with feeling

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE THROUGH THE ARTS

Emotional Literacy Unit Three
"How Can I Work in a Group?"

In this final unit, students are asked to work together for extended periods of time. The unit starts with low-level collaboration (sharing paint), and builds into much more advanced teamwork (actually sculpting the monster body as a team). For this reason, this unit is the most frustrating, and the most rewarding, in the curriculum. Students have been working all year toward this project, however, and they are ready for it.

Students begin by sculpting the monster face parts from white clay (make-it-yourself play dough works just as well; just be willing for it to take its sweet time to dry). This is a calming activity; some students will love the tactile nature of working with clay and will want to spend the whole class doing it. Give students permission to make as many eyes or mouths as they want; they are only limited by the amount of clay. Every student gets the same amount of clay. If a student wants to make 20 eyeballs out of that one hunk of clay, great. If someone wants to make one giant eyeball out of his hunk, also great. Provide one big piece of copy paper for kids to sketch monsters or write their explanations. This also acts as a placemat for the workspace: clay can stay on the mat.

The instructor should be prepared for students to experience some separation anxiety when it comes time to attach their individual clay eyes onto the class monster. Students are used to taking their work home, and all the work in this unit stays with the monster as a class creature. Make sure students are prepared: Tell them from the beginning that their monster eyes will be attached to a big monster that the whole class will share.

Sometimes students don't agree about how the monster should look. Use these instances as opportunities. Facilitate constructive conversation around disputes, and loudly celebrate compromise. Once students understand that the aim here is for everyone to be happy, they'll begin facilitating compromises themselves: "If we put the arm in the middle of the chest, would you be okay with us painting it green?"

The monster can live in the classroom, the library, or somewhere covered outside. Remember to spray the completed monster with an weather-proof finish. If you make your own papier mâché (which is preferred to store-bought mixes), mice will be interested in the flour part of the mixture. Weatherproof your creation so students can be proud of it for years to come.