



THE OJAI FOUNDATION'S
Council In Schools

Inspiring engaged, compassionate school communities

A Council on Cruelty and Kindness

Grades K–12

Summary

This council helps us recognize that we all have the capacity for both cruelty and kindness. Values and virtues are best discovered through storytelling and hearing the stories of others, rather than by “teaching” values like kindness or respect. As Joe Provisor says, “Council is the process whereby values are formed.”

Note: This council is offered when trust has grown in the circle, when issues arise in your community, or when the themes are relevant to current events or curriculum. It is not recommended for beginning programs where the topic may feel unsafe. Nor is this intended as a lesson on behavior, but rather as an opportunity to derive wisdom from events we have experienced.

Objectives

- To reflect on choices about how we treat others and ourselves
- To develop empathy, understanding, compassion, forgiveness

Materials

Each Kindness by Jacqueline Woodson (picture book)

Note: We suggest this picture book because even older students can appreciate a read-aloud, and reading together sets a tone of intimacy and sharing. Written stories can help students of many ages recognize their own stories and develop their appreciation of literature. Share texts either immediately before the council or in advance – inviting students to use the intervening time to consider what stories they themselves may have. These suggestions apply to any piece of text you may choose to help set context for your council. You could also use texts from your history or social studies curriculum.

Set context for a council on cruelty and kindness

Throughout our entire lives we will be dealing with the way we are treated and the way we treat others. Each of us is capable of a range of behavior, including both cruelty and kindness.

Read

Each Kindness by Jacqueline Woodson

Ask students the following: (Ask for a show of hands after each question.)

- How many of you have ever had someone be mean to you, or seen someone being mean?
- How many of you have ever been mean to someone else?
- How many of you have had someone be kind to you, or have witnessed an act of kindness?
- How many of you have ever done something kind for someone else?

Open Council

Story Round One

Tell a story about a time when you were mean to someone, or someone was mean to you. Leave out names.

Witness Round One

What stayed with you from what you heard?

Story Round Two

Tell a story about a time when you were kind to someone, or someone was kind to you. Leave out names.

Witness Round Two

What stayed with you from what you heard (or what are you taking away)?

Note: If you wish, you might mention that we have a choice, and if we are going to build a happier, more peaceful school and world, we can choose to include rather than exclude, to treat others as we would wish to be treated, etc. Stay away from making this an explicit lesson on behavior. Usually the stories speak for themselves.

Intention Setting (Optional)

One thing I will do to create more kindness and inclusion at our school is...

Close Council

We encourage you to amend this plan in any ways that feel natural to you.

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