



TREES OF CARING: ROOTS AND WINGS

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL: 1 – 3

LENGTH OF TIME: One session of 30 minutes and one or two project sessions of 35 to 40 minutes



GOAL

- To help students think about the many ways families are formed.
- To look at the many ways family members care for and support each other.



OBJECTIVES

- Students will list many things families do to support and care for each other.
- Students will create an authentic definition of their family or caring community.
- Students will explore the metaphor of roots and wings around families.
- Students will make a graphic representation of their family or community of caring.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.2.1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups. (Also K.1 and 1.1)
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.2.5: Add drawings or other visual displays to descriptions when appropriate to clarify ideas, thoughts and feelings. (Also K.5 and 1.5)

EDUCATORS' NOTES

It is natural for young children to notice differences. This lesson offers an opportunity to build classroom community by giving students a chance to share and learn about each other's families. One of the learning objectives of this lesson is to teach children to accept and embrace differences and similarities amongst their families.

Children naturally notice human differences in skin tone, eye color, hair, etc. Talking openly and honestly about how families and humans are different in these ways is very important. Teachers need to communicate about differences while interrupting bias and stereotypes.

For some children, the traditional family tree format can be unsettling; thus, this lesson is framed around the concept of caring adults in your student's lives. Family tree activities and graphic depictions of families should be empowering activities for all children, not activities that create comfort and pride for some and confusion, shame or isolation for others.

This project centers the concept that all families are unique and different. Your students may have families with two moms or two dads; stepparents; a transgender parent; adoptive

parents; or foster parents. It is useful to find out the language they use to refer to their families to help respectfully answer questions that may arise. If, for example, you have only one student in your class with same-gender parents, then be mindful not to put that student in the position of teaching other children about their family. That is the job of the educator, not the student.

In this lesson, each student will create a beautiful tree from their imagination. The roots and trunk of the tree will be filled with the names of caring adults from that child's life. Each student will also draw a picture of themselves with bird or butterfly wings. They will cut out these self-portrait drawings and glue them above their tree.

MATERIALS

- Sturdy paper 9" x 12" , 4" x 6" paper
- Pencils, markers, crayons, colored pencils (make sure to have lots of good choices for skin tones and hair tones)
- Chart paper

COMMUNITY OF CARING

- Begin the lesson by reading this anonymous quotation to your students:
"A wise woman once said to me that there are only two lasting gifts we can hope to give our children. One of these, she said, is roots, the other, wings."
 - Ask your students what this could mean. They may need help with this abstract concept.
 - Answers might include: Our roots are the people who love and take care of us—caring adults, our family, our ancestors (the people who came before us) or where we live. Our wings are children going out into the world to become themselves—such as going to kindergarten for the first time.
- Spend some time clarifying ideas about what a family is.
 - It is important to emphasize that families are made up of different adults and children, and what is most significant are the ways they take care of each other, work and play together.
 - For many children, important caregivers and support extends beyond what some may think of as "family."
- Talk about and ask your students about the many ways adults or even older siblings show caring for children.
 - Make a list on chart paper.
 - The list might include feeding, clothing, loving, setting rules for safety, reading bedtime stories or helping them when they are hurt. Many kinds of nurturing, caring behaviors could be on the list.
- Ask your students to list all the caring people who might be in a family or community of caring for children. Make a list on chart paper.
 - The list could include grandparents, foster parents, birth parents, moms, dads, stepdads, stepmoms, godparents, aunts, uncles, great-grandparents, great

uncles, great aunts, cousins, step-siblings, half-siblings, foster siblings, neighbors, friends who are like family—chosen family.

- Remember to let students identify for themselves who is in their family. They may also include a pet or a neighbor, for example.

TREE OF CARING PROJECT

- Tell students they are each going to make a tree that shows all the members of their family and/or caring community. This can also include pets.
 - Explain that this is an opportunity for each student to show who the most important people are in their life.
 - Ask students to think about the caring people in their life who love and take care of them.
- Give each student a 9" x 12" piece of paper.
- Have each student draw the most beautiful tree they can imagine. Remind them to draw the roots in the ground, a big trunk (they will be writing names of loved ones in the trunk), and room at the top for lots of leaves and a picture of them flying (they will do this step later). Have students use pencil first and then outline the drawing with black permanent marker.
- Have each student write the names of caring people on the trunks and in the roots of their trees in pencil or black permanent pen. Some children have large communities, and some children may only represent one person. Each child's interpretation of this assignment will be unique to them and the make-up of their family or community of caring adults.
- Have students decorate their trees with branches, leaves, flowers, fruit or whatever they would like with crayons and markers.
- Next, have each student draw a detailed picture of themselves with wings on a separate small piece of paper. Make sure to provide art materials in many skin tones and hair tones so that all students feel included.
 - Students can give themselves butterfly wings, bird wings, or some other creative idea to help them fly above their tree.
 - Have them cut out around their flying self-portrait and glue it onto their paper above their tree.

EXTENSIONS OR VARIATIONS

- Create a large group tree in your classroom. All of the students' caring adults will have their names in the trunk, and all of the students in your class will be flying with their wings above the class tree.
- Invite families to see the caring tree in your classroom as a symbol of providing their children with roots and wings.
- Have students draw or write about ways that caring adults love and take care of them with a sentence prompt such as "My grandma helps me..."

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

- Each student will present their family and/or caring community to the class. Students should be able to describe some of the ways members of their family or community of caring work and play together. Students should be able to name one or more ways people in their family or community of caring take care of and support them.

SUGGESTED BOOKS

Families, Families, Families! Suzanne and Max Lang.

Home at Last. Vera B. Williams and Chris Raschka.

Marisol McDonald Doesn't Match/ Marisol McDonald No Combina. Monica Brown.

One Family. George Shannon.

Over the River and Through the Woods. Linda Ashman.

Tar Beach. Faith Ringgold.

This Is the Rope: A Story from the Great Migration. Jacqueline Woodson.

Thunder Boy Junior. Sherman Alexie.

We Belong Together: A Book About Adoption and Families. Todd Parr.

Who's In My Family?: All About Our Families. Robie Harris.

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Credit: Adapted from a lesson by Emmy Howe, nationalseedproject.org. Artwork: Todd Parr.