

Learning to Support Peers From Different Backgrounds

Lesson Objective:

Students will explore the importance of supporting peers from different cultural backgrounds through empathy, curiosity, and inclusion, using the S.T.A.R. strategy.

Materials Needed:



- Copy of Chapter 23: Learning to Support Peers From Different Backgrounds
- Paper and pencils
- S.T.A.R. Strategy Poster
- Interview Worksheet & Cultural Appreciation Card (blank paper)
- Home Connection Letter

Introduction to the Topic (10 minutes)

Greeting Outline:

- Welcome the children and have them sit in a circle (if applicable)
- Briefly discuss the concept of peer support

Greeting and Circle Time Teacher Script

Warm Welcome and Opening Discussion:

- "Today, we're going to talk about how we can support our friends and classmates from different cultural backgrounds. Being part of a diverse community means we can learn a lot from one another. But being inclusive also means taking the time to learn from each other's experiences. Let's read how Ollie and his friends learned to support their peers during Cultural Appreciation

Discussion Starter

- "Can you think of a time when you learned something new about someone's culture? How did it make you feel?"
- "Why do you think it's important to support people from different backgrounds?"

Read the Chapter (15 minutes)

Story Time Outline:



- Read Chapter 23 aloud.
- Ask questions during key parts of the story.

Story Time Teacher Script:

Prepare the Children for the Story:

- “Now let’s read a chapter from *The Star Squad: Navigating Fifth Grade Adventures* where the squad learns to support their peers and consider others' experiences.”

(Read the chapter aloud, pausing at key moments to ask questions and engage the children.)

Read the Chapter with Emphasis on Key Moments.

While reading, pause during key moments.

Ask Questions:

- How did Maya describe Diwali to her friends?
- What made the friends curious about different cultures?
- Why was Luis nervous when he shared tamales?
- How did Ollie help Luis feel more comfortable?
- What role did curiosity play in helping Luis feel included?
- What did Maya say about her experience moving to a new school?
- How did Harriet respond to Maya’s story?
- What did the friends learn about assumptions?
- Why did Bennie say that learning about other cultures made him appreciate others more?
- How did the friends decide to support their peers moving forward?

Chapter 23: Learning to Support Peers From Different Backgrounds

It was mid-May, and the school was celebrating Cultural Appreciation Week. Each class had been learning about different cultures, and students were encouraged to share something special about their heritage, whether it was a recipe, a family tradition, or an interesting fact about their background.

As the friends participated in the activities, they began to realize that there were many things they didn't know about their classmates' cultures. Maya, who had recently moved from another state, shared that her family was originally from India, and they celebrated festivals like Diwali and Holi.

"I've heard of Diwali," Harriet said, "but I don't know much about it. What's it like?"

Maya explained that Diwali was a festival of lights that celebrated the victory of light over darkness and good over evil. "It's one of my favorite holidays," she said. "We decorate the house with oil lamps, exchange sweets, and watch fireworks."

The friends were fascinated and wanted to learn more. They began to realize that understanding different cultural backgrounds was an important part of supporting each other as classmates and friends.

Understanding Cultural Differences

The group gathered during recess to talk about what they had been learning during Cultural Appreciation Week. "There are so many different ways people celebrate things," Ollie said. "I didn't realize how many traditions were out there."

"Yeah," Bennie agreed. "And even though we might do things differently, there's a lot we can learn from each other."

The friends began to think about how they could support their peers from different cultural backgrounds. They knew that sometimes people might feel out of place or misunderstood, and they wanted to find ways to be more inclusive and show that they cared.

Using the S.T.A.R. Strategy to Support Peers

The friends decided to use the S.T.A.R. strategy to help them figure out how to be better allies to classmates from different backgrounds:

Stop: They would pause whenever they noticed someone feeling left out or misunderstood and think about why that might be happening.

Think: They would consider what they knew (or didn't know) about the person's background and think about ways to include them in activities or learn more about their culture.

Act: They could ask questions to show their interest, invite the person to join their group, or make an effort to learn about their customs or traditions.

Reflect: Afterward, they would think about how their actions made the person feel and what else they could do to show support.

Putting It Into Practice

The friends soon had an opportunity to practice what they had discussed. During one of the Cultural Appreciation Week events, the students were encouraged to share something about their family's culture. A boy named Luis, whose family was from Mexico, brought a dish called "tamales" for everyone to try. But as the event went on, Ollie noticed that Luis seemed a bit nervous.

"Maybe he's worried that people won't like the food or that they'll say something mean," Ollie thought. He remembered the S.T.A.R. strategy and decided to act.

Ollie walked over to Luis and said, "I've never tried tamales before. They look delicious! Can you tell me more about them?"

Luis seemed to relax a little. "Yeah, my grandma makes them for special occasions," he said.

"They're filled with different things like meat or cheese, and they're wrapped in corn husks."

The friends gathered around and asked Luis questions about his family's traditions. Soon, other students joined the conversation, and Luis's nervousness seemed to fade. The friends noticed that simply showing interest had made a difference.

Learning from Maya's Experience

Later that day, Maya shared a story about her own experience with feeling different. "When I first moved here, I was really nervous about sharing anything from my culture," she said. "I was worried that people wouldn't understand or would think it was weird."

Harriet nodded. "I think sometimes people don't ask questions because they're afraid they'll say the wrong thing."

"That's true," Maya agreed. "But it's better to show curiosity than to ignore it. I'd rather someone ask a question than assume something about me."

The group realized that being supportive wasn't just about knowing everything about different cultures; it was also about being open, asking questions, and showing a willingness to learn. They understood that they didn't have to be experts on every culture to be good friends, they just had to care enough to be inclusive.

Reflecting on Cultural Appreciation Week

At the end of the week, the friends gathered to share what they had learned. “I didn’t realize how much I didn’t know about other cultures,” Bennie said. “There’s so much to learn, and it makes me appreciate how unique everyone is.”

Harriet added, “I used to think that being different was something to hide, but now I see it as something to share. Learning about everyone’s traditions has made me feel closer to our classmates.”

Ollie summed it up. “Supporting people from different backgrounds isn’t just about learning facts; it’s about being a good listener and making an effort to understand. When we show that we care, it makes a big difference.”

Moving Forward

As they continued through the rest of the school year, Ollie, Harriet, Bennie, Sammy, Buzz, Betty, and Maya made a promise to keep being curious and inclusive. They knew that understanding different cultural backgrounds was an ongoing journey, and they were ready to keep learning and growing.

The friends felt proud of the ways they had supported their peers during Cultural Appreciation Week and looked forward to finding even more opportunities to celebrate the diverse community they were a part of. With each new connection they made, they realized that embracing different cultures didn’t just make their friendships stronger, it made their world richer and more vibrant.

Post-Chapter Teacher Script

- **Teacher:** “This story shows us how being a good friend includes being a good listener and making an effort to understand them, and how the S.T.A.R. Strategy can help us do just that.”

Post-Chapter Questions

These questions encourage children to think deeply about what they listen to and to understand that they can use the S.T.A.R. Strategy in many different situations.

- Why was it helpful for Ollie to ask Luis questions about tamales?
- How did Maya feel when she first moved to the school?
- What can happen if we assume things about people instead of asking questions?
- How can curiosity help build friendships?

- Why is it important to make others feel welcome?
- What does it mean to be inclusive?
- How can the S.T.A.R. strategy help us support our peers?
- How do you think Luis felt after the friends showed interest?
- What are some ways we can celebrate differences in our classroom?
- What did the friends learn about the importance of listening?

Do an Activity (20 minutes)

- Students will learn about another student's cultural experiences through an interview worksheet



Activity: Peer Interview and Cultural Appreciation Card

Introduce Activity

“Today, we’re going to celebrate what makes each of us special by learning more about one another’s **family traditions, holidays, or cultural practices**. Every family is unique, and there’s so much we can learn when we listen with curiosity and kindness.

You’ll be paired up with a partner and use an *Interview Template* to ask questions and learn about something your partner’s family does that’s meaningful to them. It might be a special food, celebration, language, or tradition.

Be a respectful listener. Ask follow-up questions if you’re curious, and remember that it’s okay if someone’s traditions are different from your own. Differences are what make our community stronger!

After the interviews, you’ll each create a *Cultural Appreciation Card* to show something you learned and admired. Your card will include:

- A kind message to your partner
 - A drawing or symbol that represents what you learned
 - A short sentence about what you found most interesting or meaningful.
- Let’s have fun learning about each other with open minds and open hearts.”

Instructions

- Partner Interviews (15 minutes):
 - Students will pair up and use the Interview Template to ask their partner questions about a family tradition, holiday, or cultural practice.
 - Encourage students to be curious and respectful during the interview, asking follow-up questions to learn more about their peers' backgrounds.
- Create a Cultural Appreciation Card (15 minutes):
 - Using the Cultural Appreciation Card Template, students will design a card based on what they learned during their interview.
 - The card should include:
 - A short message of appreciation
 - A drawing or symbol representing something they learned
 - A sentence describing what they found most interesting or meaningful

Closing Discussion (5 minutes):

Sharing



- “Now that you’ve completed your interviews and your Cultural Appreciation Cards, I’d love for a few of you to share what you learned. You can read your appreciation message, tell us about your partner’s tradition, or describe what you drew.
Sharing what we’ve learned helps us celebrate our differences and find things we have in common, too.”
- *Allow a handful of students to volunteer to share. Offer encouragement and praise for respectful listening.*

Wrapping It Up

- “Today, you practiced something really important, **cultural appreciation**. That means noticing and respecting what makes someone else’s life and traditions unique, even if they’re different from your own.
- When we take time to ask questions, listen, and show kindness, we help make our classroom a safer, more welcoming space for everyone.”

Wrap Up the Lesson (5 minutes)

Review and Reflection Overview:

- Have students reflect on their experiences and what they learned.

Review and Reflection Teacher Script

Gather in a Circle for Reflection:



- “Let’s gather in a circle to reflect on what we learned today. Circles remind us that everyone is equal and everyone belongs.
- When it’s your turn, you can finish this sentence:
- **‘One thing I learned or appreciated about my partner today was...’**
- You can say something small or big, it’s all about what feels meaningful to you. If you’d rather pass, that’s okay too.”

Closing

- “Every single person has a story, and today we learned how powerful it can be to hear those stories and say, ‘That’s special, and I appreciate it.’
- Keep asking respectful questions, keep listening with curiosity, and keep celebrating what makes each of us who we are.”

Home Connection Letter

Sending Information Home:

- “Before you go, I have a letter for you to take home. It explains that our class participated in a Cultural Appreciation activity focused on learning about each other’s family traditions, holidays, and cultural practices. Through interviews and reflection, students created “appreciation cards” to celebrate what they learned about a classmate’s background.”
- Hand out the letters as the children prepare to leave.

Parent Letter

Sending Information Home:

- Provide each child with a letter to take home to their parents explaining the lesson.

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

Today, your child participated in a lesson on supporting peers from different cultural backgrounds. Through interviews and creative activities, students explored how curiosity and appreciation help build a more inclusive community.

Your child also learned how to use the S.T.A.R. strategy to navigate these situations:

- Stop: Pause and notice if someone feels left out.
- Think: Consider what you know (or don't know) about the person's background.
- Act: Ask questions, invite them to join, or learn about their traditions.
- Reflect: Think about how your actions made a difference.



Thank you for supporting your child's learning!

With Gratitude,

S.T.A.R. Strategy



Stop -Take some deep breaths.

Think -What solutions are there?

Act -Pick the best solution.

Reflect -How did it go?



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A graphic of a spiral-bound notebook with a black cover and a white page. The spiral binding is at the top. The page has a black border and contains the title 'Peer Interview' and five numbered questions.

Peer Interview

1. Can you share a family tradition or cultural celebration that is important to you?
2. What do you enjoy most about this tradition?
3. How do you celebrate this event with your family or community?
4. What is something about your culture that you are proud of?
5. Is there a food, song, or activity that is part of this tradition?