



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

READING OURSELVES WHOLE: A CONTEMPLATIVE CHORAL READING METHOD

"Only through our connectedness to others can we really know and enhance the self. And only through working on the self can we begin to enhance our connectedness to others."

—Harriet Goldhor Lerner

OVERVIEW

Lead a brief choral reading practice that fosters community and connection.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- During a staff, grade-level team, or department meeting
- During a high school or college class
- During a high school advisory session
- At the beginning or ending of a class or meeting

TIME REQUIRED

- 5 minutes

LEVEL

- High School
- College
- Adult

MATERIALS

- Excerpt from MLK's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" on handouts and/or displayed on a board or PowerPoint slide.
- Optional: An inspiring poem or quote that lends itself to choral reading

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students or staff will:

- Strengthen social awareness by participating in a choral reading about connectedness
- Foster self awareness by recognizing their role within a larger group

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Prior to leading this activity with students or staff, take a moment to think about a time when you, your staff, or your students read aloud. How did it feel?
- What are the benefits of sharing meaningful words and ideas aloud and in unison?
- When or why might you invite others to read aloud?

INSTRUCTIONS

GETTING STARTED

Note: [Poems](#), [inspiring quotes](#), or other pieces of writing may be selected for this practice. A well-chosen piece can make a group of individuals "sing" as one.

- Invite group members to sit or stand to read together.
- Depending on the size and distribution of individuals in the room, you may ask small groups to read individual lines of a text, one at a time, and/or ask individuals to serve as small group representatives with each representative reading one line of the text.

THE PRACTICE

- Say:
 - *This simple exercise may be used to assist our group in experiencing the oneness of the whole.*

- *Adapted from the practice developed by Ignatious of Loyola for Jesuits, it involves collectively reading a single piece of writing with a line read in turn by each member of the group until completed.*
- *The practice embodies inclusion, and effectively weaves together individuals into a whole, working together to bring a piece of reading to life.*
- Invite individuals to take turns reading each of the following lines from Martin Luther King’s “[Letter from Birmingham Jail](#)” aloud:

*In a real sense all life
Inter-related.
All men are caught in an inescapable
network of mutuality, tied in a single
garment of destiny.
Whatever affects one
directly, affects all
Indirectly.
I can never be what I ought to be
until you are what you ought to be,
and you can never be what you ought to be
until I am what I ought to be.*

CLOSURE

- Ask one or more of the following questions to close this activity:
 - What was it like to read this piece with your peers/colleagues?
 - What words or phrases from this reading are most compelling or memorable?
 - What is the message of this reading for you?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- How did participants respond to this reading exercise?
- Did it shift the mood in the room? How do you know?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

[Research](#) suggests that it’s possible to reduce tensions among groups of people when they establish a shared goal that requires some form of collaboration.

[Studies](#) also indicate that engaging in contemplative practices may reduce age and race biases by building moment-to-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, and surroundings.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Schools are a slice of humanity, with students and staff alike bringing their personal histories into the classroom, which may vary widely and radically. It takes effort to foster a sense of unity despite these differences, but it can be done.

To cultivate a sense of connection, whether it be with students or staff or both, [research](#) suggests that all parties should feel like they're of equal status, and groups members need to have common goals and a sense of interdependence that provides an incentive to cooperate.

Mindfulness and contemplation can also help us to bridge differences by helping us to be more deliberate about the intention for connection we're setting when we start a class, participate in small group learning, or engage in an important conversation with a peer.

In this particular practice, a group comes together to share a reading about the ways humans are connected to each other. Both the process of contemplative choral reading and the content of the reading itself prompt readers to contemplate the value of community.

SOURCE

Adapted from [Rhonda Magee's](#) work:

- Magee, R. (2015). The way of ColorInsight: Understanding race and law effectively through mindfulness-based ColorInsight practices, *The Georgetown Law Journal of Modern Critical Race Perspectives*. Retrieved from <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2638511>
- Magee, R. (2019) [The Inner Work of Racial Justice](#). New York: TarcherPerigree.