



Letter to Teachers

Lesson 1, Counselor Resource

Dear Colleague:

So you're off and running today with Lesson 1! In many ways this lesson is the cornerstone of the curriculum. The kids are learning about the significance of norms in every day behavior. The term "social contract" is introduced and they are asked to remember and identify real life situations and scenarios where "social contracts" now exist.

I think I'd start by identifying some classroom norms that you all follow and abide by. Frequently these norms have occurred without any conversation, teaching or verbal agreement. Behaviors just evolved. Brainstorm some of your classroom norms that are widely agreed upon. (i.e. – use of bathroom passes, pencil sharpening, etc.) You could stretch this concept of social contracts into other areas of the school, their community or even their home. This would lead nicely into the two important concepts of a social contract:

- Respect for others
- Taking responsibility for behavior

This is going to segue quite naturally to the reason why appropriate and standardized social contracts never got completely settled in the cyber communication world. You'll probably also have a chance to explore the sense of entitlement that they feel about their "right" to have cell phones, MySpace, etc. You might ask, "Have any of you ever been in trouble with your parents for overuse of minutes (texting or talking) on your cell phone?" I'm just guessing that there will be many hands that will rise up; almost every family has had a "surprise" cell phone bill at one time or another. Ideally, that will take you logically to the brainstorming of a family social contract.

The student works that follow are a nice combination of individual and small group activities that keep them focused. There's enough movement, guided discussion and student work to meet various learning styles and thinking modes. The first writing assignment asks students to develop their own code of social responsibility relating to cyber communications. It asks that they consider the following attributes:

- Respect
- Honesty
- Privacy
- Kindness

These words guide the students in the creation of their own online social contract. Sharing with classmates and parents is recommended. Words and concepts such as empathy and the golden rule also weave into the discussion and set them up for the final writing activity. We're optimistic that the kids will be challenged and motivated by a topic that they have such personal experience with. There's a great deal of rich subject matter to delve into those topics as well.

I hope that you have some fun with this and listen to them with an open mind. I've learned that adolescents today frequently have a completely different world view than we do. They aren't always receptive to us putting our norms and values upon them – rather you'll need to listen to them and seek to understand their perspectives, their filters and their experiences. It's an adventure and a process.

Cheers!

Chris