

BUILDING COMMUNITY

How can you create a learning environment where each child feels important, both as an individual and as part of the larger group? Here are songs and activities to foster mutual respect, cooperation, shared responsibility and other hallmarks of a supportive classroom community.

“Somos El Barco” (Spanish: “We Are the Boat”) *CD track 5*

“Courage” *CD track 6*

“All Work Together” *CD track 11*

“Walking on My Wheels” *CD track 15*

“You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught” *CD track 19*



I WILL BE YOUR FRIEND

Different and the Same

One important aspect of building community is respecting differences and looking for common ground in spite of them. This theme is addressed in the songs “Courage,” “You’ve Got to Be Carefully Taught,” and “Walking on My Wheels.” Use one or more of these songs as a springboard for discussing the ways in which people react to perceived differences. How do students respond to someone who looks, acts or dresses differently than they do or to someone who has different beliefs or opinions? Explain that sometimes we make negative judgments about people who are different from us simply because what is unfamiliar makes us feel uncomfortable. Often, we make these judgments about people based on one aspect of their identity and with a limited understanding of who they are as individuals.

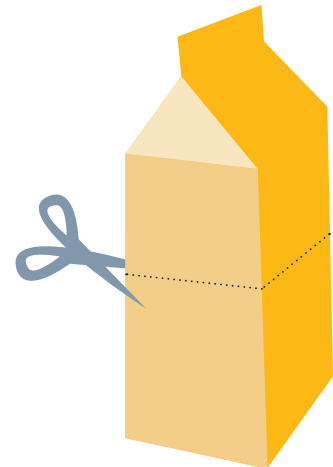
Help students see themselves and others as complex, multi-dimensional people by assembling and sharing “identity cubes,” following the directions below. By comparing their cubes, students can learn to see differences as positive qualities that make themselves and others unique. They can also begin to look beyond their differences to find commonalities.

Materials

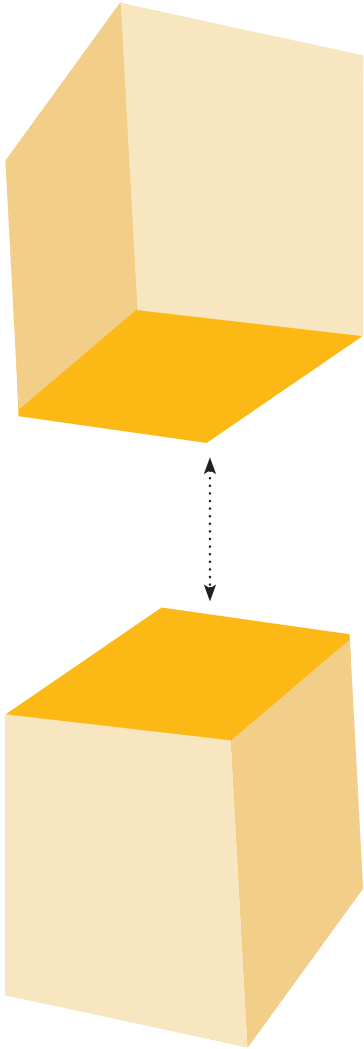
half-gallon cardboard milk and juice cartons (2 per child), drawing paper, rulers, scissors, glue, collage materials (magazines, catalogs, etc.), small photo of each child (optional)

Directions

1. Trim off the top of each carton so that the bottom forms an open-ended cube shape. The cubes should be approximately 4 inches tall.



2. Insert the open end of one cube into the open end of the other to create a closed cube.



3. Cover all six sides of the cube with drawing paper cut to size.

4. On the top of the cube, write your name, age, birthday, where you were born, and a brief description of your physical characteristics (e.g., brown eyes, curly hair, tall, etc.). If you want, you can include a small photo of yourself.

5. On the remaining 5 sides of your cube, use pictures and words to tell other things about yourself. Use one side to provide information about each of the following:

- your family and cultural background
- your favorite things (activities, books, movies, foods, etc.)
- your personality
- something about yourself others may not know
- a goal you have for the future/something you'd like to do or be one day

After students have finished their cubes, divide them into pairs. Choose students who do not typically work or socialize together as you match up partners. Have partners compare and contrast their identity cubes. They can then create Venn diagrams (overlapping circles) showing some of the ways they are different as well as things they have in common.

