MAKE PEACE WITH PUPPETS

Using Puppetry to Explore Conflict Resolution through Creative Collaboration

The uniquely playful nature of the art of puppetry leads students to learn while engaging them in a process of interaction, imagination, and creativity. Puppetry in the classroom curriculum offers teachers and students a highly effective tool to enliven many areas of the standard course of study.

The ancient and global art of puppetry communicates via a combination of visual imagery and playwriting. Students will construct simple puppets during this unit; however, the focus will be on *learning to create multidimensional characters as well as effective stories and plays.* The process of collaboration with an emphasis on story structure offers multiple opportunities to practice conflict resolution strategies, by broadening the idea of "story" to include the challenges of "real life".

The following describes a brief unit on puppetry appropriate for the K-5th grades, that directly reinforces the goals of the elementary level language arts curriculum, including story mapping, character development, literary genres, and methods of editing/critique. In addition, it offers a matrix for problem solving (conflict resolution) on a social/emotional level.

By consistently practicing conflict resolution in the context of creative play, students learn the practical tools to become more reflective and less reactive in their daily lives.

UNIT CONTENTS:
1) **Introducing Puppetry (1 hr.)**
2) **Stress-free puppet-making (1 hr.)**
3) **Understanding Character Development (1 hr.)**
4) **From Story Mapping to Storytelling (1.5 hrs.)**
5) **From Improvisation to Performance (1 hr. - ?)**

OBJECTIVES:

1) Students will become more self-aware through inner reflection on various character traits.

2) Students will learn and practice concepts and skills necessary for peaceful conflict resolution

3) Students will know and be able to competently manipulate a set of theatrical tools.

4) Students will improve their imaginative writing skills in general through the creation of written stories and biographies.

5) Students will succeed in achieving a significant creative and collaborative goal boosting levels of confidence and individual self-esteem.

Introducing Puppetry

A person who works with puppets is called a puppeteer. It is a profession in the performing arts just like singer, actor, musician or dancer. Let your students know that they are about to become puppeteers. They will all be making their own puppets. They will be working together to create stories in the form of Public Service Announcements (or fables) to share with other kids in the school.

There are many different kinds of puppets from all around the world. Initiate a discussion with your students to find out what kinds of puppets they have already made. Ideally, bring in different kinds of puppets to share with them. Take the opportunity to discuss the "engineering" aspects of multiple techniques (shadow puppets, hand puppets, rod puppets, marionettes, etc.), as well as the cultural history of the art form in differing regions (Asia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, etc.) There are plenty of resources in books and on line. Better yet – invite a puppeteer to your classroom to demonstrate!

Introducing Character Education Traits

Examine the profession of performing artist through the lens of the NCDPI Character Education matrix. What are the practical and emotional skills necessary to achieve success in the field? Lead your students to discover that their school's "Character Traits of the Month" embody many of the very skills needed for success in the arts (or sports, or medicine…etc.)

QUESTION: What kinds of qualities do performing artists need to have in order to be successful? How do you get to be famous?? The arts are a business like any other – how does that apply?

Using a chart of the following traits, have your students offer examples as to how and why each of these contributes to success. Put a dot next to each trait as it gets mentioned.

Respect, Responsibility, Honesty, Caring, Fairness, Citizenship, Courage, Perseverance, and Hope.

Chart which traits get mentioned the most. Are some more important than others? Why?
(NOTE: We will refer to this later on in our process)

To become successful puppeteers we need to be mindful of these traits… AND NOW… We are going to make our own puppets!

STRESS-FREE PUPPET-MAKING

No Water, No Paint, No Glue, (and almost) No Scissors…

It has been my experience that many classroom teachers are almost phobic about the idea of constructing puppets in their classrooms. I think it conjures up frightening visions of goopy paper mache covered balloons drying for days on windowsills! Here is the simplest possible method that I have found to create puppets with lots of individual character, and very little prep or clean-up.

In an average class, this will take approximately 1 hour

You Will Need:

One Styrofoam egg per student (preferably 4 inch)
　　　(source: Paul Van Horn at The Craft Place. *Mention me get 20% off*. (616) 364-5537)
Tongue Depressors
Pipe Cleaners (Multicolored, cut into 4ths, plus a few uncut)
Colored craft pom-poms
Fat Yarn (Roving)
Long Map Pins (straight pins with the little plastic ball on the end)*
　　　* Don't worry, in 20 years I have yet to see a single pin injury!
Cheap bed sheets torn into approx. 1 ft. squares (one twin flat = 12 squares)

Insert tongue depressor at the base of the egg, behind the point, which becomes the chin.
Use straight pins to affix pom-poms for eyes
Push pipe cleaners into the egg to form, nose, mouth, eyebrows, antennae, etc
Loop yarn around your hand 6 - 8 times and affix to head with a pipe cleaner (think of it as a big staple). Cut the loops. Note: younger students will need help with this step.
Remove head from stick, drape cloth over stick, and push the cloth-covered stick firmly back into the egg where it came out
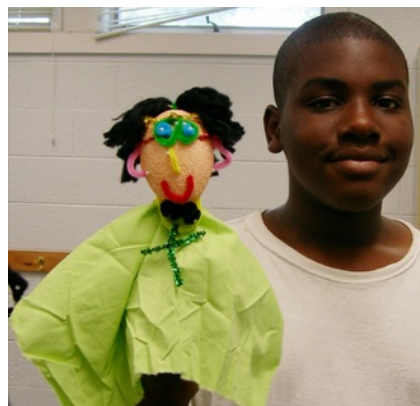
CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Puppetry is an amazingly effective tool for character development, combining literary, visual and theater arts as well as integrating goals of the guidance (social/emotional) curriculum.

After constructing their puppets, students will work on developing the puppets character, in essence, creating a life for it. It's fun to use an interactive interview process to tease out the components of a character including habits and habitats, hopes and dreams, fears and problems. These components can then be written into puppet biographies and offer a jumping off point for a discussion of story-form.

1) **Discuss and define the words character and characteristics**.
   What are the traits that make us who we are? Make a distinction between physical characteristics and personality traits. Refer to your chart of positive character traits. What are some other, maybe less positive traits? Brainstorm a list, focusing on what makes characters INTERESTING. Have students assign dreams/ wishes, fears, and one big problem to their puppets (NOTE: See "Amazing Character Map" attached)

2) **Create a "TV Studio" in your classroom and host a talk show.** With younger grades, the teacher will be the host and interview the puppets. Use a "microphone" (a fat marker will do) and focus your attention on the puppet, not the child. Try to tease out as many details as possible. Take questions from your "studio audience" (the class), have the puppet elaborate as much as possible. Find out about their likes and dislikes, families, and their opinions. Each character should have a big dream, and one serious problem. This makes for a more interesting and lifelike character.

NOTE: Often, this process of character development will reveal an insight into the (sometimes hidden) reality of a child's own personal life. Be aware, and be gentle! I have interviewed many puppets whose parents are divorcing, who wish they had a dad, who have no friends, etc. I have even experienced indicators of trauma and abuse. Sometimes it is a child's imagination, but sometimes it is real. It should always be kept in mind that a puppet can often say things that a child cannot.

WRITING EXTENSION

Autobiography: The puppeteer writes from the perspective of the puppet in first person. Be sure to use the phrases "I think" and "I feel"

Biography: In pairs, each student further questions the partner's puppet and writes its biography. Biographers may share their own ideas *about* the character as well.

FROM STORY MAPPING TO STORYTELLING:

*Puppetry provides a great opportunity to reinforce an understanding
of story form and construction.*

 Students are usually chomping at the bit to "play" with their puppets. All you need to do is provide a specific structure to harness and organize that energy. I often like to use a "cooking" metaphor, offering up a "story recipe" because it seems to be one that is clear and that kids relate to easily. The list of ingredients is specific- just make sure to use lots of interesting details as "the spice".

EXERCISES:

1) **Introduce or review story form.**
 If students are already familiar with the template that your curriculum suggests, then use the same one. If not, I like to use a **recipe** with the following **ingredients**:

 Situation = Who or what, where, and when.
 Conflict = Problem
 Transformation = Change (where the magic happens)
 Resolution = Turning 'loose ends' into 'The End.'

2) **Develop a group story with your class.**
 Use a brainstorming format and follow the "recipe", add details, tease out a setting, etc. As the moderator, choose the most interesting and/or workable ideas and re-tell the story at each new phase of the process (as each new ingredient is added and mixed in).
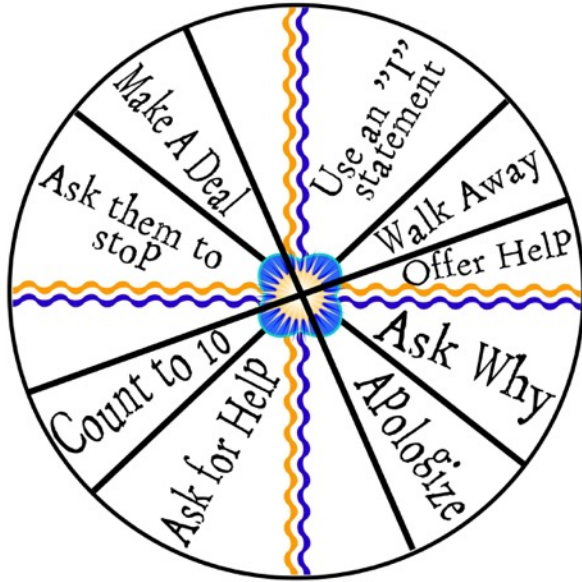
2a)

STORY MACHINE

In three columns brainstorm a list of characters, a list of wishes/dreams, and a list of problems. The lists do not need to be related to each other in any way. "Start" the machine by running a finger down the list of characters until the class yells STOP! Move to the list of wishes and do the same. When the class yells STOP, connect the character to the wish. Do the same with the list of problems and connect the problem to the character and the wish. You will end up with ridiculous juxtapositions…

"Once there was a _____, and all she wanted was _____, unfortunately _____." How can we solve this problem?
The nonsense aspect of this game forces us to think creatively to solve a problem. And proves that, with enough imagination, everything connects!

BREATHE First!
then make choices...

Make A Deal
Ask them to stop
Count to 10
Ask for Help
Use an "I" statement
Walk Away
Offer Help
Ask Why
Apologize

Try at least two of these when you have a Problem

WHEEL OF CHOICE

Introduce the "Wheel Of Choice" to your students. There are many examples on-line (Kelso's Choices being the most popular) or develop your own. Make sure to leave one or two blank spaces to allow for other options.

Did you use one of these choices to help solve the problem from the story machine? You are about to move into small groups to invent your own puppet plays. You can use the "Wheel of Choice" to help your characters come up with solutions.

CONNECT:
Take this opportunity to refer to "Our Foundation" chart of Character Traits:
Respect, Responsibility, Honesty, Caring, Fairness, Citizenship, Courage, Perseverance, and Hope.

Are there any character traits on our chart that might be useful in making the choices on the wheel?
Can you give examples?
Are there ways that your puppets could demonstrate those traits in the stories you will be inventing?

Extension:

Before moving into the next step of small-group improvisation discuss and demonstrate *the difference between narrative and dialogue*. How could you get the puppets to speak to explain the group story? What might a character say? What would they sound like? Reference any storybook with quotation marks.

FROM IMPROVISATION TO PERFORMANCE

The small group portion of the unit is as much about social skills as it is about writing skills. As the stories evolve students will need to practice effective teamwork and the art of compromise. Try to emphasize that the initial **improvisation is a *first draft***, some of it might work, some will not, sometimes the ideas that come out of perceived "mistakes" turn out to be the best ideas of all!

Introduce the process for small group collaboration:

OUR PROCESS = THE FIVE "C's"

1) CREATE -------->   **Brainstorm** lots and lots of ideas
2) COMMUNICATE --> **Share** your ideas clearly with other in a way they can
                                understand.
3) Use CRITICAL THINKING -->**Sort** all of the ideas, decide on a few that work best.
4) COMPROMISE ----------> **Choose** One idea. The others may be just as good
                          but they will have to wait!!
5) COLLABORATE-> **Work together** to express the one idea in the best possible way.

Divide students into small groups or have them form their own. Have each group decide on a single problem to serve as the basis for a brief (2-3 minute!!) puppet play:

Pass out puppets and have students develop movement and dialogue to enact the story. Once a story has been invented (Situation, Conflict, Transformation, Resolution) students will work on the telling of it through dialogue and movement. **Although it can be a challenging transition to move from narrative to dialogue, by this time the puppets are dying to talk, which makes the journey easy and fun.**

Sit with each group for a few minutes as "The Director" to help them hone in on dialogue and plot. The story should be short and simple. In the collaborative process conflicts will arise! Remember, **every conflict is an opportunity to practice peacemaking** using our FOUNDATION, our CHOICES, and our PROCESS.

CONNECT:
Invite students to use the **Wheel of Choice** to solve the problems in their stories. Suggest that they can use "real life" problems as well as imagined ones. By using our puppets to engage in storytelling, we are practicing strategies for conflict resolution before an actual conflict arises.

NOTE: Students will tend to continue to change and elaborate resulting in a complex soap opera. Once they have a VERY basic plot, see if they can practice the SAME story 3 times without changing it.

PERFORMANCE

Define and discuss the idea of IMPROVISATION.

Improvisation in theater is a bit like your FIRST DRAFT in writing (your "sloppy copy"). Students should NOT use a written script while performing since it is impossible to manipulate a puppet while reading from a page. After about 10-15 minutes of working together, invite small groups up to present skits. Use a table covered with a sheet as your stage.
NOTE: Students will often want to use small props. Try to discourage this as they become awkward and often get in the way.

> ### ABCD's OF PUPPET PERFORMANCE
> a. Keep your eyes on your puppet
> b. Use your normal voice (for now) and speak loudly and clearly
> c. Move your puppet deliberately, pausing in between movements
> d. You don't have to hide to be invisible; you just have to really FOCUS on your puppet.
> *If you believe you can bring it to life, your audience will too!*

Discuss Constructive Criticism as a way to EDIT and IMPROVE the plays, the same way you edit your writing. After each improvisation, invite the class to offer a "problem sandwich" e.g.: tell us something that worked well, something that needs work, and something else that worked well. *As facilitator, make sure to pump up the praise and soften the criticism if necessary.*

CONNECT:
Using our foundational Character Traits and the "Wheel of Choice", ask each group to evaluate which of the specific values is most expressed by their story. Which choice or choices were made to resolve the conflict? Before the second draft performance have someone introduce the play by saying:

"This story demonstrates the value of _____ by making the choice to _____."

CONNECT:
Refocus on the 5 C's and the collaborative process. What kinds of conflicts did you experience in working together as a group? Did it take courage to share your ideas? Did it take respect in order to compromise? What kinds of choices did you make to resolve those conflicts?

ENCOURAGE YOUR STUDENTS TO BUILD A BRIDGE BETWEEN STORY AND LIFE
A problem is a seed for a story. Whether real or imagined, truth or fiction, the more we practice resolving conflict, the easier and more natural it becomes. By becoming aware of our choices, taking our foundations to heart, and respecting our own process and that of others, we become forces for good in the world. In short, **we practice making peace.**

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Follow Up Activities and Outcomes

Look at sample scripts. Have students write a script for their show.
Be sure to include stage directions both physical (exit stage right) and emotional (shaking his head sadly).
Compile and publish scripts for your library

Perform skits for another class or another grade level.

Film and broadcast performances as "Public Service Announcements" for your school

Collaborate with art, music, technology staff to develop soundtracks, and painted or projected scenery

GOALS AND STANDARDS:

CONFLICT RESOLUTION
Students will be use the character traits from the Student Citizen Act of 2001 to create stories where characters actively demonstrate effective conflict resolution.

Students will use collaborative theater to learn, practice, and demonstrate the skills
necessary for peaceful conflict resolution (EI.SE.3.2 Use conflict management skills to achieve
desired outcomes, EI.SE.3.1 Use communication strategies that are appropriate for the situation and setting)

Students will become more self-aware through reflection specific character traits from the Student Citizen
Act. (EI.SE.1 Understand the meaning of personal responsibility and self-awareness, EI.SE.2 Understand the
relationship between self and others in the broader world)

WRITING:
Students will create stories that demonstrate conflict, transformation, and resolution (W.CCR.3
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well chosen
details, and well structured event sequences.)

PUPPETRY:
Students will manipulate a set of theatrical tools including improvisation, scripting, vocal expression and
characterization. (5.C.1 Use movement, voice, and writing to communicate ideas and feelings, 5.C.2 Use
performance to communicate ideas and feelings.)

Resources:

OUR WEBSITE www.timmyabellmusic.com

Please feel free to connect with me for any reason! You will find a materials list for puppets as well as contact information on our website. While your there – listen to some music!

The Center for Puppetry Arts www.centerforpuppetryarts.com
The Center for Puppetry Arts' mission is to inspire imagination, education and community through the global art of puppetry. There is lots of information on their site and plenty of resources about the art of puppetry.

Kelso's Choices - kelsoschoice.com
Conflict resolution strategies from the original Wheel Of Choice

The Creative Counselor
http://thecreativecounselor.blogspot.com/2012/03/solving-friendship-problems.html
To download the foldable "Problem Solvers"

Peace First www.peacefirst.org
"Educators, parents and youth service providers across the country and the world are using Peace First's curriculum and tools to teach peacemaking every day. Our Digital Activity Center makes it easy to get started teaching peacemaking today by providing access to our full K-5 curriculum and hundreds of individual lessons, games and activities."

Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) **www.casel.org**
"Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) is the nation's leading organization advancing the development of academic, social and emotional competence for all students. Our mission is to help make evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) an integral part of education from preschool through high school. Through research, practice and policy, CASEL collaborates to ensure all students become knowledgeable, responsible, caring and contributing members of society."

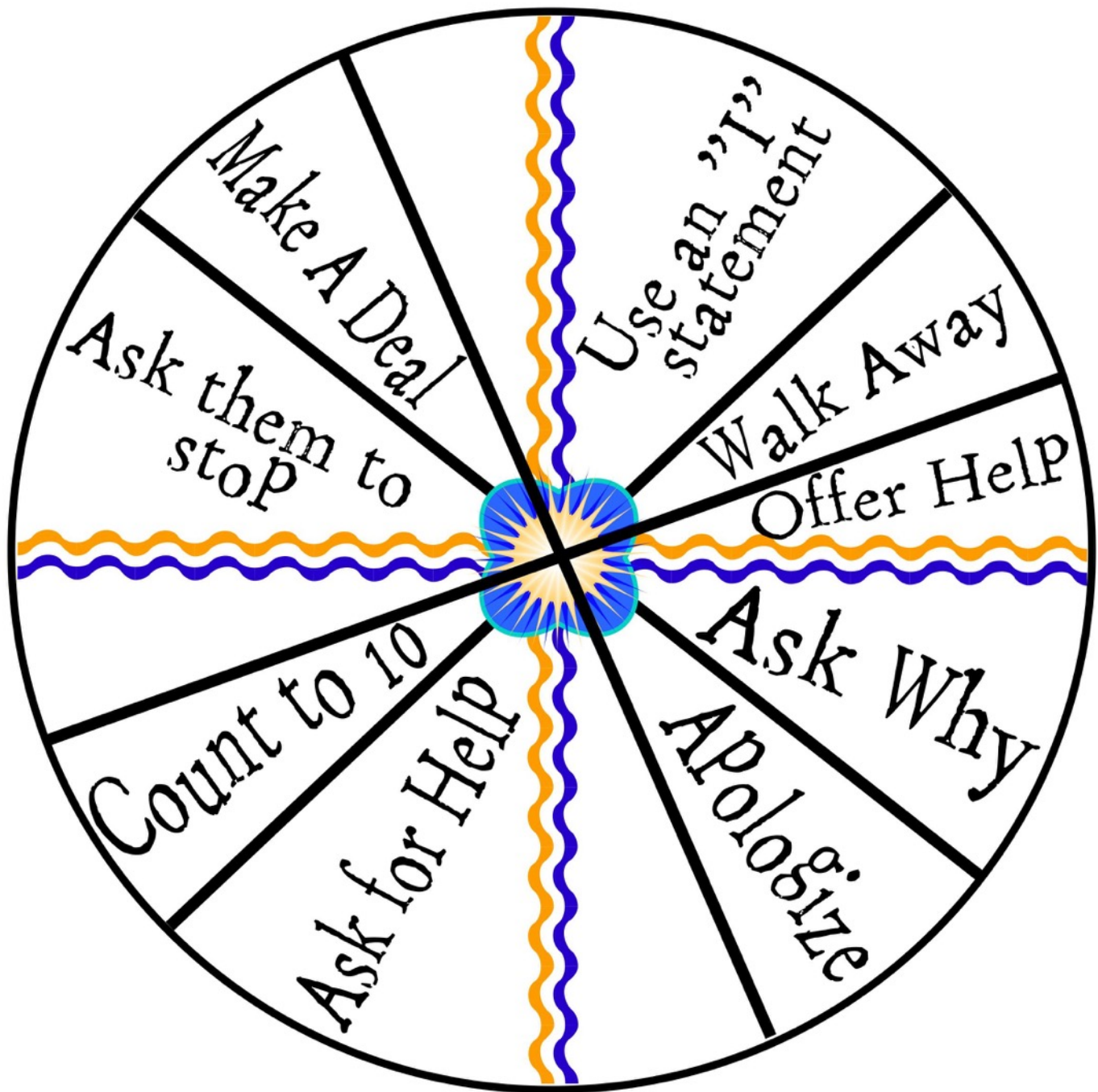**The Hawn Foundation - MindUP**
www.hawnfoundation.org
"MindUP™ teaches social and emotional learning skills that link cognitive neuroscience, positive psychology and mindful awareness training utilizing a brain centric approach."

The Charter For Compassion charterforcompassion.org
"We believe that a compassionate world is a peaceful world. We believe that a compassionate world is possible when every man, woman and child treats others as they wish to be treated - with dignity, equity and respect. We believe that all human beings are born with the capacity for compassion, and that it must be cultivated for human beings to survive and thrive."

BREATHE First!
then make choices...

Wheel segments:
- Make A Deal
- Use an "I" statement
- Ask them to stop
- Walk Away
- Offer Help
- Count to 10
- Ask for Help
- Ask Why
- Apologize

Try at least two of these when you have a Problem

A Problem Solving Matrix for Literature and Life

Our Foundation

Kindness ~ Courage ~ Respect ~ Good Judgement ~ Responsibility ~ Perseverance ~ Self-Discipline ~ Honesty

Our Choices

Make a deal/Compromise ~ Count to 10/BREATHE ~ Ask for help ~ Apologize ~ Use an "I statement" ~ Ask them to stop ~Shake hands and take turns ~ Ask "WHY?" ~ OR??

Our Process The 5 C's

1) CREATE -------> **Brainstorm** lots and lots of ideas
2) COMMUNICATE --> **Share** your ideas clearly with others in a way they can understand
3) use CRITICAL THINKING -->**Sort** all of the ideas, decide on a few that work best
4) COMPROMISE ----------> **Choose** One idea. The others may be just as good but they will have to wait!!
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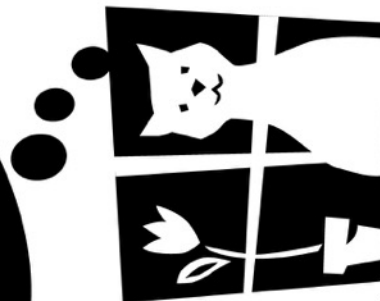
AMAZING CHARACTER MAP

A WISH

A problem is a seed for a ...

WHO ARE YOU??

Name? Age? Job? Where are you from?

Hobbies? Talents? Special Powers?

A FEAR

ONE BIG PROBLEM: _____