

# **Diversity Activities**

**Connecting Your Students**

**Michael James**

**Principal**

**Jefferson Jr./Sr. High School**

**Edgewater, CO**

**[mijames@jeffco.k12.co.us](mailto:mijames@jeffco.k12.co.us)**

**303-982-6096**

## Diversity Activities

1. The Wall
2. Squat Game
3. Cross the Line/Challenge Day
4. Touch Someone Who
5. I AM POEM
6. Voices
7. Stand Up

### Some songs to consider using:

- "Finding Neverland"
- "I Stand" Idina Menzel
- "Color Blind" Counting Crows
- "Calling All Angels," Several Versions
- "Why" Annie Lennox
- Chariots of Fire Theme
- "That I Would Be Good" Alanis Morissette
- "For Good" Wicked

# The Wall

Topics for your boxes:

- |                    |               |                  |
|--------------------|---------------|------------------|
| * White            | * Jewish      | * Teenagers      |
| * African-American | * Women       | * Elderly People |
| * Hispanics        | * Men         | * Disabilities   |
| * Asians           | * Class ranks | * GLBT           |

1. Write down all stereotypes.....no matter what!
2. Have one student from each group read all the stereotypes out loud, stacking each box one by one into a 3x4 wall.
3. After they are all stacked, sit there for awhile and let it sink in. Then ask them what they want to do with the wall.
4. They are allowed to knock the wall down, but only one by one, slowly.
5. Have kids raise their hands and have each kid that wants to take one down, must do so by saying why they want to justify taking it off the wall. It may be personal to them or simply upset, whatever the reason, let them know, no one will judge what they say or bring it out of this group.

The reason why this activity is called "The Wall" is because it stacks up all the stereotypes we face daily against all kinds of people. It brings to light a separation amongst our society that blocks us from all having respect among each other. Please remember that it is not always because people "suck" that they discriminate against people, but it is also ignorance, peers, and unawareness. We can't necessarily use violence to take down this wall, but we can start by respecting others, noticing stereotypes, and speaking up about them. Becoming aware is one of the most important steps to actually not being prejudiced, racist, or discriminative toward any individual. This activity is something that can be remembered forever, and will impact those deeply who understand it's precious message.

## If the World Were a Village of 100 People

If we could reduce the world's population to a village of precisely 100 people, with all existing human ratios remaining the same, the demographics would look something like this:

The village would have 60 Asians, 14 Africans, 12 Europeans, 8 Latin Americans, 5 from the USA and Canada, and 1 from the South Pacific

51 would be male, 49 would be female

82 would be non-white; 18 white

67 would be non-Christian; 33 would be Christian

80 would live in substandard housing

67 would be unable to read

50 would be malnourished and 1 dying of starvation

33 would be without access to a safe water supply

39 would lack access to improved sanitation

24 would not have any electricity (And of the 76 that do have electricity, most would only use it for light at night.)

7 people would have access to the Internet

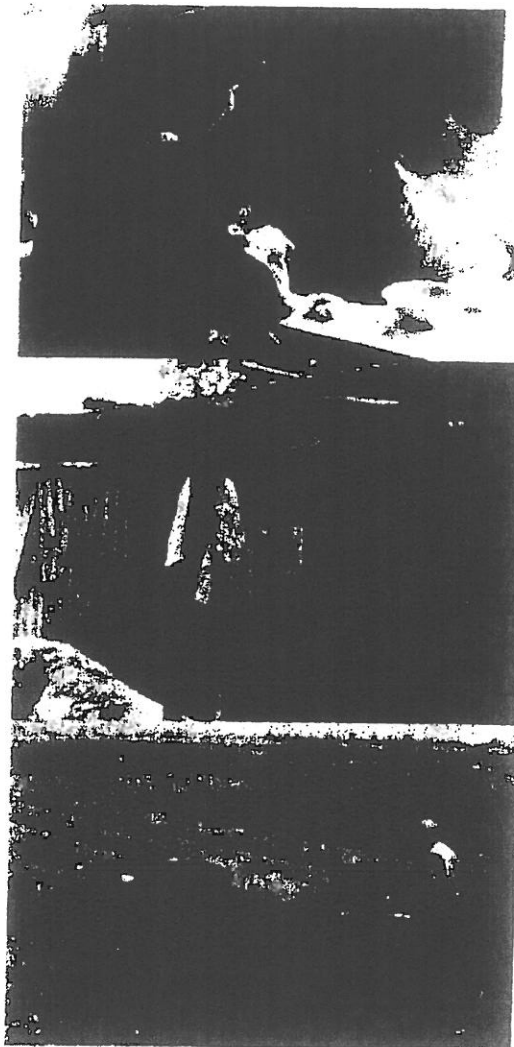
1 would have a college education

1 would have HIV

2 would be near birth; 1 near death

5 would control 32% of the entire world's wealth; all 5 would be US citizens

33 would be receiving --and attempting to live on-- only 3% of the income of "the village"



No amount is too small to help some of those more unfortunate ones of our Global Village.

If you would like to make a donation for projects supported by Family Care Foundation, click here.

## SQUAT GAME

Try to empty your head. Forget about the stresses of your life. Forget about any problems that you might have carried with you into the room for just a few moments. Forget about all the millions of little things you have to do before you go to sleep tonight. Allow yourself to relax. Take a deep breath if you need to.

(Pause here)

Now, try to think about something pleasant. Think about your education and the vast amount of possibilities you have to become a doctor, an engineer, a lawyer, a social worker, or a teacher. What will you do when you leave school? What will life be like for you? Will you go to college? Will you have a big house or a small one? What kind of car will you drive? Will you make a lot of money, or will you work for minimum wage? Where will you be? What will you do?

Choices...decisions. Where will you go for vacation? Will you go with friends? With your family? Think of your day so far. Think for just one moment about what you have eaten. Did you have breakfast? What will/did you have for lunch? For dinner? Did you get what your body needs? Could you eat a well-balanced meal if you chose to?

Whether you realize it or not, you are probably better off than your peers around you. You may not know them-or they could be one of your best friends-but many of your peers are yearning to be heard-yearning for a little more from life. A huge number of high school kids go to school hungry every day in and out. They are not only starving for food but for nourishment- maybe the simple affection of a peer-maybe a smile- acknowledging that they are actually there. They don't have many choices. They'll never go to college- no money- no desire. They'll never face your decisions. If they die, people like you may not even be affected by the loss. The quality of life is not even an issue when a person is trying to survive merely until tomorrow. One more day, still hoping that someone will talk to them in the hallway, invite them to a football game or a study session.

Who are these invisible kids in your schools just waiting to be touched by your presence, included, invited, accepted by their peers. Can you imagine the emotional pain that they must endure day in and out?

It hurts in the very center of their being. It hurts mentally and physically. They feel it in their legs when they cramp up because they do not get enough of the right food and support, and it is painful. And they wonder if it will ever end. Sometimes they see people who have no pain. They see people who stand free and strong but who are completely blind to what is happening around them. They cannot see the suffering and the pain. They are ignorant to what is happening around them. These people are blind but the others see. They continue to wonder if the pain will ever stop. If this life will ever end...

Some of you have already been touched. You have experienced the presence of a hand that has eliminated your pain. Some of you have been touched twice. You are not only out of pain, but you are fully aware with your eyes open. You see, without question, those who are in pain. You begin to slowly realize how important a single touch can be. You realize the power that a single touch can have. With the single touch, you can relieve the pain of one who suffers, and open the eyes of one who is blind.

And you realize the freedom you have to move, to choose. You are free to touch someone, and we are all free to touch the hungry people of the world and bring them from darkness into light.

You may now make yourself more comfortable.

---

Processing questions:

1. There are three levels to this activity. Explain what these levels are and how they relate to the high school experience.

- Level 1 – Squatting and in pain the entire time. Students who are in pain all the time could care less about what is going on in their classes, friendships, families, in life in general. These students have a hard time fitting in and truly need to be helped.
- Level 2 – Standing with your eyes closed. These students are oblivious to everything going on around them. They feel no pain but find it difficult to realize that others are in pain because of their lack of attention or concern. They are blind to what is going on around them or don't have the desire to make a difference and change what is wrong.
- Level 3 – Standing, eyes open, and able to touch one person. These students are the ones who are not afraid to take that step and make a difference. The question is, however, who do they choose to help? Their own friends perhaps, or do they help the ones that are in the greatest amount of pain?

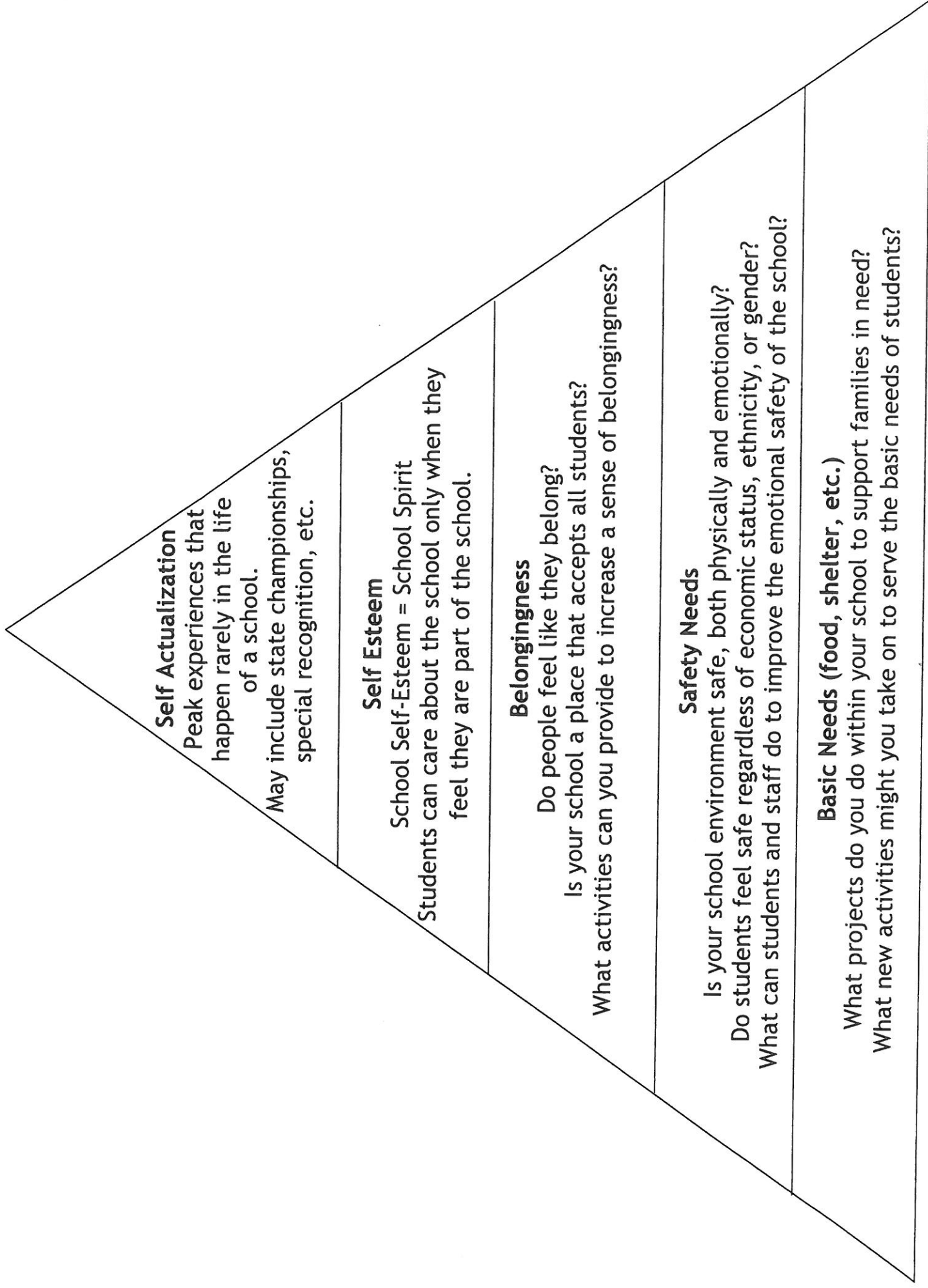
2. What level do you personally belong to? (Confidentiality should be mentioned as a result of this question).

3. Draw Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Chart on the board: Discuss the following points as you write the key words in each part of the pyramid:

- A school's climate is directly related to the needs that are met for its students.
- **Basic Needs** must be met first. Students must feel that they have a support system in school if families are struggling at home. The canned food drive is one example of an activity that students can do to support families in need.
- **Safety Needs** must be considered next. Do you feel safe at your school? Do you believe that students feel safe regardless of economic status, ethnicity, or gender? What can you do at your school to improve the emotional safety of your students?
- Next, all students must feel that they **belong**. How many of you feel like you belong to something here at school? If not, what have you done to personally try and get involved? Do you believe that your school is a place where students feel accepted and respected?
- Next in the pyramid are the **esteem needs**. Students can only care about a school when they are a part of it. Positive School Self Esteem = School Spirit. What is something that you have done lately that made you feel a part of your school?
- The final level in the pyramid is self actualization. When all other levels are met, a school can claim itself to be a dignified school of character. The end result is a feeling of deep school pride. How many of you can honestly say that you have pride in your school?

4. What can we do as a school to help our own?

# SCHOOL CLIMATE AND MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS



## Cross the Line

Cross your hands like this....

How many of you have your left thumb on top? Right?

This is a habit at the simplest level. Every time you have crossed your hands since you were little, you did it, most likely, in the same way. Is there anything wrong with this habit, not so much.

How many habits do we have in our life?

Habits are the things that we repeat every day without even noticing. Some of the habits can leave us trapped inside a box – this box symbolizes our comfort zones.

Habits force ourselves to stay in the box – force us to shy away from venturing out of our comfort zones.

The activity we are about to do encourages you to step out of your box for a deeper understanding of our connections.

Right now I want you all to close your eyes. I want you to pause for a minute and think to yourselves. What is it really like to be you? What do you hide behind? What do you have to do, who do you have to be to get people to notice you? How many jokes do you have to tell to get a laugh?

Maybe there is someone special in your life right now, someone that you love – and for some reason this person just isn't there anymore.

What is it really like to be you? Go ahead and open your eyes.

Today, the goal of this activity, Cross the Line, is to understand and appreciate the connections that exist between our Northglenn staff members and the students that we serve.

The way this activity works is that we are going to call out different groupings. If a grouping we call out pertains to you, you will cross the line as far as can and turn around to face the larger group. Then we want you to take a deep breath and think about what it feels like to have crossed the line. Every time you cross the line you are going to be a part of a group with less privilege, less power, and sometimes abused physically or mentally because of who you are.

This is the international sign for "I love you." I would like you to use this sign towards those that have crossed the line in order to show your support.



Cross the Line if: (Notice that you are not alone – there are other people that know what this feels like....)

1. You were ever ignored, served last, or watched suspiciously in a store because you were a young person.
2. You have ever felt your physical safety threatened at school.
3. You were ever yelled at, commented upon, whistled at, touched, or harassed in a public place.
4. You have ever been made to feel ashamed or humiliated by a teacher or schoolmate.
5. You ever heard degrading jokes, comments, or put-downs about women, people of color, Jews, people with disabilities, or gays and lesbians made in your presence.
6. You have ever been hit by an adult or peer.
7. You ever drank, took other drugs, overate, or did something risky or unsafe in order to cover your feelings or hide the pain.
8. You were teased or hurt for wearing glasses, braces, a hearing aide, or for the way that you talked or the clothes that you wore.
9. You ever were yelled at, screamed at, put down by someone on a regular basis. (If you crossed, you know what it is like to be hurt all the time.)
10. You came from a divorced, separated, or single parent home.
11. You were hurt or judged because of the color of your skin.
12. You were teased or hurt because someone thought you were fat.
13. You, your brother, or your sister, have ever physically or emotionally hurt one another, beat each other up, call each other names, or made life harder for each other. (What if your brother or sister wasn't going to be here tomorrow? Is there something you would want to say to them today, like I love you? I forgive you? I'm sorry?)
14. You come from a family where alcohol or other drugs have ever been a problem.
15. You have an immediate family member or close friend that has died. (When someone we love dies, we're supposed to get over it real fast. Grieving is a process- it takes time. Some days are easy and some days are hard.)
16. You have ever felt alone or afraid. (If people feel lonely, it is not because there aren't enough people. It is because there is not enough connection between us.)

When did we learn to judge each other in life? When did we become so mean?

Today we want you to see that you are never really alone.

Students – there are teachers here that understand your emotion and want to support your pain.

Teachers, there are students that need your guidance and understanding.

Together as the community of Northglenn High School, we can each reach out to not only each other in this room, but to the 1,700 students that will enter on Monday. One person can make an incredible difference in the life of another – and teachers and student leaders – every one of us must be the catalyst in supporting each other and our peers. It is crucial and the right thing to do!

## Challenge Day

1. Where are we right now as a group? What has happened so far on this retreat? How do you feel differently now compared to when we arrived yesterday?

Cross your hands like this? How many of you have your left thumb on top? Right?

This is a habit – every time you have crossed your hands since you were little, you did in the same way.

How many habits do we have in our life?

Habits are the things that we repeat every day without even noticing.

If you repeat your habits every day without even noticing, you're going to wind up in this box.

This box is called our comfort zone – and this evening there are going to be people in this room that step outside of their comfort zone.

---

Small circles

Right now I want you to close your eyes. I want you to pause for a minute and I want you to think to yourselves. What is it really like to be you? What do you hide behind? What do you have to do, who do you have to be to get people to notice you? How many jokes do you have to tell?

Maybe there was someone special in your life, someone that you love – and for some reason this person just isn't there anymore.

What's it really like to be you?

Go ahead and open your eyes.

Everybody in your group is going to have their turn to share what it is really like to be you.

If you really knew you, let's begin....

---

Share a few hugs with people outside of your group.

2. This evening we are switching gears and focusing on who we are and the groups that we get stereotyped into.

The way this activity works is that we are going to call out different groupings. If a grouping we call out pertains to you, you will cross the line and go as far as you can.

Then we want you to take a deep breath and think about what it feels like to have crossed the line.

Every time you cross the line you are going to be a part of a group with less privilege, less power, and sometimes abused physically or mentally because of who they are.

International sign language for "I love you."

---

When did we learn to judge each other – to be so mean?

Today we want you to see that you're never really alone.

As long as you are alive, you can change!

## *Touch Someone Who*

*This activity is designed to honor one another after working with groups over a period of time.*

Directions: Participants lie face down on the ground or sit in a circle with their backs facing outward with their eyes shut. Once everyone is comfortable the facilitator will tap 4-6 individuals to open their eyes and stand up. Once standing they will be instructed to tap the individual that the "someone statement" most pertains to (they can select more than one for each statement). Once the facilitator has read through several statements (10-12) the tappers will resume their positions on the floor with eyes closed and the next group will be selected.

Touch someone who has made an impact on your life.  
Touch someone who makes you laugh.  
Touch someone who you have learned something from.  
Touch someone who makes you smile.  
Touch someone who could be your brother or sister.  
Touch someone you will never forget.  
Touch someone who is beautiful on the inside and out.  
Touch someone who you can trust.  
Touch someone that you can always count on.  
Touch someone athletic.  
Touch someone artistic.  
Touch someone intelligent.  
Touch someone who you can depend on.  
Touch someone you appreciate.  
Touch someone you couldn't live without.  
Touch someone you have made a connection with.  
Touch someone who you can cry with.  
Touch someone that will always hold a special place in your heart.  
Touch someone you want to know more about.  
Touch someone you respect.  
Touch someone you think is cute.  
Touch someone who is positive.  
Touch someone who you can tell anything.  
Touch someone who is a good listener.  
Touch someone you think has strong values.  
Touch someone who is quiet.  
Touch someone who gives it their all.  
Touch someone who you won't forget even in 100 years.  
Touch someone that makes you feel important.  
Touch someone who is truly a leader.  
Touch someone who you know supports you.  
Touch someone who is very special to you.  
Touch someone who challenges you.  
Touch someone with good ideas.  
Touch someone who is reliable.  
Touch someone who is forgiving.  
Touch someone you consider a friend.  
Touch someone you admire.  
Touch someone who can really brighten your day.  
Touch someone who always makes you feel comfortable.  
Touch someone who knows the most about you.  
Touch someone who will go above and beyond for Harvest.

# I AM

## 1<sup>st</sup> Stanza

I am (two special characteristics you have)

I am \_\_\_\_\_

I wonder (something you are actually curious about)

I wonder \_\_\_\_\_

I hear (an imaginary sound)

I hear \_\_\_\_\_

I want (an actual desire)

I want \_\_\_\_\_

I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

I am \_\_\_\_\_

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Stanza

I pretend (something you actually pretend to do)

I pretend \_\_\_\_\_

I feel (a feeling about something imaginary)

I feel \_\_\_\_\_

I touch (an imaginary touch)

I touch \_\_\_\_\_

I worry (something that really bothers you)

I worry \_\_\_\_\_

I cry (something that makes you very sad)

I cry \_\_\_\_\_

I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

I am \_\_\_\_\_

## 3<sup>rd</sup> Stanza

I understand (something you know is true)

I understand \_\_\_\_\_

I say (something you believe in)

I say \_\_\_\_\_

I dream (something you actually dream about)

I dream \_\_\_\_\_

I try (something you really make an effort about)

I try \_\_\_\_\_

I hope (something you actually hope for)

I hope \_\_\_\_\_

I am (the first line of the poem repeated)

I am \_\_\_\_\_

# VOICES

Student Council thanks you for your help in making our Diversity Week a success. Today we'll be making Diversity Bracelets at lunch, so stop by to make a bracelet and remind yourself that everybody is Thumbody at BHS.

Right now we'd like you to take a few minutes to consider what you might hear if you could hear the thoughts of students sitting in classes and walking in the halls.

Please join us for Student Council's presentation of "Voices in the Hallway."

**1** *I am the one walking down the halls, sitting in the class just wondering what people think of me. All I hear are voices yelling, "Jock, nerd, geek, get out of the way. Some people seem to have a name for everyone. Don't they realize that we all need understanding, acceptance, comfort, encouragement...I wish they would quit making fun of others because next, they'll probably make fun of me.*

**2** I love hearing the crowd cheer on Friday nights, and I work hard to give the school the victories it loves. I worked out all summer; everyday after work I did weights and run...and ran...and ran...Somehow it's just easy for me to visualize what I need to do on the field, and because I work hard in practice, I can be a standout on the field and on the court. I wish math came that easily. I go to tutorials every day; my friends help me. I stay up late working on homework, but during tests, I just never seem to get it right. Then I hear people laugh and say I'm just a dumb jock. Mom and dad say I have to get a scholarship. Coach tells me my grades have to be as good as my performance on the field. It's the rare person who's good at everything, but I'm trying. Please give me credit for trying.

**3a** Yes, I have my head down on the desk again. No, I don't have my homework. You're right, I look like I don't care. But you can't even imagine what went on at the place I stayed last night...and the night before that. Yeah, I'd like to be involved. I'd like to make great grades. I'd like to have the teachers like me. Right now, I'm just trying to survive. Right now that's all I can do.

**3b** My voice is definitely heard around this school. I work hard at everything I do, but it's not always easy. I know the stereotypical description of an airheaded cheerleader, and yes, maybe I do have a hard time remembering which uniform to wear on any given day, but hey!!! It's a tough job keeping a crowd of 1400 students and fans pumped up all the time. I work hard at everything I do, but it is not always easy. It is not always a piece of cake to be a leader for the whole school, but I do it, and I do it with spirit.

**4** *When you spend all your time to do something right and you're sitting in a classroom hearing an announcement saying UIL competed and won and no one cares...Yet next they say the football team won, and everyone cheers. How do you think that makes me feel? Yeah, maybe I can't shoot a three pointer or kick a field goal, but I do debate, and I do what I do because I am good at it. Nobody laughs when an athlete tells them he won a football game because they know how hard he works. I stay up night and day working to win, but when it's announced that debate won 1st place, the announcement is ignored. It's good for me to know I did well, but it would also be nice to be recognized.*

**5** I usually sit in the back of the classroom. My clothes are very non-descript. You know nothing from any designer you would know. I don't want to call attention to myself anyway. While walking down the hallway...Well, I try to make it from class to class without ever having to look up...or at least without ever having to make eye contact with anyone...other students or teachers. I sit in the class praying the teacher never calls on me for an answer, and if they do...I usually just mumble something incoherent, and hopefully they move on to someone else. Sometimes I think it would be so nice to be a part of your group, but no one would ever ask me to join, and I'm not the kind to ever ask. You know...I bet I could be absent for a whole week and nobody would really notice. You see, I'm the invisible student walking down your hallway.

**6** I'm the one who never misses a practice, a StuCo meeting, a UIL meet. I'm the straight A student who finds time to work with Teen Court and get in as much community service as possible, that's who I am. You rarely notice, but next time you turn your nose up at me and take for granted who I am, you might think about trying to be me. If you try to do half of what I do, you wouldn't laugh at me. You'd understand the stress. People come to expect it. Next time you think I'm stuck up, remember I just might be tired. It takes a strong person to do what I do. I don't appreciate being called a nerd, but if that's the name for hardworking and dedicated, that's me.

**7** *I don't know why I can't read as fast as the other kids in my class. Oh, I hope she doesn't call on me to read. I would give anything not to have to read aloud where the other students can hear me stumble over the words. They laugh when I say a word wrong, and I want to die. The lady who did some tests said I have dyslexia. I don't know. I wish there were some kind of class I could get into where I'm not so embarrassed, but what if there's not. My parents keep talking about college. I'm not even sure I'll finish high school. I'll never be as smart as the other students. I guess I am just stupid like they say.*

**8** Thanks. You spoke to me today. You don't know how much that means to me. You gave me some encouragement, and you probably didn't even think about it, because you're nice to everyone. I was thinking about just leaving, just walking out the door, but now I can make it. You made a difference to me. Thank you.



# Stand Up Exercise

To facilitate this exercise, first introduce yourself. Go slowly from the beginning so students have time to pay attention to themselves and notice how they are feeling. Proceed as follows:

*Let's begin by getting quiet within ourselves and taking a deep breath. In this exercise, I will ask you to stand silently if the statement I read applies to you. Notice any feelings you have as you stand. If you decide not to stand for something that applies to you, think about what you would need to feel safe enough to stand up for that statement. Please do this exercise in silence. If you feel a need to laugh, make comments, or talk, notice what uncomfortable feelings you may be having that these gestures may be trying to cover up.*

*These statements are addressed to young people; if you are an older person, think of the time when you were in school yourself.*

1. Please stand up silently if your dress or appearance was every criticized or ridiculed by an adult.

*(Ask students to notice who is standing and take note of their own feelings. Then ask everyone to sit down, and proceed slowly with the next statement. Read every statement slowly, allowing time for students to notice who is standing, to notice their own feelings, and then to sit down.)*

Please stand up silently if:

2. You have ever been made to feel ashamed or humiliated by a teacher or schoolmate.
3. You were ever ignored, served last, or watched suspiciously in a store because you were a young person.
4. You have ever felt your physical safety threatened or violated at school.
5. You were ever yelled at, commented upon, whistled at, touched, or harassed in a public place.
6. You ever heard degrading jokes, comments, or put-downs about women, people of color, Jews, people with disabilities, or lesbians and gays made in your presence.
7. You were ever the object of slurs, comments, put-downs, or violence due to prejudice.
8. You were ever in a situation in which you felt conspicuous, uncomfortable, or alone because you were the only representative of your racial or ethnic group, gender, or sexual orientation.
9. You have ever received less than full respect, attention, or response from a doctor, police officer, court official, or other professional because of your age, race, gender, sexual orientation, or physical ability.
10. You have ever been hit by an adult or peer.
11. You were ever forced to fight or otherwise defend yourself against another student.
12. You ever drank, took other drugs, overate, or did something risky or unsafe in order to cover your feelings or hide the pain.

When students are seated again, proceed:



## **Activities for Creating a Positive School Climate**

1. Take pictures of students involved in positive behavior. Enlarge these and post in the main hallway.
2. Hold assemblies at least each quarter to reinforce positive student accomplishments. Emphasize improvement as well as standard excellent achievement.
3. Involve students in beautifying the school. Plant flowers around the outside of the school.
4. Provide a space in the hallway where teachers can post positive comments about students and students can write positive statements about their teachers.
5. Create an award (a stuffed turtle or giraffe works nicely) to be presented weekly or bi-monthly to a student who "stuck their neck out" to help students. The school climate committee can initially give the award with subsequent selection made by the previous recipient.
6. Involve students and staff in a fund raising activity such as a jog-a-thon with proceeds going to a local charity or other needy cause.
7. Rather than have the attendance officer call absent students, have an adult with who the student relates well call.
8. Involve the entire school in a daylong evaluation of the school with ideas generated to resolve problems and make the school even better.
9. Set aside some time each day or week where everyone in the school stops what they are doing and reads quietly.
10. At the end of each day have everyone in the school write on a 3x3 card one positive experience they had that day.