

Teaching the Medicine Wheel with Velma Kills Back

The medicine wheel, if I was to teach that, I would first go into shapes, you know, what does each shape represent? And then we're going to get into circle. And then when I get into circle, then I'm going to start teaching that the whole circle is a circle of life. And in the circle, there are these four quadrants. And I will give examples. For an example, I always start out with respect. Because we have to teach respect on the first day of school. When you teach respect on the first day of school, they're going to always remember that.

And so I will teach respect. We have to have respect for the classroom, your supplies, the pencils, and the paper. If you don't respect them, you're going to break it, or you're going to throw it away. Or when you're doing some kind of a project, then the students are going to want to keep that. In all children, especially on their first grade level, everything is theirs. They want to show what they've learned. And they want to take something home. They're really proud children in all aspects. You have different nationalities.

Every child at that level are very proud of what they do. And so with that, I would start with respect first. And then start from that, teaching them how to respect themselves. If they don't respect themselves, how would they expect respect to them if they don't have it themselves? So that's how I would start out with. I would take that for a whole week. And at the end of the week, on Friday, I would do an evaluation. How do we respect? What are some of the things that we have to respect? They should be able to say, we're going to respect our room.

We're going to respect that door so we won't slam that door. We have to respect our desk so we won't mark on it. We have to respect our chairs so we won't rock on it. All these things. I'm going to teach them that in order to respect, when they go home, they should be able to respect that at home. And vice versa. If they have respect at home, it should trickle down into the classroom. But today, sometimes you don't see that. And so you have to take time in your busy schedule. I can make a schedule.

But I don't necessarily follow that schedule because of the way I see children. I can automatically know and say, OK, I'm going to take at least three days to do this lesson. And then you start stretching everything. On that last day for evaluation, it's going to be an oral evaluation. What do you respect in this classroom? Chairs, or the board, or our computers. And then I would ask them, how will you respect yourself in this classroom? I will learn to be quiet. I will learn to raise my hand. I won't talk when so-and-so is talking to the teacher.

I will not go up to the teacher and try to get her attention by slapping her on the back. Because that happens. It's OK. But to a point. So I would advise, this is how we're going to do this. And then the second week, again, we're going to start to the next quadrant. And that's generosity. Because at that first grade level, everything is mine. But we as Lakota people, we like to share. We share information. We share gifts. We offer gifts. We have a giveaway. And so I will teach about sharing.

If you bring suckers to school, it's not going to be for you only. You have to bring enough for everybody to have. And if you don't have enough, then don't bring it to school. Now that's sharing. You have to teach them how to be generous to each other and to be able to share. If your next partner doesn't have a pencil, if you have a pencil, give it to him. So that, I will start out like that. And then I'll be around the whole medicine wheel. And then end it with being brave, brave enough to say, no, I'm not going to fight.

I'm not going to be a big bully. I'm going to be able to say no. If someone tells me to do something, you should be able to say no. And in first grade, it will really be easy for them to understand that. But I know you have to reiterate time and time again in order for them to really ingest all the information that I will be giving them. So start with that, start with everything, and then go around the circle. And that should be a whole month. And then again in the next month, and then just touch base with every quadrant.

And then by, hopefully by Christmas, they should be able to write, write everything that they learn.