
Life Circle Wall Hangings

I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.

What This Project Addresses

- the cyclic nature of every living thing
- an awareness and comprehension of self
- creativity and persistence
- communication through representation
- goal setting
- curriculum connections: Language Arts, Health, Science, Art

Project Overview

Every teacher appreciates the importance of helping students to develop self-awareness, self-respect, and self-confidence. Sometimes, however, it is difficult to encourage them to look closely at themselves and to examine their existence in the world. Children are egocentric. They live in the here and now. How can we help them to understand something as abstract as the cyclic nature of existence?

This project helps them to do this by inviting them to break their lives into four or more *chunks* (students like this term and can understand it, so I will refer to the quadrants as chunks from now on); students also illustrate or write about each chunk. The chunks are as follows: (1) Infant (preschool), (2) Student (including the rest of the school years), (3) Adult, and (4) Senior (old age). Each chunk will be identified by the year-span: for example, 1996–2002 might cover the preschool years. The final chunk, from the date at which they believe their old age will begin, will end in a “?” indicating the uncertainty about time of death.

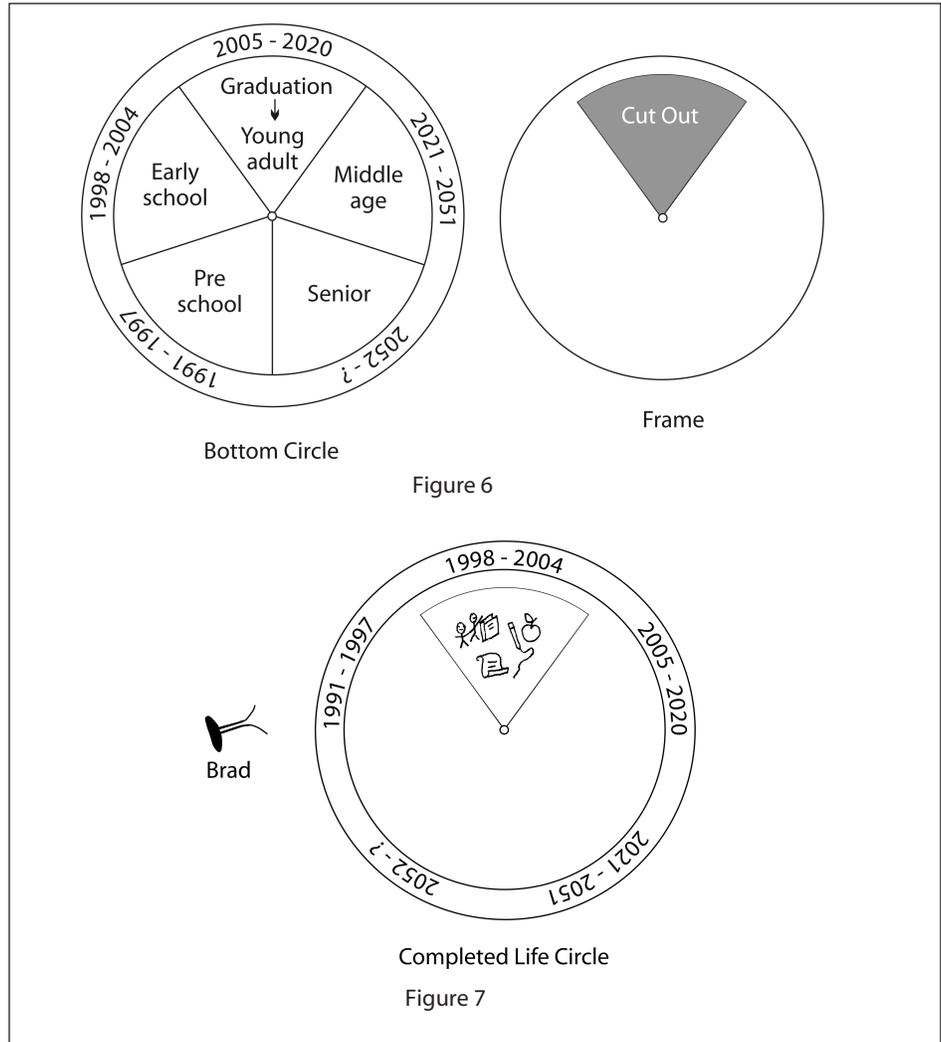
Since most young people don’t ever imagine themselves getting “old,” this project encourages them to gain insights into the whole aging process; it also helps them think about their futures as well as develop more appreciation for elders. Students are called to identify at least one situation, personal quality, or idea associated with each chunk of their lives. Doing this will require making predictions and wishes for the future. Because their predictions must be based on reality (as much as possible), students, in essence, will be making long-term goals. “Living on Mars,” for example, would not be an appropriate representation for the third chunk.

Each student is given two circles on heavy paper. Construction paper or heavy copy paper will work, but slightly heavier is even better. One circle will be about 5 cm in diameter smaller than the other. The smaller circle will have a portion marked to cut out a “window” (see Figure 6). This circle is simply a “mask,” whose purpose is to cover the entire underlying circle and reveal only what can be seen through the “window.”

The bigger circle is where the action is. Divided into fourths, this circle is clearly marked around the edge with the appropriate “time frames” (see Figure 7) and the section of circle beneath the time frame is decorated in some way to illustrate that time period, or “chunk,” of the student’s life. Students may draw, write text, or decorate using collage. Some students may wish to make each chunk completely different. For example, a student might prepare a *drawing* of a baby; show

pictures of books and school materials, as well as *text* about school; make a *collage* including a magazine picture of a man in a business suit and other images related to being a lawyer; and include a *photograph* of a grandfather reading to a small child, with a few words of a student-written *poem* about grandfathers.

The two cardboard circles are joined with *brads* so that the inner circle can be turned. Although this project *sounds* complicated, it is really quite easy and the results are exciting. Students love to turn the inner wheels of peers and thus learn more about others and their hopes and dreams.



TINY TRUE TALE

“Are you going to make a Life Circle, Ms X?” asked a small voice eagerly.

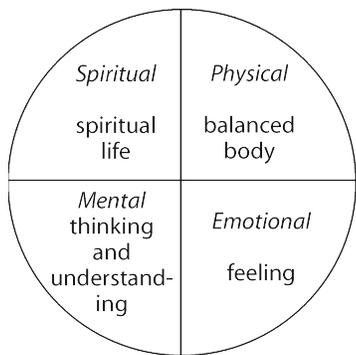
“No,” answered Ms X.

“Why not?”

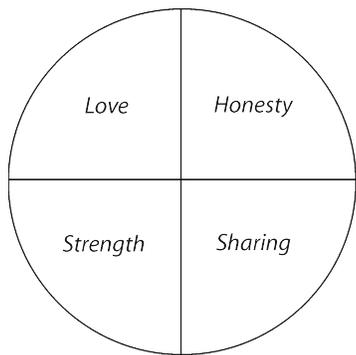
Before Ms X could reply, another small voice answered innocently and sweetly, “Because she’s so old she’d have to put a grave in her last chunk and who’d want to see that? Isn’t that right, Ms X?”

Brads come in various shapes and sizes and are available in craft stores or in some stationery or office supply stores in boxes of 20 or 30.

Be sure to engage the whole class in a discussion about Life Circles—pasts, presents, and futures—and about making appropriate goals (or wishes) for the future. Relate the Medicine Wheel, an important facet of Aboriginal culture, to the students and their lives. Be sure to point out how a circle has no beginning and no end. Discuss other things that happen in cycles, such as the life of a frog or butterfly. Discuss what has happened so far in the students' lives; then ask them to make predictions about their futures.



Medicine Wheel



Cree Natural Laws

Figure 8

Materials

- two card circles for each child
- one “brad” (a small device with a head and two arms that permits turning) per student
- magazines, scissors, and glue
- clips for the centres of the circles
- coloring materials
- white paper (for drawing and gluing to circles)
- pictures or overheads of the Medicine Wheel of the First Nations people (see Figure 8)

Steps for Teachers

1. Prepare the cardboard circles as described above.
2. Locate any information you wish to share about the Aboriginal Medicine Wheel and Circle of Life, as well as details about other obvious circles of life, such as that of a familiar plant or animal.
3. Introduce the project to the whole class and then have students break into groups.
4. Provide specific questions to discuss in groups, such as *What sorts of things have been important to you up till now? What might be important for the rest of your school lives? What will you be like as adults?*
5. Have small-group discussions about making adult goals and being elders, before letting students decorate these two chunks, as they will need time to think and talk about these areas of their lives.

Quick Check: Life Circle Wall Hangings

- Do I have a sample wheel to use as a model, even if the chunks are not decorated?
- Do students have an adequate understanding of what's involved in making future goals?

Steps for Students

1. Students cut out their circles and the windows on the smaller circles.
2. They label the time frames on the bigger circle, in the part marked for them. They then divide their bottom circles into four or more parts. Each part will be directly related to the dates that tell about it.
3. Students decide on one or more important events for their *preschool* and *now* chunks. They decorate both of these chunks in any way they want, keeping the decorations in the right parts of the circle. They may decorate directly on the bottom circle or decorate on a piece of white paper which is cut out and glued to the circle.
4. Students then think about their futures. In small groups, they discuss future plans and goals and give one another ideas about how to represent different futures.
5. Next, students talk about any seniors they know. What are some things they really like about them? Students choose something they like about elders and imagine themselves as elders with those characteristics. They consider such questions as whether they would want to have grandchildren or to be travelling.

6. Students decorate the last two chunks of their lives.
7. Finally, each of them fastens the two circles together so that the inside one turns and shows different life chunks, one chunk at a time. They include their names somewhere on the frame circles.

Dealing with Diversities

Cultural: Encourage these students to include any ideas related to their specific cultures. At the very least, a child born in another country could add the name of that country in the first chunk.

Linguistic: Encourage these students to use text in both their first language and English in the different chunks of their wheels.

Religious: Encourage these students to include facts relating to their religious beliefs in their chunks; these are an important part of their lives and this is an excellent place to include them in a school project.

Physical: Because this project involves working in fairly small spaces, it may be necessary to arrange for individual help for these students.

Gifted: Encourage these students to include more abstract illustrations and text in their chunks or to break their pages into more chunks (and change the window size accordingly). Empower them to “think metaphorically” by providing them with some samples, for example, *I will find my pot of gold by ...*

Dealing with Developmental Levels

Kindergarten to Grade 3: As noted previously, it may be necessary to have the circles and windows already cut out for younger students. In addition, stiffer circles of Bristol board are easier for them to use and if the bottom circle is white or beige colored, they will be able to work directly on that circle and bypass the cutting and gluing of additional paper.

Grades 4 to 9: The older and more capable the students are, the more chunks they can break their lives into. For instance, some students enjoy adding chunks for teen years, early adulthood, middle age, and so on.

Making Curriculum Connections and More

Language Arts: Activities include writing autobiographies, summaries of stories or expository text, and dialogues based on imagining what people were saying in a specific chunk.

Health: Students could discuss the importance of personal goals as well as the importance and value of elders in the community.

Social Studies: Here is a good opportunity to learn about the First Nations people, especially the Medicine Wheel, the Circle of Life, and sharing circles.

Science: The class could take an opportunity to learn about the life cycles of all living things in a specific ecosystem or to research topics such as metamorphosis and compost.

Art: Students could explore a variety of ways to illustrate a point visually.