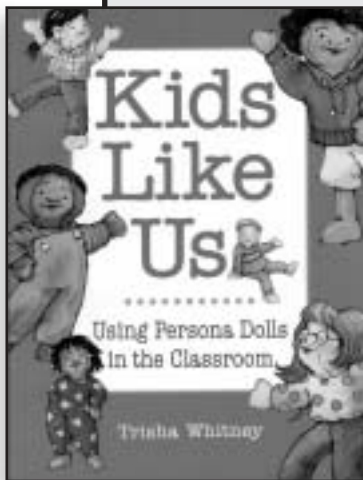


STUFF & NEW STUFF

Build classroom tolerance with persona dolls...

Persona dolls are a tool for teaching about almost anything, but especially diversity. Each doll is given its own name, racial or ethnic identity, and a few personality traits, usually by the teacher. "This is



Paco. He's 4 years old and he speaks Spanish and some English. He lives in an apartment with his mom and dad, grandmother, brother, and two sisters.

He likes strawberry ice cream, pizza, and Spiderman."

As time goes on, the teacher tells stories about Paco. One story might tell about celebrating a sister's birthday, and another about how someone made fun of him. Afterward the teacher and children discuss Paco's feelings and brainstorm solutions. Among the goals are to introduce children to differences, help develop empathy, and learn problem solving skills.

Louise Derman-Sparks introduced this teaching tool in *Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children* (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1989). The concept actually originated with Kay Taus, a kindergarten teacher who participated with the author on an anti-bias task force.

In subsequent years, many teachers in the United States and abroad have used persona dolls with great success. At least two books have been written about the topic.

Kids Like Us: Using Persona Dolls in the Classroom

Written by Trisha Whitney.
Redleaf Press, 1999. (\$24.95 paperback)

Trisha Whitney, elementary school director in Eugene, Ore., has been training teachers about using persona dolls since 1995. Her how-to guide is a primer for teachers who have never used the dolls before.

She suggests how create a collection of the dolls and map out stories that reflect real-life situations facing children in the classroom. She explains how to first introduce a doll so children develop a relationship with it. Then she describes a five-step method for each storytelling session:

1. **Introduction.** Reacquaint the children with who the doll is. "Remember this is Mickey, and he has cerebral palsy. It's hard for him to get his muscles to do what he wants them to."
2. **Situation.** Outline the situation to be discussed. "Last week his new baby brother was born."
3. **Feelings.** Ask how the doll is feeling. Use active listening, and repeat what the children say. "Yes, he's feeling mad because the baby cries all the time." "Maybe he feels lonely because Mom doesn't have much time for him."
4. **Discussion and problem solving.** Ask children what

the doll could do. "Yes, he could scream like the baby. What else?" "Jamal, what did you do when your family had a new baby?"

5. **Resolution.** Give the story an ending, incorporating ideas the children have offered. "Mickey was feeling left out. But one night after the baby was asleep, he told his dad about how he was feeling. Now his mom and dad take turns playing with Mickey for about a half hour while the other one watches the baby."

The book contains suggestions for adapting the dolls to different age groups from toddlers through the primary grades. It contains sample planning sheets and a list of resources. The real-life examples not only illustrate the storytelling method but also provide ideas for lots of stories.

Combating Discrimination: Persona Dolls in Action

Written by Babette Brown.
Trentham Books, 2001.
(\$29.95 paperback)

Babette Brown, a native of South Africa, credits Derman-Sparks and Whitney, among others, as influences for her book. As the title suggests, Brown focuses on how persona dolls can counter biased attitudes and discriminatory behavior. She cites evidence from recent research as well as anecdotes from teachers who have used the dolls.



Brown makes it clear that there is no one right way to use the dolls. She suggests presenting them to children as small friends with their own special place in the room or as visitors who come out of the cupboard on occasion.

Teachers can start with one or two dolls and build up the collection. Almost any dolls can be used as long as they accurately portray children being represented (not fashion dolls). Many teachers make the dolls from cloth so they can represent a range of skin colors, facial features, and physical conditions. A simple body pattern is easy to sew, and a 20-30-inch size fits into readily available clothing.

Brown encourages parent involvement at the outset. In the chapter on "Including Parents," she describes how to run a training session for parents.

One chapter is devoted to training teachers. It begins with ideas for raising awareness about different forms of discrimination and ends with an outline of a sample training session, complete with nine exercises, on using persona dolls.

Because the book was published in Great Britain, North American readers may notice a few references to unfamiliar agencies ("QCA" and "National Association of Teachers of Travellers") as well as different spellings ("colour" and "programme"). In addition, most of the resources have a London or other British address.

Nonetheless, readers everywhere will find a wealth of information about using persona dolls to help children learn about similarities and differences among people and to appreciate the hurt that prejudice and discrimination can cause.

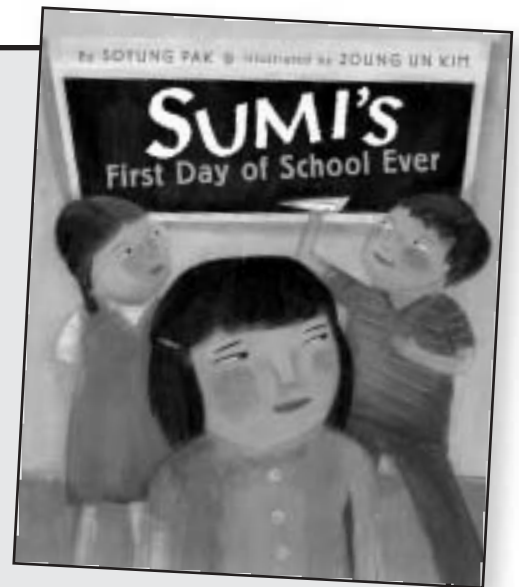
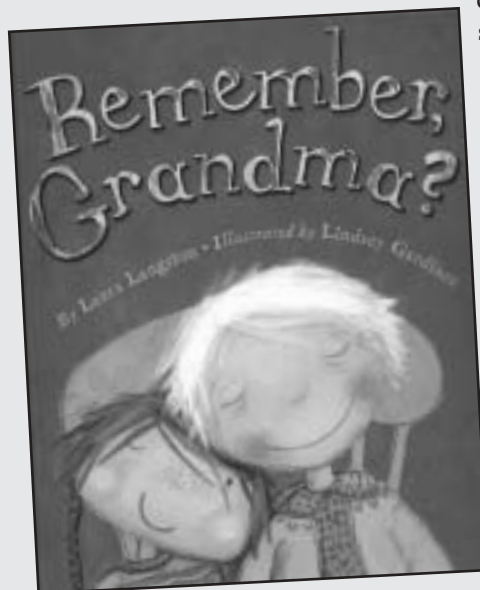
and new children's books about differences

Remember, Grandma?

Written by Laura Langston and illustrated by Lindsey Gardiner. Viking Children's Books, 2004. (\$15.99 hardcover)
Margaret and her grandmother go for walks, sing songs, play piano, and gather apples. But more and more Grandma can't remember. In joyful innocence, Margaret forgives her grandmother's confusion of Chopin for Bach, pears for apples, and roses for sweet peas.

But on the day Grandma can't remember Margaret's name reality is painful: "At first I think she's teasing. But then I see that look on her face and I know. My head gets all whooshy; my eyes start to sting. Grandma can't remember who I am."

Readers are reassured that love within families endures, even when memories do not as the child proclaims: "I am Margaret. I am your remembering."



Sumi's First Day of School Ever

Written by Soyung Pak and illustrated by Joung Un Kim. Viking Children's Books, 2003. (\$15.99 hardcover)

This thoughtful picture book describes a young Korean girl on her first day of school. Like all children entering a new school, Sumi is overwhelmed by a new building, unfamiliar people, and unknown expectations. And for Sumi, the day is extra hard because she doesn't understand the language everyone is using. She decides school is a lonely, scary, and mean place.

The timely intervention of a great teacher and friendly girl helps Sumi reconsider her feelings. Readers rejoice with Sumi realizing that school isn't such a lonely, scary, or mean place after all.