with feeling

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE THROUGH THE ARTS

Emotional Literacy Unit Two
"How Do I Feel?"

PROJECT & THEME: Mask Collection

Psychologists Mayer and Salovey (1993, 1997) initially proposed that the primary characteristic of people with high emotional intelligence was their ability to accurately identify emotions and judge whether an expression of emotion was honest. This unit focuses on emotional literacy and a grasp of five of the seven major human emotions—joy, fear, anger, sadness, and surprise—as identified by Carroll Izard (1971), a seminal scholar in human emotions. Major violent conflict at school can be avoided if students feel equipped with the language to express how they are feeling. This unit project is a set of emotion masks that students create and then add sounds and motions, resulting in a classwide theatrical performance. The masks begin to incorporate elements of sculpture (some are made with homemade "clay," others are created out of sculpted cardboard), so artistic vocabulary is widened. The project also helps students begin to grow comfortable working as an ensemble.

A NOTE ON EMOTIONS USED IN THIS UNIT

Emotional vocabulary is very complicated, and there are hundreds of different words for what humans can feel at any given time. To simplify this complicated concept, this unit starts by teaching "comfortable" and "uncomfortable," because all feelings fit under one of these two umbrella categories. The ability to recognize whether one is feeling comfortable or uncomfortable, and to assert one or the other, is the first step in being able to talk about emotions. Students are encouraged to understand that it's OK to feel uncomfortable. When students can acknowledge their emotions, even negative ones, their friends, parents, and teachers can better understand them during interactions.

Psychologist Carroll Izard was the first to differentiate emotions into seven basic categories: anger, fear, disgust, contempt, joy, sadness, and surprise. This unit teaches all but "disgust" and "contempt," because those are very complicated and negative emotions for children, and our teachers have not found them to be helpful. Consider adding "neutral" or "calm" to reflect those times when we aren't really feeling anything at all.

Teachers may find that other emotion words are more helpful; in that case, the emotion words for this unit can easily be substituted. A complete list of emotion words is included as a supplemental document. Many teachers have discovered that "frustrated," "confused," and "hurt" are beneficial for them. The strategies are the same: act out the emotion, role-play scenarios wherein students might feel the emotion, and create an artistic representation of it.

Once students are grounded in a sense of self-worth, they can begin to explore how they change moment by moment. The ability to name and identify an emotion can prevent major conflicts from occurring. When a student is feeling hurt, she might choose to tell her classmate that she is feeling that way rather than engaging in a fight or completely shutting off.