

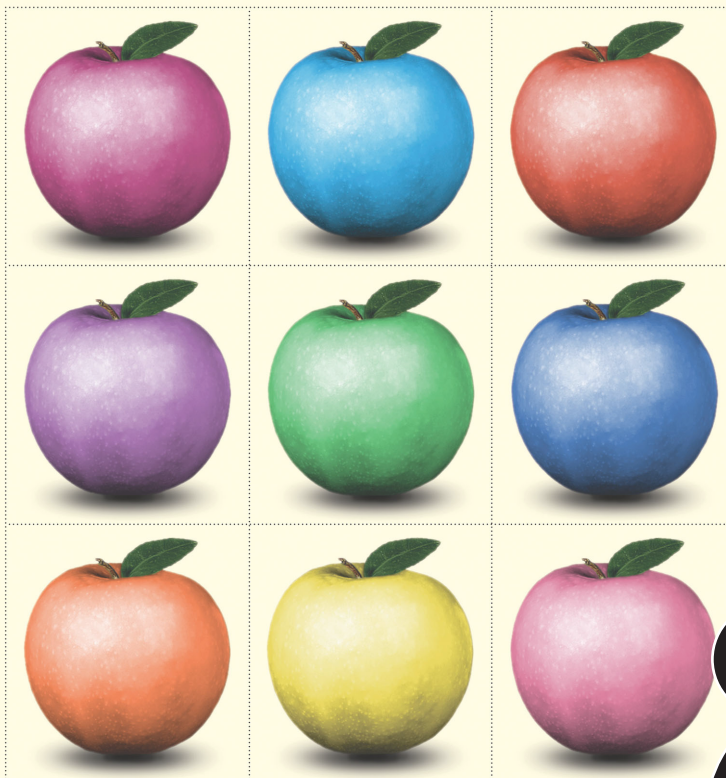
Diversity Project—An Elder Visit

Pembroke's Friday Freebie

Differentiated Learning

Language and literacy projects that address diverse backgrounds and cultures

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**Thought
&
Emotion**

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Visit from an Elder

Friendship is constant in all other things.

What This Project Addresses

- cultural diversity
- the importance and value of elders, community seniors, and grandparents
- awareness of heritage
- listening and questioning
- respect for self and others
- manners and authentic introduction skills
- curriculum connections: Language Arts, Health, Social Studies

Project Overview

What a valuable resource our elders are. The value of using them in our classrooms has been well documented. This project involves each student in identifying an elder—a grandparent, other relative, or community senior—meeting with the elder, and inviting the elder to visit the classroom on a specified date to talk about something that interests both the students and the elder.

Most children have “an elder”; for those who do not, get in touch with community seniors at a local seniors’ residence for willing candidates—there will be no shortage of them. I promise that if you make the effort to involve your class in this project, you will not be disappointed.

TINY TRUE TALE

Vicki: *I didn’t know your gran was so pretty. I really liked her dress. My gran wore pants when she came.*

Dali: *Sari. It’s called a sari.*

Vicki: *Sari. Pretty name for a pretty dress.*

Dali: *(Smiling broadly) I have one too.*

Vicki: *You should wear it to school some day. I bet you’d look really pretty in it too.*

Penny: *My grandfather wore his special ceremonial necklace from his tribe when he came.*

Dali: *I guess all our elders are different. Like us.*

Vicki: *Yep! Come on, let’s go find a swing before they’re all taken.*

The teacher smiled to herself. Until the day of her elder’s visit, Dali had been alone—segregated from the other students most of the time. It appeared she was segregated no longer. Penny had seldom spoken at all. Now she was more than willing to talk about her grandfather, a Cree elder.

Materials

- large wall calendar to show dates of visits
- stationery for writing invitations
- thank-you notes and stamps
- Elder Questionnaire (see page 21)

Be sure to discuss the importance of elders: how their wisdom, stories, history, and accumulated knowledge are invaluable to all of us.

Steps for Teachers

1. Adapt the Elder Questionnaire as necessary for your grade and photocopy enough questionnaires to give one to each student. (See **Dealing with Developmental Levels** below.)
2. Make a large year calendar or list of months for marking upcoming visits. It's a good idea to limit visits to one per week, on a specific day at a specific time. This minimizes timetabling confusion.
3. Be sure to have stationery and thank-you cards ready.
4. Approach elders in the community to serve as surrogate seniors for any students without a personal elder in their lives.
5. Discuss "elders" with the class. You could bring up the different ways elders are treated in different cultures, and ask for input from any non-dominant culture students. Discuss all the ways elders can contribute to the class (e.g., special talents, memories of historical events, stories, poetry, and favorite readings).
6. Have students think of elders they would like to invite to class and why.
7. Role-play inviting elders, dealing with the questionnaires, and introducing the elders to the class.
8. Discuss the concept of a sharing circle, where all members may talk and ask the elder questions after the elder has finished telling or presenting.
9. Inform the principal of your intentions and provide the dates of scheduled visits.

Quick Check: Visit from an Elder

- Have I informed the principal of my plans?
- Do I have enough "spare" seniors available to visit?
- Have I determined how to arrange my class into a circle for the visits?

Steps for Students

1. Students think of an elder they would like to invite to class. If they cannot think of one, they consult the teacher.
2. Working with classmates, they practise making invitations to elders.
3. Students write invitations, telling what day and time they would like the elders to visit based on the teacher's predetermined dates and times. The letters should suggest a number of possible visitation times from which to choose.
4. Each student calls or visits the elder with a questionnaire after the invitation has been accepted.
5. Using the information from the questionnaire, the student plans a good introduction for the elder, and contacts the elder again to confirm the date and time of the visit.
6. When the elder comes to school, the student makes proper introductions not only to the class, but also to the principal and secretary. Even primary students can handle this as long as they have had time to practise making the specific introduction beforehand. This provides an excellent learning experience for them.
7. After an elder's visit, the student writes a thank-you card and mails it.

Dealing with Diversities

Cultural: This is such a wonderful way to invite elders from different cultures that I suggest *all* students invite their elders to talk, at least in part, about their cultural backgrounds.

Linguistic: If an interpreter is necessary, try to provide one so that the elder can speak to the class in his or her first language. Students need to be exposed to other languages. If the elder speaks limited English, encourage the students to learn some words from the elder. Make it a mutual learning experience.

Religious: Encourage these students, either those belonging to any non-dominant religions *or* students from Christian or atheist homes if they so choose, to bring a strong advocate for their faith to class as a learning experience for all.

Socio-economic: Sometimes, these children feel embarrassed about bringing a relative. If hesitancy occurs, discuss in private with the student. Perhaps arrange for an elder from the local community to come instead or offer whatever assistance is needed to create a comfortable experience. (On one occasion, I picked the grandparent up on my way to school as he didn't have cab fare.)

Behavioral: If any of these students refuse to invite someone they know, suggest a community elder to them, and make the necessary arrangements for the two to meet. Seniors are usually very willing to cooperate. If possible, try to connect a child with an elder who had similar tastes as a youth (e.g., young ball player with a senior citizen who played ball).

Dealing with Developmental Levels

Kindergarten to Grade 3: Simplify the questionnaire. Practise good “sharing circle” manners and listening skills. Use templates for thank-you cards if necessary.

Grades 4 to 9: Encourage higher level questioning. Practise asking *good* questions of each other so as to avoid the familiar *How old are you?* or *Is that your real hair color?*

Making Curriculum Connections and More

Language Arts: Students may write reflections after the visit of an elder. They may create comparison charts and graphic organizers, perhaps looking at two elders of quite different backgrounds and pointing out what may be a surprising number of similarities. Other activities include collecting and recording data from interviews and questionnaires, and brainstorming ways of showing respect, such as offering a helping hand and listening attentively.

Health and Social Studies: Students may draw conclusions about similarities between different peoples. They may write about or discuss feelings of pride in cultural backgrounds or discuss stereotyping, cultures, immigrating and emigrating, and the wealth of diverse populations. Elder visits may provide an opportunity to understand history, as told by the elders. Students may also explore ways of demonstrating respect for members of the community through appropriate discussions, letters, interviews, and more.

Elder Questionnaire

1. What would you like to talk to our class about? (Please see the list of possible topics below. You do not have to choose one of these; they are suggestions only.)

2. Do you have any objects, supplies, or pictures you would like to share with the class?
Yes _____ No _____ If so, what?

3. Do you have a way to get to our school? Yes _____ No _____

4. Would you like to share anything about how or when you came to Canada?
Yes _____ No _____ If so, what? How long have you lived in Canada?

5. What name would you like to be introduced by? _____

6. Is there anything you would like me to tell the class before you visit us?

Possible Topics

- Events from your early life (at school, in the community, on a farm)
- Stories you would like to tell
- Stories about your cultural background
- What it was like when you were a child
- How the value of money has changed
- What expectations were put on you in your youth