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# BRIDGING THE GAP: WAYS TO HELP CHILDREN UNDERSTAND THE ELDERLY

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How can teachers assist their students in breaking the "generation gap" with the elderly? How can teachers change the term "generation gap" to "communication gap"? What positive ways can teachers expose their students to view the value of the elderly without promoting stereotyping and discrimination? How can teachers aid their students in sharing the lifelong experience of the elderly, regardless of their ages? What precise methods can teachers use with their students to portray the elderly as "ageless achievers?" (Scott, 1983) who have too much to give to give up (Rock, 1983)? The answers to these questions lie in providing students with specific classroom learning activities which can foster positive understandings of the elderly and the aging process.

The following is a miscellaneous collection of ideas for learning activities which can enhance, create, encourage, and develop a "communication bridge" between the elderly and today's youth. These learning activities are ungraded and can be easily adapted for classroom use.

1. Encourage children to design a family tree and re-search their roots.
2. Encourage children to discover what their grandparents' names mean.

(Use First Names from Abby to Zach 1983, written by Felder and Burt or baby name books as references.)

3. Develop Grandparent's Favorites Questionnaires. Have the children take the questionnaires to their grandparents and let them answer the questions orally.

My favorite holiday is \_\_\_\_\_.

My favorite color is \_\_\_\_\_.

After the questionnaires are returned, graph the results, and create a bulletin board display titled "Our Grandparents' Favorites." This is an excellent way to integrate math concepts, reading, and an under-

standing of the elderly.

4. Dramatize and videotape a particular story, play, or poem dealing with the topic of aging. Present the videotape to a parent advisory council or parent teacher conference meeting, or inservice training sessions for teachers and administrators, demonstrating how positive attitudes of love and respect for grandparents can create an understanding of the aging process, the elderly, and grandparenting.

5. Reinforce language development through retelling and predicting stories, such as We Can't Sleep (1982) written by James Stevenson.

6. Create questions which generate children's responses on aging. Use open ended questions and sentences, or metaphorical language exercises. Sample exercises are given:

What is a grandmother?

Aging is \_\_\_\_\_.

My grandfather is like \_\_\_\_\_.

7. Encourage creative writing experiences. Permit the children to compose poems, stories, songs, letters, birthday, holiday, greeting, or postcards, slogans, (Grandparents are Ageless) and bumper stickers (I LUV MY GRANDPARENTS) for their grandparents.

8. Sponsor a Foster Grandparent Program in your classroom or school providing volunteer opportunities for grandparents to establish a positive relationship with a child or a group of children.

9. Establish a weekly I'll Read to You, You Read to Me, reading program. Each week a child invites his or her grandparent(s) to the school to listen to children read a story to them. Then the grandparents can read a story to the children. A newsletter can be sent out early in the school year explaining the purpose of the program. If a grandparent(s) wish(es) to participate, (he/she/they) can respond on the newsletter indicating convenient days and times that they could come to the school. If grandparents are unable to participate, permit the child to invite another adult.

10. Celebrate a Grandparent's Happy Birthday Party in your classroom. Each child invites his or her grandparent to school wishing grandparents all over the world a Happy Birthday. If a child's grandparent cannot attend, permit the child to invite another adult. Children can entertain their grandparents with

songs, poems, choral readings, skits, or puppetry.

11. Have a Career Awareness Day or My Favorite Collectibles Day in your classroom. Invite the grandparents to the school and encourage them to talk to the children about their careers, hobbies, or collections that they are presently involved in or did in the past.

12. Sponsor a Book Fair in your school library. Let children create television and radio service announcements, book reviews, bulletin boards, displays, or posters for promoting books on grandparenting, the elderly, or the aging process.

13. Permit children to create wordless picture books using cartoons. The Flying Grandmother (1981) written by Naomi Kojima is a wordless textbook presented with numbered cartoons. It tells the flying adventures of a little girl and her grandmother who are outfitted with wings.

14. Integrate science and the aging process. Ask questions which stimulate classroom discussion; for example, "What causes senility?" or invite a local physician to speak with the children about aging.

15. Integrate social studies and the aging process; for example, "Who was Grandma Moses?"

16. Integrate reading and language arts with Susan Hogue's book titled I Unpacked My Grandmother's Trunk (1983). It is a popular word game book which teaches the letters of the alphabet, memory, and sequencing.

17. Cut out, paste, and laminate photos from magazines or newspapers which depict the elderly in positive and productive ways. Permit children to react to the illustrations. An excellent resource is Dorka Raynor's book titled Grandparents Around the World (1977) which presents forty-six full page black and white photographs of grandparents and children taken in twenty-five countries with a brief identifying text accompanying each photograph.

18. Let children create a school newspaper or a magazine. Feature columns or articles on the elderly, the aging process, or biographies on the children's grandparents.

19. Let children send telegrams to their grandparents. Design original telegram forms or obtain them from a local telegraph office. Each child writes a message to

his/her grandparents. The words are cut out of old newspapers or magazines and glued to the telegram blank. Since a telegram contains no punctuation, tell children to use the word STOP to indicate a period.

20. Create an interest in etymology. Encourage children to discover the origin and the history of such words as grandmother, grandfather, grandparents.

21. Increase vocabulary through the direct teaching of synonyms and antonyms; for example, the synonym for grandfather are granddad, grandpop, grandpa, grandpapa, gramps, and the archaic form, grandsire.

22. Let children write about their grandparents' favorite recipe or helpful hints. Compose a cookbook titled Our Grandparents' Favorite Recipes or a helpful hints book titled Our Grandparents' Helpful Hints. Give a copy of the book to each child to give to his/her grandparents.

23. Let children write or contact local officials and television or radio stations to announce a Grandparents Day Celebration to be held in a local school or community building.

24. Assist children in understanding and coping with death. Use Leo Buscaglia's book titled The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages (1982) which is an allegory illustrating the balance between life and death.

25. Read The Giving Tree (1964) written by Shel Silverstein. Let children pretend that they are the giving tree. What would they give their grandparents? Let them design a giving tree and write their thoughts about it. Bring in an artificial Christmas tree and display the children's drawings and thoughts on the tree.

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