



Home Link

Dear Family:

This year our class is using the *Open Circle Curriculum*, a comprehensive social and emotional learning program that supports elementary school children in developing the skills needed to be good learners and to form healthy, positive relationships with people throughout their lives.

Twice each week during the whole school year, the class will meet in a circle for 15 to 30 minutes. Lesson topics will include listening skills, including one another, cooperating, understanding feelings, teasing, recognizing differences among people, getting calm, problem solving, positive self-talk, and more. The goals of the lessons are to create a cooperative classroom environment and to give children the skills they need to solve interpersonal problems and to build positive relationships.

Sometimes your child will have a homework assignment from Open Circle that might require your participation. You can help your child develop the skills we are working on in Open Circle by discussing and practicing them at home. You might ask your child to tell you what we talked about in the last Open Circle Meeting.

You will receive *Open Circle Home Links* periodically to keep you informed. They will include new vocabulary words and suggestions for some children's books that relate to Open Circle lesson topics. You might want to check one or two of these books out of the library to read with your child. For more information about Open Circle, please visit www.open-circle.org.

The *Open Circle Curriculum* was developed by Open Circle at the Wellesley Centers for Women, Wellesley College, and is available for all elementary grades. At each grade level, Open Circle addresses the same core concepts and skills in ways that are specifically designed to be developmentally appropriate for students at that age. All teachers who use Open Circle have received special training to implement the *Curriculum* in their classrooms.

If you have any questions about Open Circle, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours truly,



Home Link

Dear Family:

During our first Open Circle Meetings, the class worked together to make a plan to get their chairs into a circle quietly, safely, and cooperatively. We form a circle so that everyone can see everyone else and be heard. We always leave one space open in case another person would like to join the circle. Everyone is welcome, and no one is ever left out. The Open Circle symbolizes the idea of an inclusive classroom community. Ask your child to tell you how the class gets into a circle.

Students worked on getting to know each other's names in one Open Circle. In order to be able to work well together, they need to know each other's names and how to pronounce them correctly. Ask your child to say the names of as many people in the class as he/she can remember.

In another Open Circle, we discussed classroom goals and developed some classroom rules based on those goals. We learned that a **goal** is something a person tries to get, something to work toward, or how you want things to end up. Just like individual people, whole classrooms can have goals too. Ask your child to tell you some of our classroom goals.

We also made some rules that will help to keep our classroom safe, make it a place where students feel cared about, and make it a place where we can do our best learning. In addition, I added some important rules that are **nonnegotiable**. This means "no choice." Students may ask to have these rules explained, and they may ask questions about them, but they cannot be changed. Ask your child to share with you some of the classroom rules that we developed and agreed to. Ask for an example of a nonnegotiable rule in our classroom. You might have a discussion with your child about the rules in your home — for mealtimes, bedtimes, and chores.

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:

Ada, Alma Flor. *My Name is Maria Isabel*. Aladdin, 1995.

Maria Isabel Lopez Salazar is unhappy when her teacher shortens her name to Mary Lopez. Maria Isabel stands up for her right to be called by her correct name.

Cech, John. *Aesop's Fables*. Sterling, 2009.

Fables such as *The Ant and the Grasshopper*, *A Bundle of Sticks*, and *The Cat and the Mice*, illustrate the challenges and benefits of working together and sharing responsibilities.

Choi, Yangsook. *The Name Jar*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2001.

Unhei's classmates encourage her to feel proud of her name.



Home Link

Dear Family:

In several recent Open Circle lessons, we talked about what it feels like to **be calm** and **how to get calm** when we are upset. We named some times at school and at home that make us feel calm. When we are being calm, we are breathing slowly and calmly. We also thought of some situations that make us feel excited, upset, or not listening or behaving well. Sometimes at school and at other places, it is important to get calm when we are feeling anxious or are not listening or behaving well. We learned two calm breathing exercises. Many actors and athletes use this first exercise before a performance or an event. It is called **calm breathing**:

- Breathe in slowly and deeply, filling your belly with air like a balloon.
- Breathe out slowly.

We also learned a second calm breathing exercise:

- Breathe in and count to yourself up to four.
- Breathe out slowly, counting backward from four to one.

Each person has his/her own way of calming down. However, it's important to recognize the feelings and changes in our bodies and behavior that occur when we are getting upset or too excited. Sometimes taking even a few calm breaths can help us to calm down and get back in control.

Ask your child to teach you the two calm breathing techniques he/she learned in school. Practice them together. Share with your child some times when you might want to use one of the calm breathing techniques. Talk about times he/she might want to use them to help get calm. Make a habit of using calm breathing yourself and encourage your child to use one of the techniques whenever he/she needs to calm down. When we are breathing calmly, we are able to be better learners and better friends.

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:

Hooks, Bell. *Grump, Groan, Growl*. Hyperion Books for Children, 2008.

When a bad mood strikes, all you want to do is “grump, groan, and growl.” One way to lose a grumpy mood is to calm down and “let it slide.”

Muth, Jon. *Zen Shorts*. Scholastic Press, 2005.

Stillwater, the bear, shares some fables that teach children how to deal with a variety of problems in a calm manner.



Home Link

Dear Family:

In Open Circle, we have been getting to know each other better. In order for students to become friends and work well together, it is important for them to learn about each other. We played the “Stand Up/Sit Down” game to find out what we have in common, such as how many like to draw, have a sister, like to play with blocks, or know how to swim. Ask your child to tell you what he/she learned from the “Up/Down” game about what the students in the class have in common. You might encourage your child to get to know a classmate they do not know very well during recess or lunchtime.

We also practiced our listening skills and learned the **school listening look**. The school listening look means that we:

- sit still.
- sit up.
- look at the person who is speaking.
- pay attention.

It is important to everyone in the class—students, teachers, and visitors—to be listened to when they speak. At home, ask your child to show you the school listening look and teach it to you. Practice it by listening to your child. Listening is a very important lifelong skill, not only for children to develop but also for adults to learn and practice. You might want to encourage all members of your family to listen well to one another.

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:

Lobel, Arnold. *Frog and Toad*. HarperCollins, 1979.

One of the things that keeps Frog and Toad together as friends is that they really listen to one another.

Polacco, Patricia. *Mrs. Katz and Tush*. Bantam Books, 1992.

An elderly Jewish woman and a young black child find a common bond and friendship.

Rathmann, Peggy. *Officer Buckle and Gloria*. G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995.

Students who attend Officer Buckle's safety lectures don't practice listening skills until Gloria, a police dog, joins the lecture team.



Home Link

Dear Family:

In Open Circle recently, we talked about **nonverbal signals**. A nonverbal signal is a way of communicating without using words. We tried out many nonverbal signals that we already use, such as the signals for time out, speak up, and be quiet. We talked about why it might be helpful to have some nonverbal signals in the classroom that everyone agrees to and is clear about instead of using words. The class chose several nonverbal signals that we agreed to use this year in the classroom. We also chose a nonverbal signal to use if the class gets too noisy and is not listening or behaving well. We talked about what each person can do to help the classroom focus and show self-control. Ask your child to demonstrate the signals the class agreed to use this year. Ask your child to demonstrate some other nonverbal signals and have you guess what they mean. You and your child might want to develop your own nonverbal signals to use at home.

At another Open Circle Meeting, we talked about giving and receiving **compliments**. A compliment is a statement that is true and describes something good about a person. It can be about how they act or how they treat others. Compliments make people feel special and appreciated. We learned three things to remember about giving a compliment:

- It must be true.
- It must be specific.
- It must be positive.

We also learned how to respond to compliments. In school, we should:

- Look at the person and smile.
- Say, "Thank you!"

Each student had a turn to be in the spotlight and receive a compliment. At home, be sure to compliment your child often for doing something well, being thoughtful, or being helpful. If your child gives you a compliment, remember to look at him/her, smile, and say, "Thank you!"

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:

Norworth, Jack. *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*. Aladdin Paperback, 1999.

The lyrics of the familiar song are illustrated with scenes from a 1949 World Series game. The illustrations show some examples of nonverbal signals.



Home Link

Dear Family:

In a recent Open Circle Meeting, we talked about **additional calming-down activities**. We learned some new strategies to help us calm down when we need to. We discussed straw breathing, blowing bubbles, counting backward, giving yourself a time out, and focusing on something else. Students were also able to share their own strategies with their classmates. Ask your child what strategy helps them calm down and share your own strategies with your child. Knowing how to calm down when we need to is a valuable lifelong skill.

In another Open Circle we talked about practicing **self-talk**. Self-talk is a way of encouraging ourselves. Positive self-talk can help us to do something or reach a goal. However, negative self-talk can discourage us from even trying. We can use positive self-talk in school to help us do our best on a test, in a game, or in a performance; to learn something new; or to reach a goal.

At home, ask your child to explain to you what 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.

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:

Ghigna, Charles. *Score! 50 Poems to Motivate and Inspire*. Abrams Books for Young Readers, 2008.

The poems in this collection provide several different models for positive self-talk.

Krull, Kathleen. *Wilma Unlimited: How Wilma Rudolph Became the Fastest Woman*.
Harcourt Inc., 1996.
A young girl overcomes the effects of polio to become a successful track star.



Home Link

Dear Family:

Including one another was the topic of one of our Open Circle lessons recently. We talked about how it feels to be left out and how it feels to be part of a group that excludes someone. We also discussed why people exclude others and thought of many ways to include people. In a caring classroom community, it's important to try to find ways to include others and not hurt people's feelings. 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 why it is important to cooperate, and we brainstormed some skills needed for cooperation, such as sharing, taking turns, listening, letting someone organize the activity, and making sure that everyone gets to take part. We also did some role plays about cooperating. Ask your child to name some times during the school day when he/she might need to cooperate with his/her classmates. At home, find opportunities for your child to cooperate to get something done. Be sure to compliment him/her on his/her 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:

DiSalvo-Ryan, DyAnne. *City Green*. Morrow Junior Books, 1994.

Marcy and her friend encourage neighbors to join them in the creation of a community garden.

Fleischman, Paul. *Weslandia*. Candlewick Press, 1999.

Wesley is not included in groups at school. When summer comes, classmates want to become part of the exciting world that Wesley creates, and he invites them in.

Heard, Georgia. *Falling Down the Page: A Book of List Poems*. Roaring Book Press, 2009. Saying "hello" is a universal greeting, according to poet Avis Harley.

Muth, Jon J. *Stone Soup*. Scholastic Press, 2003.

Three monks help a community find happiness by introducing them to the joys of cooperation and citizenship.

Williams, Vera. *A Chair for My Mother*. Greenwillow Books, 1982.

Grandma, Mama, and Rosa struggle to save their loose change in order to buy a chair into which Mama can collapse after her waitressing job.



Home Link

Dear Family:

Speaking up was the topic of a recent Open Circle lesson. In order to be able to express our ideas and opinions, it's important to be able to speak up. We learned four important skills that help people to hear and understand what we are saying:

- Look at the group.
- Speak slowly.
- Speak clearly.
- Speak loudly enough.

We discussed how to help make speakers feel comfortable and how to encourage and support speakers. We also discussed that there may be times when we need to speak up to be a good friend to others, if we have a problem, or if something feels unsafe.

At home, ask your child to use the speaking-up skills to tell you about a book he/she has read or a television show he/she has watched recently. Ask what someone can do to make a speaker feel comfortable and supported. Encourage your child to always use speaking-up and listening skills.

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:

Ada, Alma Flor. *My Name Is Maria Isabel*. Macmillan, 1993.

Maria Isabel Lopez-Salazar must communicate directly with her new teacher about a matter of personal pride.

Pinkwater, Daniel. *The Big Orange Splot*. Scholastic Inc., 1977.

Mr. Plumbean paints his house to look like his dreams, and then he convinces his neighbors to do the same.



Home Link

Dear Family:

Our recent Open Circle lessons have focused on helping students to understand the situations in school that require the immediate intervention of a teacher or another responsible adult. We learned to identify **Double D behaviors**. These are behaviors that are **dangerous** (someone might get hurt) or **destructive** (something might get broken, damaged, or destroyed; or mean teasing or bullying). It is always important for students to tell a teacher or other adult immediately when they observe a Double D behavior in school. For example, Double D behaviors might include running across the street at recess to get a ball, climbing a tree on the playground, standing on a folding chair to reach a book in the classroom, throwing a baseball toward a window, writing in a textbook, being part of a group of kids picking on another child day after day at recess.

We also talked about some ways students can deal with situations when someone is annoying them and it is not a Double D situation. For example, another student might cut into line or make noises while others are working. Two steps for dealing with annoying behavior are:

- Describe the behavior that is annoying you and explain why it bothers you.
- Say what you want the other person to do instead.

Students were assured that they can always come to an adult for help if they cannot deal with a situation on their own.

At home, try to identify behaviors or situations in terms of Double D's. Ask your child, "Is that a Double D behavior?" If it is, compliment him/her on telling an adult. If it is not a Double D behavior, help your child to follow the two steps listed above. You also might want to help your child identify responsible adults whom he/she could tell about a Double D behavior at places other than school and home.

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:

Caseley, Judith. *Bully*. Greenwillow Books, 2001.

Mickey gets plenty of advice from his family about how to handle a bully, but ultimately, he comes up with the best solution.

Franco, Betsy and Jessie Hartland. *Messing Around on the Monkey Bars: and Other School Poems for Two Voices*. Candlewick Press, 2009.

The poem, "Jenny's Pencil" describes a common annoying behavior in classrooms - the tap, tap, tapping of a pencil.

Polacco, Patricia. *Thank you, Mr. Falker*. Philomel Books, 1998.

Trisha suffers when children make fun of her inability to read. When the teasing reaches the point of being destructive, Trisha's teacher intervenes.



Home Link

Dear Family:

Dealing with **teasing** was the topic of a recent Open Circle lesson. We talked about how it feels to be teased, how people teasing others might feel, and what one can do or say that could either stop the teasing or make it worse. We discussed how to find out if someone doesn't mind being teased or if it bothers them. Some teasing is okay, but not if it is hurtful or mean-spirited. Students were reminded that mean teasing and bullying are Double D behaviors and are not acceptable. When students observe mean teasing and bullying, they should tell a responsible adult immediately.

At home, talk to your child about teasing. Share a time that you were teased and did not like it. Have you ever teased someone, thinking it was fun, but it bothered them? Encourage your child to be sensitive to the feelings of other children.

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:

Couric, Katie. *The Brand New Kid*. Doubleday, 2000.

Children tease Lazlo, a new boy in class, because he looks and sounds different.

Once a kind classmate reaches out to Lazlo, the other children in school follow suit.

Saltzberg, Barney. *Crazy Hair Day*. Candlewick Press, 2003.

When Larry teases his friend, Stanley about his hair, the whole class tries to convince Stanley that he'll still "fit in" to the class picture.

Yashima, Taro. *Crow Boy*. Puffin Books, 1976.

A shy Japanese schoolboy is ignored or teased by his classmates until a sensitive teacher encourages him to share his special talents with the school community.



Home Link

Dear Family:

In a recent Open Circle Meeting, we talked about the issue of bullying. Together we talked about what bullying is and children learned that bullying is defined as: when one or more people severely or repeatedly harm someone with words or actions. We also talked about how bullying is different than an argument or a fight, and explored some of the reasons why students may choose to bully and how it might feel to be bullied. We ended our conversation with a reminder that bullying is a Double D behavior and that if a child witnesses or is the target of a bullying incident, she/he needs to tell a responsible adult right away.

We also talked about what a bystander is and the important role they can play in a problem situation. Children brainstormed a list of responsible adults they can go to if they are being bullied or if they observe bullying behavior.

At home, have a conversation with your child about bullying. Share your own experiences. Have you had any experiences yourself with being a target, a bully, or a bystander? How did it feel? What did you do? Did you ever go to an adult for help? What did she/he do? Talk with your child about whether she/he has had any experiences with bullying. Ask your child why they think bullying happens. Ask your child how she/he feels about going to an adult for help? How might it help? What might be hard about going to an adult for help?

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:

McCain, Becky Ray. *Nobody Knew What To Do*. Albert Whitman, 2001.

Some students pick on Ray everyday, and Ray's classmates finally speak up about the bullying behavior.

Otoshi, Kathryn. *One*. KO Kids Books, 2008.

Colors and numbers are the characters in this story about bullying behavior. This tale illustrates how friends can stand up for a person who is the target of bullying.



Home Link

Dear Family:

Group membership was the topic of a recent Open Circle lesson. We talked about the many groups to which each of us belongs, such as girls, boys, elementary school students, soccer players, dancers, etc. We chose to be members of some groups but did not choose to be members of others. We learned that even though people may belong to a certain group and have some things in common, they are not exactly like everyone else in that group. To treat people fairly, we need to treat them as individuals.

At home, talk to your child about the groups to which members of your extended family belong. Is everyone in your family just alike? Encourage your child to understand that not everyone in a group is exactly alike even though they may look alike or share similar interests.

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:

English, Karen. *Nadia's Hands*. Boyds Mills Press, 1999.

Nadia feels conflicted about having her hands decorated for aunt's wedding.

Howe, James. *Horace and Morris Join the Chorus (but what about Dolores?)*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2002.

Three friends audition for the school chorus, but only two are selected.



Home Link

Dear Family:

In a recent Open Circle, we talked about **understanding feeling words**. Everyone has feelings, and all feelings are okay — even though some feelings make us feel better than others. We can guess what someone might be feeling by how they look or what they do. But to really know what someone is feeling, we have to ask. Some of the feeling words we named were happy, sad, frightened, excited, disappointed, and mad.

Take turns with your child naming as many feeling words as you can. You might want to look at an illustrated book or magazine with your child and name the feelings people are showing in the pictures. Make a habit of using feeling words at home to name how you and other family members are feeling.

Body language was the topic of another recent Open Circle lesson. Body language is a way of expressing feelings using our faces, bodies, or hands. We practiced recognizing body language signals, such as a frown, arms crossed, eyes wide open, a raised eyebrow, and other facial expressions and gestures. Body language helps us to understand how people are feeling even if they are not telling us with words.

Make a game of noticing body language when you are out with your child. Notice the signals that people are giving and try to guess how they might be feeling from their gestures, facial expressions, and other body language. You might also watch a television show or look at a magazine with your child and take turns pointing out the examples of body language that you see.

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:

Bailey, Linda. *When Addie Was Scared*. Kids Can Press, 1999.

Addie chases away a hawk that is threatening some chickens. She feels proud when she realizes that she has overcome her fear to help her family.

McPhail, David. *The Teddy Bear*. Henry Holt Books for Young Readers, 2002.

A little boy and a homeless man experience strong feelings related to having, and then losing, a teddy bear.

Snihura, Ulana. *I Miss Franklin P. Shuckles*. Annick Press, 1998.

Molly has a summertime pal, but when school starts, she wants nothing to do with him. Both Molly and Franklin experience strong emotions as they navigate changes in their relationship.



Home Link

Dear Family:

In Open Circle recently we talked about **expressing anger appropriately**. Anger is a feeling that everyone has at times. Sometimes it can be a very strong feeling and difficult to control. We talked about the kinds of things we do when we feel angry. There is nothing wrong with feeling angry, but doing something inappropriate or hurtful with anger is not okay. One way to deal with angry feelings is first to calm down, think, and then to use words to express your anger. For example, take a deep calming breath, think about the situation, and say to the person who made you angry, "I'm angry because ____."

At home, talk to your child about dealing with angry feelings. Share with your child some situations that make you angry and some ways you handle anger. Ask your child how he/she expresses anger. Encourage your child to always use words rather than actions to express his/her anger.

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:

Harrington, Janice N. *Roberto Walks Home*. Viking, 2008.

Roberto expresses his anger in several different ways when his brother forgets to pick him up from school.

Smith, Linda. *Mrs. Biddlebox*. Harcourt Children's Books, 2007.

Mrs. Biddlebox expresses her anger in a most creative way, by baking the ingredients of her most annoying day into a cake!



Home Link

Dear Family:

In Open Circle this week, we began a multi-lesson unit on **problem solving**. In the coming weeks, we will be learning to use a six-step process for solving people problems. We began by talking about what a problem is. A problem is any situation that causes someone to be upset or confused. We made a list of problems that students in our grade might have, such as problems on the way to school, at recess, with friends, with rules, with schoolwork, or with students in other grades.

To help us learn and remember the problem-solving steps, we use the colors of a traffic signal: Red = Stop. Yellow = Think. Green = Go. In problem solving, we do the same three things that a traffic signal tells us:

RED reminds us to STOP:

- Calm down.
- Identify the problem.

YELLOW reminds us to THINK and be careful:

- Decide on a positive goal.
- Think of several solutions.
- Evaluate the solutions.

GREEN tells us to GO:

- Make a plan and try it.

The six problem-solving steps are printed on the back of this sheet. Please post them on your refrigerator or someplace in your home where you can see them often as a reminder to both you and your child to use the problem-solving process to solve problems that come up outside of school. Problem solving is an important skill that your child can use throughout life, not only in school but later on in the workplace and the community.

Yours truly,

Problem-Solving Steps

1. Calm down.
2. Identify the problem.
3. Decide on a positive goal.
4. Think of several solutions.
5. Evaluate the solutions.
6. Make a plan and try it.



Home Link

Dear Family:

In Open Circle, we are continuing to learn and practice each of the six steps of problem solving: Calm down. Identify the problem. Decide on a positive goal. Think of several solutions. Evaluate the solutions. Make a plan and try it.

Before we can begin to solve a problem, we need to **calm down**. We discussed in Open Circle some ways to calm down, such as calm breathing or counting to 10.

We also talked about the second problem-solving step: **Identify the problem**. It's important to be able to use words to say how you feel and what the problem is. One way to put a problem into words is to say, "I feel ____ because ____." For example, "I feel upset because my friend did not play with me at recess." Or, "I feel mad because someone borrowed my markers without asking me." Saying how you feel and what the problem is helps you to solve the problem.

In this *Open Circle Home Link* and in the next several *Home Links*, there will be a list of books that deal with problem solving and are appropriate for your child's grade level. You might want to check out a few from the library and read them with your child. While you're reading together, talk about how the characters in the book solve their problems. Do they follow some of the problem-solving steps that we use in Open Circle? Meanwhile, continue to use problem solving at home with your child.

Yours truly,

LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Carlsson-Paige, Nancy. *Best Day of the Week*. Redleaf Press, 1998.

Because Calvin wants to play pirates and Angela wants to play store with an old card table which they found in the trash, they must find a way to resolve their conflict.

Caseley, Judith. *Bully*. Greenwillow Books, 2001.

Mickey gets plenty of advice from his family about how to handle a bully, but ultimately, he comes up with the best solution.

deGroat, Diane. *Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire*. SeaStar Books, 2003.

Gilbert is nervous about playing George Washington in a school play. To prepare for his role, he "borrows" a hat and lies about it. When he finally tells the truth, the show goes on successfully.

Demi. *The Empty Pot*. Henry Holt Books for Young Readers, 1990.

Children in an ancient village find different solutions to the problem set before them by the emperor.

English, Karen. *Speak to Me (and I will listen between the lines)*. Farrar Straus Giroux, 2004.

A collection of poems that describe one school day from the points of view of six students.

Petrillo, Genevieve. *Keep Your Ear on the Ball*. Tilbury House Publishers, 2007.

A new student, who is blind, helps his classmates adjust to his way of seeing the world. His new friends, in turn, help him figure out how to join in their kickball game.

Rosenthal, Amy Krouse. *Duck! Rabbit!* Chronicle Books, 2009.

Is it a duck or a rabbit? Being able to see things from different points of view is an important problem-solving skill.

Williams, Karen Lynn, and Khandra Mohammad. *Four Feet and Two Sandals*. Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2007.

Two girls meet at a refugee camp, become friends, and work together to solve a variety of problems.



Home Link

Dear Family:

Our lessons in Open Circle continue to focus on each of the six steps of problem solving: Calm down. Identify the problem. Decide on a positive goal. Think of several solutions. Evaluate the solutions. Make a plan and try it.

Recently, we learned and practiced the third step of problem solving: **Decide on a positive goal**. This means that we decide what the best ending would be, what we would like to see happen, or how we would like the problem to end up. In order to be positive, the goal must be safe and fair. We also talked about worst endings, or how we would not like to see the problem end up, as a way to help get to a positive goal.

In another Open Circle, we practiced the fourth step of problem solving: **Think of several solutions**. Thinking of many ideas is called **brainstorming**, and there are two rules for brainstorming at school:

- Think of many ideas.
- Don't judge any of the ideas or comment on them until the brainstorming is finished.

A strong negative reaction could stop people from generating ideas. Similarly, a strong positive reaction could halt the brainstorming too. We also learned a technique called **piggybacking**, which is taking someone else's idea and expanding it.

At home, use the problem-solving steps with your child as often as you can. Check out of the library a few more of the books on problem solving listed below. As you read together, talk about how the characters are problem solving. Are they deciding on a positive goal and thinking of many solutions?

Yours truly,

LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Howe, James. *Horace and Morris Join the Chorus (but what about Dolores?)*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2002.

When Dolores is not selected to join the chorus, she comes up with a different, but effective, way to change her music teacher's mind about her musical ability.

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

When a sparrow becomes trapped in a subway car, riders of all ages and ethnic backgrounds must figure out how to free the bird.

Williams, Vera B. *A Chair for My Mother*. Greenwillow Books, 1982.

A child, her waitress mother, and her grandmother lose all their furniture in a fire and must save dimes to buy a comfortable armchair.



Home Link

Dear Family:

In Open Circle, we are continuing to work on each of the six steps of problem solving: Calm down. Identify the problem. Decide on a positive goal. Think of several solutions. Evaluate the solutions. Make a plan and try it.

In the past few Open Circles, our lessons have focused on the last two steps. After we think of many possible solutions to a problem, it's important to **evaluate the solutions**. We must ask, "What would happen if I tried this?" about each of our possible solutions. Also, we must ask, "Which of the solutions would be most likely to get me to a positive goal?" Sometimes our first idea is not the best idea. When we evaluate the possible solutions, it is like obeying the yellow light in the traffic signal, which tells us to WAIT and be careful before we act.

We also worked on the last step of problem solving: **Make a plan and try it**. After choosing the solution most likely to get us to the best ending, we make a plan by deciding what steps it will take to implement our solution. We should also think about the best time to try the plan, what we need to prepare or get ready, what words we will use, and what we want our body language to communicate. Then it's time to try it. If the solution doesn't work, we should choose another solution, make a plan, and try it. In problem solving, it's important not to give up.

At home, continue to use the six problem-solving steps as often as possible. Use them to solve your own everyday problems as well as problems that involve your child. Go to the library and check out some of the books below that relate to problem solving. Read them with your child and talk about the steps the characters use to solve their problems.

Yours truly,

LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Kelley, True. *Blabber Mouse*. Dutton Children's Books, 2001.

When a mouse can't stop gossiping, his friends take things into their own hands to solve the "Blabber Mouse" problem.

Ketteman, Helen. *Armadillo Tattletale*. Scholastic Inc., 2000.

Armadillo annoys creatures on the prairie by spreading gossip. Alligator takes steps to stop this annoying behavior.

Khan, Rukhsana. *Ruler of the Courtyard*. Viking Children's Books, 2003.

Saba must solve the problem of how to protect herself and her grandmother from what she thinks is a snake.



Home Link

Dear Family:

In our last lesson on problem solving, we took a problem and went through all six steps to solve it: Calm down. Identify the problem. Decide on a positive goal. Think of several solutions. Evaluate the solutions. Make a plan and try it.

One of our final two lessons on problem solving was used to introduce a tool designed to help students practice the problem-solving steps. The tool is a problem box that I have placed in the classroom. As problems arise, the students can use problem cards to record problems and place them in the box. I will be reviewing the problem cards and selecting some of the topics for discussion during Open Circle Meetings.

At home, try to use the six-step problem-solving process with your child often so that it becomes automatic and a habit. Be a role model for your child by using the steps to solve problems you encounter at home, at work, or in the neighborhood. Compliment your child whenever he/she uses the six steps to solve problems.

Yours truly,

LITERATURE CONNECTIONS

Here are some books that relate to problem solving. You might want to check out one or two at the library and read with your child:

Smothers, Ethel Footman. *The Hard-Times Jar*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.

Emma's transition to school is difficult because of her family's economic hardships.

She finds the courage to face and solve multiple family and school-related problems.

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

When a sparrow becomes trapped in a subway car, riders of all ages and ethnic backgrounds must figure out how to free the bird.

Williams, Vera B. *A Chair for My Mother*. Greenwillow Books, 1982.

A child, her waitress mother, and her grandmother lose all their furniture in a fire and must save dimes to buy a comfortable armchair.



Home Link

Dear Family:

In our final Open Circle Meeting of the year, we took time to reflect on this school year and our experiences in Open Circle. We shared what we liked most about school this year, some things we have learned, some people we have gotten to know better, and some things we have learned about ourselves. We also talked about the skills we have learned in Open Circle and how they have helped us in the classroom, on the playground, and in other places.

Ask your child what he/she has liked best about coming together in Open Circle this year. Ask what he/she has learned in Open Circle that has helped him/her the most. During the summer and beyond, continue to use the vocabulary and skills your child has learned in Open Circle. Keep the problem-solving steps close by and continue to practice them with your child. Thank you for the support you have given to Open Circle this year by reinforcing at home what your child has learned at school.

Yours truly,