

Say “Hey” Your Way!

*“When a child walks in the room, your child or anybody else’s child, do your eyes light up?
That’s what they’re looking for.” ~Toni Morrison*

Overview

Middle school students enter our classrooms with a wide range of backgrounds, needs, and feelings. Ultimately, each of them strives to be recognized for who they are. They want to know they are seen and valuable. By greeting each individual student at the door each day as they enter class, teachers demonstrate a respectful, professional, and welcoming nature that adds to the foundation of a classroom community.

Grades

6-8

Activity Type

Partner

Materials

None

Duration

A few seconds per student

Procedure

1. Beginning on the very first day of school, wait for your students by your classroom door and individually welcome each person with a smile and a greeting as they enter. Include a handshake, a high-five, a fist-bump, a pat on the back, or some other special interaction. Once you have learned your students name, use their name as you greet them. This moment ensures you have recognized and had a positive interaction with each and every student that you teach. It also makes students feel welcome and important to the classroom community. Not to mention, they are learning an important social skill. While students may be unaccustomed to this at first, they will grow to expect and enjoy this interaction.
2. As you greet students at your door on the first day of school, instruct students to take their assigned seat and immediately follow a set of instructions written or projected in the front of the room. Beyond the importance of always getting students started on work right away, a warm-up assignment also frees you to have the time to welcome each child. By modeling and later explaining this, beginning on the very first day of school, students will learn the expected procedure for entering class. (See the Consortium’s “The First Day of School-Sample Lesson Plan.”)
3. At some point during the first day of class, refer to the way they were greeted as they entered class and explain to your students that this will take place each day. Tell them that each of them is important to you and you want to ensure they feel welcomed into the classroom community. Not to mention, learning to greet others in a warm and welcoming way is an important mature and social skill to have – often, this is when first impressions are made.
4. As the school year progresses, this few seconds of greeting time with each student will ensure time for checking in or furthering relationships:
 - Hey Mario! You really had a great essay yesterday. Awesome work.

- Morning, Jasmine. Is your grandmother feeling better?
 - Hey there Kiara. I saw you helped clean up the lunch tables today. That was really nice of you – thanks!
 - It's good to see you back in school today, Jacob. We really missed you yesterday.
 - Jose, are you alright today? You seem a bit down.
 - How are you today, Ashley? I know we had a disagreement yesterday, but I want you to know again that I really appreciate you taking responsibility for your actions.
5. Start this process on the very first day of class and make it a habit every single day. While a simple gesture that only takes a few minutes, the results make a big difference in building a classroom community.

Teacher Tips

- *What if I have something that comes up, like a spontaneous parent visit, or I really need a few minutes to get an activity set up? Or, what if I am absent and a substitute is in charge of the class?*
If you are absolutely unable to be at the door on a particular day, ask a student to fill in for you as the greeter. When pointing out to students that they can expect to have you greet them by the door each day, also let them know to expect that occasionally, you may be unavailable, and thus will ask one of them to step in for you. Students need to be prepared to greet a fellow classmate filling in for the teacher in the same way they would greet the teacher. Likewise, if you have a substitute, leave instructions for him or her on how to greet the students, or assign a student greeter to be at the door in your absence and let the sub know to expect this in the plans you leave for him/her.
- *My students have a warm-up when they enter the room and it's important that I am circulating around the room while they are working. How can I greet them but still monitor the progress of those who have already begun their work?*
Having an opening assignment or warm-up is a perfect idea – it means that students are learning that as soon as they hit your classroom, they are in work mode. If you do not have a vantage point that enables you to greet students and keep an eye on those working, an option is to train your students to line up quietly outside of your classroom door and wait to enter. Once you are at the door, welcome them in as described. Doing this will ensure most are entering at the same time and beginning their work at the same time, keeping you from having to be in two separate places at once. That said, if your students have encompassed the expectation of coming in and getting straight to work, they shouldn't need your eyes on them to do so, freeing you to be by your door for a few minutes.
- *I have a student who seems uncomfortable with the handshake.*
Some students may be a bit confused at first if they are not used to being greeted in this way (or greeted at all for that matter.) If you have a student who is uncomfortable with any type of physical greeting, do not force the issue or make a big deal of it. Give them a welcoming smile and a wave instead. You might want to pull them aside privately at some point (i.e. during lunch) and ask if there is any particular reason they don't like to shake hands. Sometimes, the issue could be cultural, so it's important to listen to the student. Don't make a big deal out of it. If the student doesn't have a particular reason to share, simply remind them why you feel it's important and tell them that once they are comfortable with a physical greeting, they can initiate it at the door with you. Until then, a smile and a wave will suffice.
- *Isn't this just ONE MORE THING to worry about doing each day? Is this REALLY going to make a difference?*
Though a small and fast thing, this is indeed "one more thing" - *but it's one more thing that is going to make other things easier for you.* By spending a few minutes of your time greeting students – in actuality an incredibly simple thing to do – it sets the foundation for a cooperative, classroom community. Each of your students will know that they were recognized and respected that day; someone saw them and smiled at them and welcomed them. Don't underestimate what this means in an environment where students often feel invisible. Try it! Then, extend it! When you pass your student in the hall, make eye contact, smile, and address them by name. Extend it even more...Try to attend the arts events, sporting events, etc. that your

students are participating in. Let them see you there and congratulate them on their hard work after the game or the following day in class when you greet them.

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“There used to be a time when I would slump down at my desk once all the students had left for the day and wonder, ‘Did I speak to any one of them as an *individual* today?’ I was so caught up in the whirlwind of the day-to-day, and so focused on communicating the content of my lessons, that I was often unsure if I had interacted one-on-one with any student beyond my time spent in front of the whole class. Waiting for my students by my door each period, shaking their hands and saying hello ensures I have interacted with each and every student every single day. I’ve let them know ‘You are welcome here – you are a person that is important to me and to this class.’ The difference this simple change made was enormous. I was able to build relationships with each of my students. We liked each other more and thus learning became easier. I may have had papers to grade or an activity to set up as students wandered in, but I let those be and devoted those minutes entirely to the individual personalities entering.”

~8th Grade Teacher