.

I highly recommend the *Net Cetera* booklet as a resource for civil rights teams and schools, and especially for wide distribution with teachers and parents as part of ongoing efforts in addressing this important issue.

You can download or order this resource at:

www.onguardonline.gov/tools/order-publications.aspx

And it looks like the *Net Cetera* booklet is just one piece of the federal government's effort to promote cybersafety. The OnGuard Online campaign features other publications, videos, and online games. It's definitely worth a look:

www.onguardonline.gov

A special "THANK YOU" for Gwen Robertson Mohlar at Maranacook Community Middle School for sharing this wonderful resource.

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The next resource worth sharing was a serendipitous discovery. Driving home from Massachusetts, I heard an incredibly insightful short story on NPR's *Selected Shorts* April 24th broadcast. It was a flashback to my days of teaching, when I'd experience a great piece of literature and think, over and over again, "I should use this."

With Shereen Pandit's short story "She Shall Not Be Moved," it was more than just "I should use this." There was some regret that I was unaware of this story during our fall



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trainings. It would have made an excellent compliment to my workshop “Standing Up: Easier Said than Done.” The author gives an authentic voice to an adult witnessing bullying and bias behavior who chooses to do nothing. She makes excuses. She rationalizes. She rages. She regrets. But still, she does nothing.

“She Shall Not Be Moved” shows how difficult it is to stand up for others and the thought process so many of us have experienced in deciding the proper course of action. I don’t want to say too much about the story, except that it is absolutely worth fifteen minutes of your time and future consideration as a teaching tool.

You can download the whole April 24th *Selected Shorts* broadcast online. You’ll have to sit through the show’s introduction, but it’s the first featured story. Have a listen at:

www.npr.org/rss/podcast.php?id=510202

You can also get a text copy of the story from Shereen Pandit’s blog at:

<http://shereenpandit.book.co.za/blog/2008/03/18/she-shall-not-be-moved>

Upcoming Events:

**Wednesdays, now through May:
The Holocaust and Human Rights
Center presents Series 360**

Augusta, UMA, Michael Klahr Center,
various times, free and open to the
public.

A series of films, lectures, and
roundtable discussions with the theme
of Digging in the Ruins of History:
Memory and the Nazi Holocaust.

Check out this impressive program of events at:

<http://www.facebook.com/l.php?u=http%3A%2F%2Fbit.ly%2FeLJPog&h=928co>





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Now-June 12: Susan Hiller's "The J. Street Project" Art Exhibit

Waterville, Colby College Museum of Art, free and open to the public.

(Also an opening reception and dance performance on March 3 at 4:30 pm)

The J. Street Project documents all the places in Germany whose names still show evidence of their former Jewish inhabitants. Includes 303 photographs, a 67 minute video, and a map and book documenting the sites.

For more information, go to:

http://www.colby.edu/academics_cs/museum/exhibitions/upcoming-exhibitions.cfm

May 7-8: Resisting Racism Workshop

Portland, University of Southern Maine, Wishcamper Center, Room 102, 9:00-5:00 on Saturday, 10:00-4:00 on Sunday, \$20-100 sliding scale

An anti-racism workshop facilitated by Ewuare X. Osayande of POWER (People Organized Working to Eradicate Racism). The weekend will address the development of race as a social construct, the legacy and current reality of racism in the United States, white privilege, internalized oppression, and the process of accountability. This anti-racism workshop is especially beneficial for educators, students, activists, parents, social workers, the curious, and the committed. Come learn and connect with others to broaden the anti-racist movement in Maine.

Sponsored by ROUSE Portland. For more information or to register, contact them at:

949-6668 or rouseportland@gmail.com