

## Someone Else's Shoes

**Pillar: Positive Social Environments**

**Division III**

**Grade Level(s): 7-9**

**Core Curriculum Connections: Language Arts**

**I. Rationale:** Alienation and exclusion of newcomers or those that are '*different*' is common. However, it is not always recognized nor completely understood. It is challenging for immigrants to become accustomed to a new place and adjust to the novelty of everything around them, from language to social mores. Others need to make them feel welcome. Through empathy and compassion, and imagining themselves in the shoes of the new arrival, students reflect upon ways to make their schools and classrooms more accepting, positive, and inclusive places to be.

### II. Activity Objectives:

*The students will:*

- recognize emotions and experiences associated with being an outsider
- empathize with the situation and feelings of individuals who encounter exclusion
- relate personal experiences to situations involving exclusion and alienation
- appreciate differences as a unique and valuable part of being human
- reflect upon ways to include others, celebrate their differences, and promote positive relationships with each other.

### III. Curriculum Outcomes: Language Arts

| Outcomes:   | Grade 7   | Grade 8  | Grade 9   |
|---|---|--|---|
| <b>1.1 Discover and Explore</b><br><b>Express ideas and develop Understanding</b> | · express personal understandings of ideas and information based on prior knowledge, experiences with others and a variety of oral, print and other media texts | · revise understanding and expression of ideas by connecting new and prior knowledge and experiences                       | · explore and explain how interactions with others and with oral, print and other media texts affect personal understandings  |
| <b>1.2 Clarify and Extend</b><br><b>Consider others' ideas</b>                    | · listen and respond constructively to alternative ideas or opinions  | · acknowledge the value of others' ideas and opinions in exploring and extending personal interpretations and perspectives | integrate own perspectives and interpretations with new understandings developed through discussing and through experiencing a variety of oral, print and other media texts |
| <b>2.1 Use Strategies and</b>   | · select and focus relevant ideas from personal   | · use strategies to supplement and   | · discuss how interpretations of the  |

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| <b>Cues</b><br><b>Use prior knowledge</b>   | experiences and prior knowledge to understand new ideas and information   | extend prior knowledge and experience when interpreting new ideas and information  | same text might vary, according to the prior knowledge and experience of various readers<br>· use previous reading experiences, personal experiences and prior knowledge as a basis for reflecting on and interpreting ideas encountered in texts |
| <b>2.2 Respond to Texts</b><br><b>Experience various texts</b>                                    | · express interpretations of oral, print and other media texts in another form or genre   | · explain connections between own interpretation and information in texts, and infer how texts will influence others   | · experience oral, print and other media texts from a variety of cultural traditions and genres,<br>· compare and contrast own life situation with themes of oral, print and other media texts  |
| <b>Construct meaning from texts</b>   |   |  | · relate the themes, emotions and experiences portrayed in oral, print and other media texts to issues of personal interest or significance   |
| <b>2.3 Understand Forms, Elements and Techniques</b><br><b>Understand techniques and elements</b> | · identify the narrator's perspective, and explain how it affects the overall meaning of a text   |  |   |
| <b>3.4 Share and Review</b><br><b>Share ideas and information</b>                                 | · communicate ideas and information in a variety of oral, print and other media texts   | · communicate ideas and information in a variety of oral, print and other media texts  | · communicate ideas and information in a variety of oral, print and other media texts   |
| <b>5.1 Respect Others and Strengthen Community</b><br><b>Appreciate diversity</b>                 | · discuss how ideas, people, experiences and cultural traditions are portrayed in various oral, print and other media texts<br>· explain how differing perspectives and unique reactions expand understanding | · compare own with others' understanding of people, cultural traditions and values portrayed in oral, print and other media texts<br>· clarify and broaden perspectives and opinions, by examining the ideas of others | · take responsibility for developing and sharing oral, print and other media texts and for responding respectfully to the texts of others   |
| <b>Use language to show respect</b>   | · demonstrate respect for diverse ideas, cultures and traditions portrayed in oral, print and other media texts   | · use inclusive language and actions that demonstrate respect for people of different races, cultures, genders, ages and abilities   | · create or use oral, print and other media texts in ways that are respectful of people, opinions, communities and cultures   |

#### IV. Materials:

- copies of the poem, *"You Have to Live in Somebody Else's Country to Understand"*

## V. Procedure:

*Preparation:* Invite an adult or student literate in a second language who will read the poem in his or her language to the class. Most students should not be familiar with the language. If there are several who do speak the language, it will offer an interesting contrast to the majority's interaction with the reading.

1. Tell the class that a guest speaker has volunteered to read them the poem "You Have to Live in Somebody Else's Country to Understand," written in 1984 by Noy Chou, a ninth-grade student from a high school in suburban Boston who was born in Cambodia. Have the reader introduce him or herself in the second language. Expect students to express discomfort, surprise, confusion, etc.
2. Request that students close their eyes as they listen to the poem to remain free of distractions. Remind them to listen without talking. Invite the guest to read.
3. After the poem is read, instruct the guest to give students these instructions in the second language: "Please take out a piece of paper and complete this journal assignment in five minutes. Describe a time when you felt like an outsider, or when someone judged you without knowing you and/or being aware of your circumstances."
4. Repeat the instructions in English, indicating that this is for the benefit of those who are non-native speakers of the guest's second language.
5. Ask students to describe their reactions during the first reading of the poem. Cluster student responses as they speak. Sample discussion questions include:
  - How did you feel when you did not understand the language?
  - What did you want to do when the reader began to recite in a language with which you were unfamiliar?
  - Were you able to pick up on any aspect of the poem—cadence, emotion—despite not knowing the language?
  - For those who might have understood the language, how did the poem make you feel?
  - What was your thought about classmates who could not understand the poem? How might you have helped them?
  - How might the teacher and the reader have helped you to understand the poem?

6. Have students review the clustered responses. Ask them to consider more broadly how the feelings they experienced relate to those of new immigrants. Based on this activity, what are some of the issues immigrants face when they arrive somewhere new? S/he might be feeling like an outsider? If the guest has remained, students can engage in discussion with him or her about personal immigrant experiences, if the speaker is a foreign-born Canadian.

7. Hand out copies of the poem in English. Have either the guest or you read it aloud or have students read it. Have students analyze and discuss the poem. Ask them to review it again to select phrases, lines, or passages that strike them. Ask students to write about a corresponding personal experience that reflects the essence of the selected sections. Allow five to ten minutes for this activity. Invite students to share their thoughts.

8. Have students relate their experiences to those of immigrants. Have each student write a journal entry that includes their personal reactions, feelings, and responses to the following prompts:

- Within your school, what groups and individuals are treated like outsiders?
- What are the possible results or consequences when people feel like outsiders in their surroundings?
- What did you learn from this experience and the poem that might help you to better understand the feelings of outsiders in the future?
- How might you act differently toward someone when you recognize that s/he might be feeling excluded or like an outsider?

# **"You Have to Live in Somebody Else's Country to Understand"**

**by Noy Chou**

What is it like to be an outsider?

What is it like to sit in the class where everyone has blond hair and you have black hair?

What is it like when the teacher says, "Whoever wasn't born here raise your hand."

And you are the only one.

Then, when you raise your hand, everybody looks at you and makes fun of you.

You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.

What is it like when the teacher treats you like you've been here all your life?

What is it like when the teacher speaks too fast and you are the only one who can't understand what he or she is saying, and you try to tell him or her to slow down.

Then when you do, everybody says, "If you don't understand, go to a lower class or get lost."

You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.

What is it like when you are an opposite?

When you wear the clothes of your country and they think you are crazy to wear these clothes and you think they are pretty.

You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.

What is it like when you are always a loser.

What is it like when somebody bothers you when you do nothing to them?

You tell them to stop but they tell you that they didn't do anything to you.

Then, when they keep doing it until you can't stand it any longer, you go up to the teacher and tell him or her to tell them to stop bothering you.

They say that they didn't do anything to bother you.

Then the teacher asks the person sitting next to you.

He says, "Yes, she didn't do anything to her" and you have no witness to turn to.

So the teacher thinks you are a liar.

You have to live in somebody else's country to understand.

What is it like when you try to talk and you don't pronounce the words right?

They don't understand you.

They laugh at you but you don't know that they are laughing at you, and you start to laugh with them.

They say, "Are you crazy, laughing at yourself? Go get lost, girl."

You have to live in somebody else's country without a language to understand.

What is it like when you walk in the street and everybody turns around to look at you and you don't know that they are looking at you.

Then, when you find out, you want to hide your face but you don't know where to hide because they are everywhere.

You have to live in somebody else's country to feel it.