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getting to the heart of learning

# Curriculum Samples



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**JOURNAL**

# Being Calm

## OBJECTIVES

- To understand what it feels like to be calm
- To learn and practice calm-breathing techniques

## MATERIALS

- **Calm Breathing** mini-posters

## NOTES

- *Once children have learned the calm-breathing techniques in this lesson, provide many opportunities for them to practice. For example, consider beginning each of the next several Open Circle Meetings by choosing and then practicing a calm-breathing technique all together.*

## INTRODUCE

Ask students to think about a time when they have taken a rest at home or at school. Have children picture themselves resting in a place that is warm and comfortable, maybe on a couch, a bed, a mat, or in a chair.

Ask: How does your body feel when you are resting? (*Relaxed, calm, heavy, quiet, etc.*) What does your body look like? How do your shoulders feel? Your arms? Your legs? How might you be breathing when you are resting and you are relaxed and calm? (*Slowly, deeply, etc.*) Explain that when we are breathing slowly and deeply, we are doing calm breathing. This kind of breathing can make us feel calm and relaxed.

Tell students that we are going to learn two ways to do calm breathing. Share the **Balloon Technique** mini-poster, to give students an idea of what they will be doing.

Invite students to sit in a comfortable position. Make sure that students aren't lifting or holding their shoulders in a tense way. Ask them to put their hands on their bellies. Have children:

- Breathe in slowly and deeply, filling your belly with air like a balloon.
- Breathe out slowly, as if you are letting air out of a balloon.

After they have practiced a few times, introduce another way to do calm-breathing. Share the **Flower Technique** mini-poster and give the following directions:

- Breathe in through your nose, imagining the fragrance of a sweet-smelling flower.
- Breathe out with an “ahhh” sound.

Have them practice the flower technique<sup>1</sup> a few times.

## **PRACTICE/APPLY**

Tell students that knowing and practicing calm breathing is important. When we are breathing calmly, we are able to be good learners and good friends. It takes time to learn these calm-breathing techniques. We will need to practice many times before we can do calm-breathing well.

Ask students when during the school day they could practice the balloon and the flower techniques. (*During read-aloud time, rest time, Open Circle Meetings, etc.*) You might want to give an example of when you will take time to practice calm breathing.

Ask students to notice times during the day when they feel calm and are breathing calmly.

## **HOMEWORK/EXTEND**

Introduce an activity, such as "Pause Button" or "One-Minute Chime Time," in order to expand students' understanding of what it feels like to be calm. Directions are in the Activities section.

Ask students to practice calm breathing several times before the next Open Circle Meeting. Tell students that you will help them practice several times before the day is over.

## **LITERATURE CONNECTIONS**

MacLean, Kerry Lee. *Peaceful Piggy Meditation*. Albert Whitman, 2004.

Humorous pig characters demonstrate how important it is to use calm breathing in order to think clearly during stressful situations.

- What are some of the examples in the book of times when it would be helpful to calm down? What do the characters in the story do to make themselves calm? As you think about when you might need to calm down, practice taking some calming breaths.

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<sup>1</sup> The technique of flower breathing is from the book *Two Flower Breaths: The Art of Teaching Yoga to Children* by Sally L. Cheney.



# Calm Breathing

## Balloon Technique



Breathe in.



Breathe out.

Kindergarten

# Calm Breathing

## Flower Technique



Breathe in.



Breathe out.

Kindergarten

# Cooperating

## OBJECTIVES

- To define “cooperate”
- To identify the skills needed to cooperate
- To practice cooperating

## MATERIALS

- Cooperate mini-poster
- Chart paper and markers

## REVIEW

Ask students to cross their arms if they were able to include someone who was feeling left out in a game or other activity. Ask how the person who was included felt. Remind students not to use names. Ask if students have thought of any new ways to include others.

## INTRODUCE

Ask students to share what they think the word “cooperate” means. Share the **Cooperate** mini-poster and read aloud the definition. Ask how students can tell that the children in the picture are cooperating. What are they doing? How do you think they are feeling? Point out that when people cooperate and share, they get things done, they feel calm, and glad to be part of the classroom community.

On a sheet of chart paper, write the heading “How we Cooperate in School.” Ask students to think about what cooperation looks and sounds like in school. (*Sharing, listening, taking turns, saying, “I’ll help you with that,” etc.*) Record students’ responses. Ask students to give examples of when during the school day they can cooperate with one another. Why might it be important to cooperate with each other in a classroom?

## PRACTICE/APPLY

Invite children to do an activity together, such as the “Wave,” an activity that fans at sporting events do together. Begin by demonstrating a simple motion: raising and lowering your arms, for example. Tell students that you will start the motion and the person next to you will start as soon as your arms are down, then the next student will do the motion. By taking turns, one after another, students will send the motion around the circle, like a wave. Practice it once and then try it again.

Ask students what they had to cooperate and make the wave travel around the circle. (*Wait for their turn, pay attention, work together, listen to directions, remind each other when it was someone's turn, not make fun of someone if they forgot the rules, etc.*) Refer to the mini-poster again and to the list of cooperation skills they created to point out connections to how they cooperated during the “Wave” activity.

## **HOMEWORK/EXTEND**

Ask students to notice times during the school day when cooperation skills could help them finish a project, clean up, play a game, etc.

Post the “How we Cooperate in School” ideas students suggested in the classroom.

Introduce an activity, such as “Rainstorm” or “Creating Silence,” to practice cooperation. Directions are in the Activities section.

Send the *Home Link* newsletter to your students’ families. To edit the *Home Link* to include more specific information about what your class is working on, or to send them electronically, you can download the text at [www.open-circle.org/homelinks](http://www.open-circle.org/homelinks).

## **LITERATURE CONNECTIONS**

McNamara, Margaret. *How Many Seeds in a Pumpkin?* Schwartz and Wade Books, 2007.  
Class members cooperate as they work on a project to estimate how many seeds are contained in different sized pumpkins.

- What are some of the ways that students in the story cooperate to complete their project? Discuss some of the ways you cooperate during different times of the school day: for example, in science, social studies, math, at recess, in the cafeteria?

Torres, Leyla. *Subway Sparrow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993.

When a sparrow becomes trapped in a subway car, the passengers work together to free the helpless bird.

- How do the passengers on the subway train work together to help the sparrow?

## **SUPPLEMENTARY LESSONS**

The following supplementary lesson(s) can be used after this lesson:

- Friendship

# Cooperate

Work together to get something done.



Grade 2

Dear Family:

At another Open Circle Meeting, we talked about **giving and receiving compliments**. A compliment is saying something about someone that is true, positive and specific, such as something they do well or something they did that was helpful. Giving compliments in a classroom community is important because it makes others feel noticed and appreciated. Getting a compliment is similar to getting a gift. We learned that when you receive a compliment, you should say, “Thank you!”

The topic of one of our recent Open Circle lessons was **including one another**. We talked about how it feels to be left out and discussed some ways to include others at recess, during free play time at school, and in the classroom. Perhaps you could share with your child a time when you were left out and how it made you feel. Ask your child if he/she has ever been excluded or noticed that other children were left out. Encourage your child to find ways to include children who want to join in an activity or a group at play.

In another Open Circle, we talked about **cooperating**, or working together to get something done. We discussed what we can do to cooperate in the classroom, on the playground, in the lunchroom, and at other times during the day at school. We also talked about why it is important to cooperate and what can be hard about cooperating. Ask your child what he/she does to cooperate with his/her classmates at school. Find opportunities at home for your child to cooperate to get something done, and compliment him/her on good cooperation. Encourage your child to cooperate with other children in activities and groups outside of school.

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Here are some books that relate to the topics we discussed in Open Circle. You might want to check out one or two at the library and read with your child:

McNamara, Margaret. *How Many Seeds in a Pumpkin?* Schwartz and Wade Books, 2007.

Class members cooperate as they work on a project to estimate how many seeds are contained in different sized pumpkins.

Torres, Leyla. *Subway Sparrow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993.

When a sparrow becomes trapped in a subway car, the passengers work together to free the helpless bird.

Estimada familia:

En otra reunión de Open Circle hablamos sobre cómo **hacer y recibir elogios**. Un elogio es un comentario verdadero, positivo y concreto sobre una persona, como cuando alguien hace algo bien o útil. Resulta importante hacer elogios en la clase para que los demás se sientan valorados. Recibir un elogio es como recibir un regalo. Aprendimos que, cuando recibimos un elogio, debemos dar las gracias. En casa, asegúrense de elogiar a sus hijos a menudo cuando sean amables o se esfuercen por hacer las cosas bien. Si sus hijos les elogian, asegúrense de darles las gracias.

Otro de los temas que tratamos fue el de **aceptar a los demás**. Hablamos sobre lo que se siente cuando nos excluyen de un grupo y sobre algunas formas de incluir a los demás en los juegos durante el recreo o en clase. Cuéntenles a sus hijos alguna situación en la que se hayan sentido excluidos y cómo se sintieron. Pregúntenles si ellos se han sentido excluidos alguna vez o si han notado que se estaba excluyendo a otros niños. Animen a sus hijos a que inviten a participar a sus compañeros en actividades y juegos.

También conversamos sobre la **colaboración** y el trabajo en equipo para conseguir algo. Hablamos sobre lo que podemos hacer para colaborar en el aula, en el patio de recreo, en el comedor y en otros lugares de la escuela a lo largo del día. Hablamos sobre la importancia de colaborar con el resto de compañeros en la clase y de algunas de las dificultades de colaborar con los demás. Pregúntenles a sus hijos qué hacen para colaborar con sus compañeros de clase. En casa, hagan que sus hijos colaboren en algunas tareas y felicítenles por su buena disposición. Anímenles también a colaborar con otros niños en actividades y grupos fuera de la escuela.

Un cordial saludo,

## BIBLIOGRAFÍA

Estos son algunos de los libros relacionados con los temas que tratamos en Open Circle. Pueden consultarlos en la biblioteca o leerlos con sus hijos:

McNamara, Margaret. *How Many Seeds in a Pumpkin?* Schwartz and Wade Books, 2007.

Torres, Leyla. *Subway Sparrow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1993.





# Positive Self-Talk

## OBJECTIVES

- To define “positive self-talk”
- To practice using positive self-talk

## MATERIALS

- **Positive Self-Talk** mini-poster
- One copy of the Positive Self-Talk worksheet for each student.

## REVIEW

Ask students to cross their arms if they have used a calming-down strategy since the last Open Circle Meeting. Take a moment and practice a calm-breathing technique together before you begin today’s Open Circle Meeting.

## INTRODUCE

Ask students to give a thumbs-up if they are familiar with the term “positive self-talk.” Have a volunteer explain what positive self-talk means to him/her. Share the **Positive Self-Talk** mini-poster and read aloud the definition to introduce or review the term.

Give students an example of self-talk from your own experience. For example, “When I began taking piano lessons, my teacher gave me a new piece to learn. Even though I kept playing the wrong notes, I told myself to keep trying, and I learned how to play the piece.”

Self-talk can be positive and helpful or it can be negative, and not helpful. Ask students to think of an example of negative self-talk they might use if they got a low grade on a test or struck out in baseball. When we use negative self-talk, it can prevent us from trying. It can also make us feel worried, and upset.

Ask children to think of some positive self-talk they might use to encourage themselves when they get a disappointing grade on a test. (*I can do better next time, I’ll study hard, I know I can do it, etc.*) Positive self-talk can change your attitude and make you feel more hopeful when you are trying to do something that is difficult.

## PRACTICE

Ask students to think of examples of times when they were trying to do something that was difficult for them. Have students share a few examples.

Ask them to choose one situation and imagine how they were feeling and what they were saying to themselves. Use the following questions to guide students' thinking:

How were you feeling? What thoughts were in your mind? What were you saying to yourself? Were you using negative or positive self-talk? How might you change negative self-talk to positive self-talk?

## **APPLY**

Write the following (and other) examples of negative self-talk on strips of paper and put them in a hat or basket. Have volunteers take turns pulling a strip of paper from the hat or basket, reading it aloud, and then changing the negative self-talk to positive self-talk:

I'm no good at math. I just can't learn it. (*I am going to spend a little extra time tonight doing my math homework and reviewing the chapter.*)

I can never get a basket. (*I am going to stand five feet from the basket and use my weight to push the ball up and toward the hoop.*)

I can't write poetry. (*I am going write a poem about something I feel strongly about.*)

I can never speak up in class. (*I am going to answer a question during class.*)

Ask children for an example of how an athlete or a performer might use positive self-talk. Tell students that they can use positive self-talk in the same way to help themselves in school. Ask students to give examples of how they could use positive self-talk to help themselves when they are doing homework, learning something new, or taking tests.

## **HOMEWORK/EXTEND**

Distribute one copy of the Positive Self-Talk worksheet to each student. Ask them to think of one thing about which they would like to encourage themselves. Write it on the top of the grid, and place it in the corner of their desk or inside their desk. Every time that they encourage themselves today, they may make a mark on the grid. At the end of the day, ask how many marks students have made.

Before beginning a standardized test or other test in the classroom, lead students through one of the calm breathing exercises and then encourage them to use positive self-talk.

Send the *Home Link* newsletter to your students' families. To edit the *Home Link* to include more specific information about what your class is working on, or to send them electronically, you can download the text at [www.open-circle.org/homelinks](http://www.open-circle.org/homelinks).

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Green, Michelle Y. *A Strong Right Arm: The Story of Mamie “Peanut” Johnson*. Puffin Books, 2004.

Mamie Johnson had to motivate herself to overcome the many obstacles to her becoming one of only three women to play baseball in the Negro Leagues.

- Why do you think Mamie Johnson was so successful as a baseball pitcher? Give an example of self-talk Mamie Johnson might have used to pitch well under pressure.

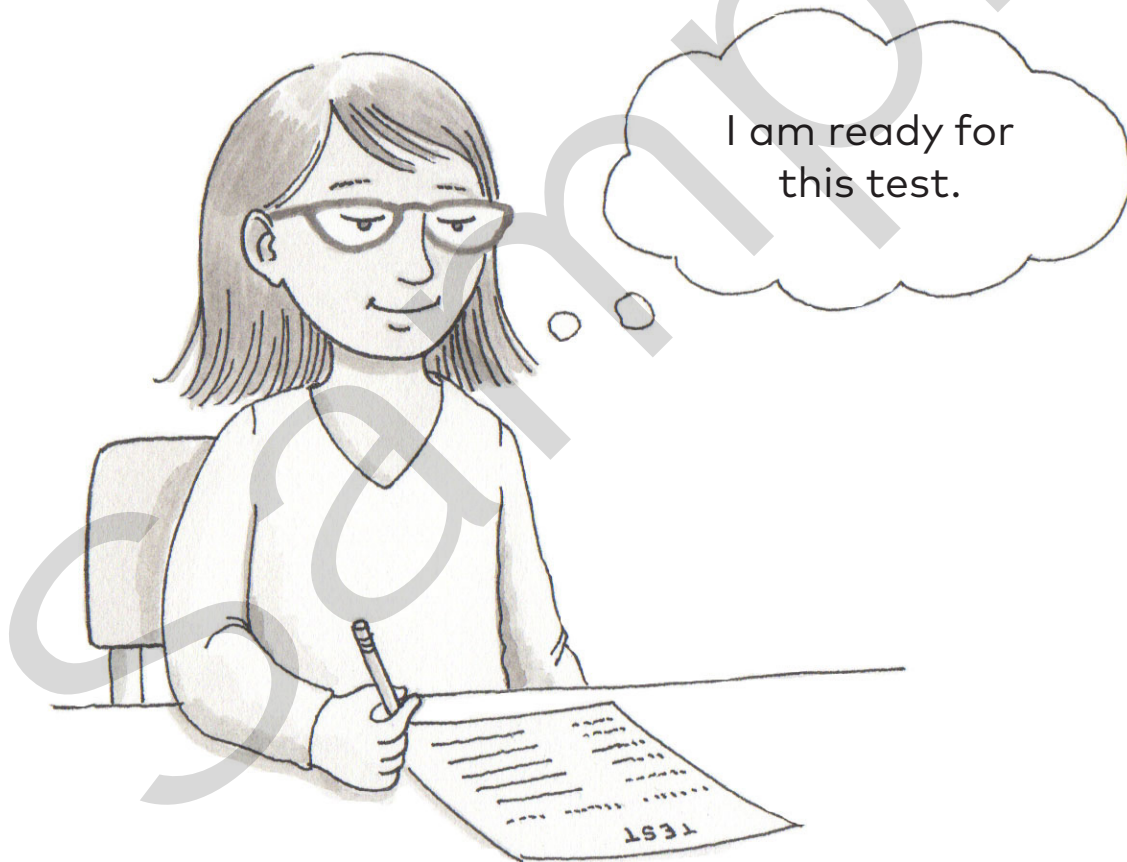
## SUPPLEMENTARY LESSONS

The following supplementary lesson(s) can be used after this lesson:

- Additional Positive Self-Talk Practice

# Positive Self-Talk

Saying encouraging things  
to yourself



Grade 4

# Positive Self-Talk Worksheet

Choose one way in which you would like to encourage yourself, and write it in this box.

Each time you encourage yourself today, mark the grid below with an "X."

Positive Self-Talk			

Dear Family:

In a recent Open Circle Meeting, we talked about ways **to get calm when you feel upset**. We discussed what happens in our bodies and brains when we feel strong emotions. We learned how different parts of the brain, such as the frontal cortex and the amygdala, control how we feel, think and act. When we are upset, it is difficult to think clearly. We learned that calm-breathing techniques can help us calm down. Spending time with people who care about us also helps us feel calm. Calming down helps us think and make decisions.

**Positive self-talk** was the topic of another Open Circle lesson. Positive self-talk is saying encouraging things to yourself. Positive self-talk helps us to try harder and not give up. We can all do things that seem hard at first if we remind ourselves to keep trying and not give up. At school, we can use positive self-talk to encourage ourselves to do our best on a test or in a game, or to try something new.

At home, ask your child to explain to you what positive self-talk is and give you an example. Encourage your child to use positive self-talk when he/she seems discouraged about learning or trying something new.

Yours truly,

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Here are some books that relate to the topics we discussed in Open Circle. You might want to check out one or two at the library and read with your child:

Dakos, Kalli. *Put Your Eyes Up Here and Other School Poems*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2003.

Poems such as “Ode to My Stress Ball” and “Worried about Being Worried” describe students’ attempts to manage strong feelings they experience in school.

Green, Michelle Y. *A Strong Right Arm: The Story of Mamie “Peanut” Johnson*. Puffin Books, 2004.

Mamie Johnson had to motivate herself to overcome the many obstacles to her becoming one of only three women to play baseball in the Negro Leagues.

Estimada familia:

En una de las últimas reuniones de Open Circle, hablamos sobre cómo podemos **calmarnos cuando nos enojamos**. Conversamos sobre lo que ocurre en el cuerpo y el cerebro cuando sentimos emociones fuertes. Aprendimos que algunas partes del cerebro (como el lóbulo frontal o la amígdala cerebral) controlan cómo nos sentimos, pensamos y actuamos. Cuando estamos disgustados, nos resulta difícil pensar con claridad. Aprendimos que las técnicas de respiración nos pueden ayudar a calmarnos. Otra forma de mantenernos tranquilos es pasar tiempo con los que nos quieren. Si nos relajamos, podemos pensar y tomar decisiones.

En otra reunión hablamos sobre el **pensamiento positivo**. El pensamiento positivo consiste en decirse a uno mismo cosas alentadoras para esforzarnos y no darnos por vencidos. Aunque algunas cosas puedan parecer difíciles al principio, todos somos capaces de hacerlas si nos recordamos a nosotros mismos que debemos seguir adelante y no rendirnos. En clase podemos usar el pensamiento positivo para dar lo mejor de nosotros en un examen o en un juego, o para intentar algo nuevo.

En casa, díganles a sus hijos que les expliquen qué es el pensamiento positivo y que les den un ejemplo. Animen a sus hijos a que usen el pensamiento positivo cuando estén desanimados por los estudios o algo nuevo.

Un cordial saludo,

## BIBLIOGRAFÍA

Estos son algunos de los libros relacionados con los temas que tratamos en Open Circle. Pueden consultarlos en la biblioteca o leerlos con sus hijos:

Green, Michelle Y. *A Strong Right Arm: The Story of Mamie "Peanut" Johnson*. Puffin Books, 2004.

Dakos, Kalli. *Put Your Eyes Up Here and Other School Poems*. Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2003.





# Speaking Up

## OBJECTIVES

- To define “speaking up”
- To learn and practice speaking-up skills

## MATERIALS

- Speaking Up mini-poster

## REVIEW

Ask a few volunteers to share any experiences of cooperating to get something done at home or at school.

## INTRODUCE

Tell students that in school it is important to speak up so that people can hear what you have to say. Share the **Speaking Up** mini-poster and read aloud the sentences that describe how to speak up in school.

Demonstrate for students what it means to speak up, as well as what it looks and sounds like when you are not speaking up.

- Look at the person or group to whom you are speaking. (*Demonstrate speaking while not looking at them versus looking at them.*)
- Speak slowly. (*Demonstrate too fast versus slow.*)
- Speak clearly. (*Demonstrate mumbled versus clear speech.*)
- Say it loudly enough so that everyone can hear. (*Demonstrate too soft versus loud enough.*)

## PRACTICE

Have students practice speaking up. Ask each student to say his/her first and last name in turn as you go around the circle. Remind students to say their names slowly, clearly, and loudly enough, and to look at the group. Use your judgment in coaching students to say their names again if they weren't clear or loud enough.

## APPLY

Invite volunteers to use their speaking up skills to complete this sentence: I like to \_\_\_\_\_.  
Remind students to speak slowly, clearly, and loudly and to look at the group.

## HOMEWORK/EXTEND

Ask students to practice speaking up during the school day. Explain that if you say, "Please speak up," you want the person to speak slowly, clearly, and loudly enough.

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Button, Lana. *Willow's Whispers*. Kids Can Press, Ltd., 2010.

Willow has trouble speaking up in school, which leads to one misunderstanding after another. Ultimately she finds a way to make herself heard.

- At the beginning of the story, how does Willow's voice sound? How does she help herself speak up? When her microphone breaks, what does she do so that people can hear her?
- Invite students to make their own microphones out of recycled materials.

Lester, Helen. *Hooway for Wodney Wat*. Houghton Mifflin, 1999.

Rodney Rat is miserable in school because his classmates tease him about his speech impairment. "His squeak could barely be heard in class." When he gains some confidence, he speaks in "a voice so strong, he had to hold his own ears."

- Why is it difficult to hear what Rodney is saying in the first part of the story? How does Rodney change his speaking style at the end of the story?
- Have students play a short game of *Simon Says*. Ask for a volunteer to be the leader. Remind the leader to speak up.

# Speaking Up



- Look at the person or group.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Speak loudly enough.

Kindergarten



# Speaking Up

## OBJECTIVES

- To define “speaking up”
- To learn and practice speaking-up skills
- To understand what it means to express feelings, ideas, and opinions in a respectful way

## MATERIALS

- **Speaking Up** mini-poster

## REVIEW

Ask a few volunteers to share an example of cooperative behavior they have noticed.

## INTRODUCE

Remind students that they have learned about the importance of listening and how to listen well to others. Explain that it is also important to be able to express ideas and opinions and feelings in a way that can be heard. It is important to know how to **speak up**. Introduce or review speaking-up skills by sharing the **Speaking Up** mini-poster, and asking a volunteer to read aloud the definition.

Ask students to think about what it means to express ideas, feelings, and opinions in a respectful way. Have a few volunteers share their ideas about speaking up respectfully. Summarize students’ ideas by emphasizing how speaking up in a respectful way means being aware of how your words, your tone of voice, and your body language might affect the people you are talking to. Give an example of how someone might use respectful tone of voice and body language to express an opinion that is not the same as another person. Remind students that when speakers express feelings and opinions using negative body language, listeners may not pay attention to their words. How people speak can be as important as what they say.

Why might the skill of speaking up important in the classroom? Why might it be important in other situations? Ask for a few examples of when students might want to speak up about their ideas, opinions or feelings or to help themselves or others.

Ask the group what they can do to create an environment that helps people in this class feel comfortable speaking up. Remind students that being respectful is just as important for a listener as it is for a speaker. Remind students of what they have learned about listening well. Point out that making comments and asking questions in a respectful

way can support someone who is speaking up. Ask how they would feel if they were expressing their ideas, feelings, and opinions and the rest of the group was disrespectful to him/her? What would happen if someone shared a belief they felt strongly about and others put him/her down?

## **PRACTICE/APPLY**

Ask a pair of students to use their speaking-up skills to take different sides of an issue. For example, have one student take the position that recess time should be shorter so that students could get out of school earlier. Have the other student say that longer recesses are worth a longer school day.

After the students have taken their turns as speakers, ask the group how each speaker demonstrated speaking-up skills. Ask the speaker how the group demonstrated their listening skills. If they did not demonstrate their speaking-up/listening skills, what could they have done differently?

Additional issues to discuss:

- The cafeteria should offer a vegetarian option for lunch everyday./Vegetarian meals should be offered only once a week.
- Fourth and fifth grade students should not be able to use the swings./Everyone should be able to use the swings.
- Rules for fifth-grade students should apply to the whole school./Rules need to be different for each grade level.

Ask students if they felt confident when they were speaking up. Ask the group if the speakers were expressing their ideas, opinions, and feelings in a respectful way. Describe their tone of voice and body language. Ask the speakers if they felt as if the group listened to them in a respectful way.

Share with students that working in Open Circle throughout the year will help everyone become better at being able to express their opinions, ideas and feelings. Tell them that learning how to disagree respectfully is an important part of speaking up. By the end of the year, everyone will become better listeners and better speakers.

## **HOMEWORK/EXTEND**

Introduce an activity, such as “Let’s Change It,” to give children more opportunities to practice speaking up. Instructions can be found in the Activities section.

Ask students to think of an historical figure who used speaking up skills effectively to express his/her opinions, ideas, or feelings. Ask them to write about that person and include why speaking up was so important. How did the historical figure demonstrate courage by speaking up?

## LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

McCully, Emily Arnold. *The Bobbin Girl*. Dial Books for Young Readers, 1996.

Judith, a young worker in a Lowell, Massachusetts, textile mill, uses her courage and her speaking-up skills to organize the first workers' strike at the mill.

- How does Judith use her speaking-up skills to convince her fellow factory workers to go out on strike? Find examples in the story of how other factory workers find the courage to speak up as well.

## SUPPLEMENTARY LESSONS

The following supplementary lesson(s) can be used after this lesson:

- Your Body Language and Tone of Voice

# Speaking Up



- Look at the person or group.
- Speak slowly, clearly and loudly enough.
- Express ideas, feelings, and opinions in a respectful way.

Grade 5