

## The Web of My Classroom Community

*Most of us have had the experience of touching a spider web, feeling its resiliency, noticing how slight pressure in one area jiggles the entire web. If a web breaks and needs repair, the spider doesn't cut out a piece, terminate it, or tear the entire web apart and reorganize it. She reweaves it, using the silken relationships that are already there, creating stronger connections across the weakened spaces. The most profound strategy for changing a living network comes from biology. If a system is in trouble, it can be restored by connecting it to more of itself. ~ Meg Wheatley*

### Overview

Part of being an active, responsible member of the classroom community is recognizing that each individual's actions affect the classroom as a whole. Thus, students who are active, engaged and respectful have a positive effect on those around them and those who are apathetic can have a negative effect. In this activity, students create a "web" to explore the interconnectedness of students within the same classroom community and how they all have an impact on one another.

### Grades

6-8

### Activity Type

Whole group/class

### Materials

- Image of Stevie, attached
- "Stevie's First Day," story attached
- Yarn

### Duration

30 minutes

### Procedure

1. Have all students sit in a circle, project the attached image of "Stevie," and tell students that you are going to read them a short story about this little boy and his first day at a new school. Tell the students you simply want them to relax and listen while you read (see the attached "Stevie's First Day.")
2. After finishing the story, allow students to share their initial thoughts or feelings regarding the story. It is likely that students will feel bad for Stevie, and upset at the way he was treated. Once students have expended their thoughts/feelings regarding the story, tell the students you want them to think about how they could make things better for Stevie if they were present in this story. Instruct students to imagine they are part of Stevie's classroom community for a moment (even though he is much younger) and to brainstorm possible positive actions they could take to assist him, how they could be better community members than the kids in the story, and/or how they could make his time in school more enjoyable. (Answers can range from "I could sit with him on the bus" to "I could stand up to the kids who were being mean to him and try to make them see how their actions are hurtful.")

3. With a ball of yarn in hand, tell students you will share your idea first and ask everyone to stand. Holding the end of the yarn and unraveling some of its length, share an example thought, such as: “If I were able to help Stevie, I would offer to be his friend at lunch time, invite him to sit with me, and let him share my lunch.” After sharing your example, throw the ball of yarn to someone else in the circle while holding on to the end. Explain to students that once they receive the yarn, they will hold onto a piece, pull it tight, and share their own idea of how they could help or be a better community member to Stevie. They will then repeat the process, holding their piece, unraveling a bit of yarn, and throwing it to another student across the circle. As this process repeats, a web will start to form in the center of the circle.
4. Once all students are finished, have them look at the web they’ve created. Ask them:
  - How would you describe the ideas we shared? (i.e., they are all positive, kind, good natured, etc.)
  - What do you notice about this web that we have created? (You are looking for a student to point out that they are all part of it, they are all holding it together, they are connected, etc.)
  - What has connected us all in this web? (ideas for kind actions, thoughts on how to be better community members, etc.)
  - If Stevie were part of our community web, rather than part of the environment of the story, how would his day have been different?
  - You’ve already said that we are all connected by this web. How are we also all connected just by being students of the same classroom and school?
  - Why is it important for us to take care of one another, just like we wanted to take care of young Stevie?
  - Why is it important that no one in our web is treated like Stevie was, or is made to feel like Stevie felt?
  - Can one person make a difference to our web, or change our web in any way? Explain.
5. As students discuss whether or not the actions of one person can make a difference, tug on your yarn and ask students across the circle if they felt it. Further discuss:
  - What just happened? How did my actions affect the web and each of you?
  - (Drop your hold on the yarn, which will create a difference in the look of the web.) What just happened? Let’s say I stop contributing to our classroom, or that I treat someone unfairly. How does it affect every single one of us?
  - How do we keep our community (or our web) strong?
  - As citizens of this classroom community, what are our responsibilities to each other and the community at large?
6. Explain to students that they are all part of this classroom community - this web. One of the ways they can keep it strong is to build stronger relationships as a group. To help a community become healthier, we must connect it to more of itself. This involves everyone following community expectations, looking out for one another, and supporting one another. (Teachers may want to use this closing as an opportunity to review classroom expectations as well.)

### **Culminating Activities**

- Have students design bumper stickers that encourage helping others, generosity, anti-bullying, or other themes brought up throughout the web activity.
- Do this activity by describing an actual problem in your community; once students brainstorm ways they can contribute and assist in a positive way, have them put those ideas into action and volunteer

Image of "Stevie"



## Stevie's First Day

It was Stevie's first day at his new school, and he was nervous. He was on the small side for a second grader, his voice was usually a little shaky when he first spoke to someone, and even though he was young, he had enough years on him to understand that his clothes and shoes weren't the nicest. But, even though it seemed like his heart had been pounding and his stomach in knots for weeks just thinking about going to his new school, he was also excited.

"Maybe I'll meet new friends," he thought.

"I bet someone will want to play kickball after school."

"I hope my teacher likes me. I hope they have pizza for lunch!"

Stevie was so excited in fact, that he spent two whole days riffling through his bags of clothes in order to select the best pair of pants and shirt he could match together. He managed to find a pair of jeans that may have been a little faded, but they didn't have any holes in the knees. After spending an hour with some paper towels, water, and soap, he even managed to get most of the scuff marks off his sneakers. If he scrunched up his feet in the shoes enough, you couldn't even see his growing toes trying to poke through the worn leather at the tip. All in all, Stevie was as ready and as hopeful as he could be about his first day in his new second grade class.

The morning of his first day, he had to wake up at 4:30 in the morning. He had a 25 minute walk to the bus stop and because where he was living was so far away from the school, he had to catch the bus at 5:30 AM. Stevie didn't complain though – he was there, all by himself at the stop, and couldn't have been happier when he saw that big yellow bus pull up to let him on. Stevie was the first person on the bus, so he had his choice of seats. He sat in a middle seat, waiting in nervous anticipation for the driver to reach the next stop. When he finally did, three boys got on. They were a little rowdy; the driver even had to tell them to quiet down as they got on. Stevie looked up and smiled as he saw the first boy coming down the aisle toward him. It was time to meet his first friends!

But, as the boys reached the middle of the bus where Stevie sat, they continued to pass right by him. Stevie heard them say to one another, "Who is that?" Another boy responded, "No clue, but he looks like a loser to me." The boys snickered as they took seats in the very back.

Stevie thought they were older than him, probably fifth grade. Maybe he'd have better luck with the kids his age.

But, as the bus filled up, the seat beside Stevie did not. Each kid that got on the bus took one look at Stevie and passed him by. Some it seemed didn't even look at him at all. Amidst noise, chatter and laughing, Stevie rode all the way to school feeling invisible.

Once the bus arrived at school, a teacher was waiting to hurry them into the building and to their classrooms. Stevie got so excited that he dropped the paper bag carrying the lunch he had put together for himself the night before. In the hustle, the boy behind him stepped on it, crushing the package of peanut butter crackers inside. Stevie, who hadn't had breakfast, was already hungry and

became very upset. He yelled out, "You stepped on my lunch!" This caught the attention of the teacher, who then scolded Stevie. "You there! You are holding up the line! Keep it moving, you don't want to start your first day here off on the wrong foot!"

The boy who had stepped on Stevie's crackers snickered, and Stevie worked hard to hold back the tear forming in the corner of his eye.

Once in his classroom, the teacher smiled at him and announced to the class, "Everyone, this is Stevie. He's new here, and I want you all to make him feel welcome." Stevie brimmed with excitement. She seemed nice! And she was pretty. She pointed to an empty desk towards the middle of the room, and he hurried over to take his seat – he wanted to make a good first impression. There, on the desk, Stevie found his name, which even had a big smiley face next to it. Maybe this would be a great day after all.

While the teacher walked around making sure everyone was working on their morning assignment, the girl sitting in the desk beside Stevie raised her hand. "Mrs. Jeffries? Can you please move me? Something smells really BAD." As the other students started to snicker, Stevie realized that the girl was pointing at him.

The teacher looked very mad. "Class! This is no way to behave. Misty, that was very rude!" Stevie wondered if the teacher was mad at him. He hasn't meant to do anything wrong, and he really thought he'd done the best he could getting his clothes clean last night. He lowered his head to his desk, but this time, he couldn't hold back the tears. As his shoulders started to shake, he heard someone near him say "cry baby."

The teacher came over and put her hand on his shoulder. "Stevie??

He couldn't bear to look up. It was his first day, he hadn't made one friend, and already he guessed the teacher didn't like him."

"Stevie? Why don't you come with me?"

As he got up, one of the same boys from his bus pushed his book bag out into the aisle before Stevie noticed, making him trip and fall to the floor. As Stevie lay there, he squeezed his eyes shut and wished that he could just disappear into the floor. He didn't have any idea how he'd be able to get up, face his classmates, or his pretty teacher.