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## **“I LOVE BEING ME”: IMPROVING SELF-ESTEEM AND LITERACY - AN EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRLS**

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### **Description:**

This self-esteem and empowerment program provides middle school girls an opportunity to learn to be the author of their own story by telling and writing their own story/book/ with a focus on psychological, academic, physical and spiritual well-being. Counselors are educated about the importance of “the story” because universally everyone has a story and every individual story is considered important. Counselors listen to a person’s story because we begin to understand the person’s worldview, their values and priorities. The story gives voice to the persons’ experience. Culturally responsive educators understand that through a person’s story, students listening to the story of others can provide a mirror (identity) and a window to the world that provides an opportunity for insight and catharsis which are the goals of culturally relevant Bibliotherapy.

This intervention program will also provide an opportunity for School Counselors to work collaboratively with the librarian, reading specialists, and language arts teachers along with the staff who have direct responsibility for the emotional and psychological development of students. This program is designed to promote the development of literacy and language skills and as a result also increase the self-concept and self-esteem of girls in early adolescence. The goals of this “whole child approach” program are:

- To increase students’ appreciation of the value of the written word and increase the development of reading and writing skills

- To increase and further develop a multicultural identity and perspective – provide students the opportunity to develop a “mirror” and ‘window to the world” (Brinson, 2012).
- To develop among girls a healthier self-concept by reading about other adolescent girls who share similarities and different challenges in their lives, and through their challenges have learned to recognize and love their strengths.

These goals will be accomplished with the use of stories from several books that are culturally relevant and music that have meaningful and relevant narratives. The two primary books that give the non-fictional stories of two adolescents are: *Claudette Colvin – Twice Toward Justice* by Phillip Hoose and *I Am Malala* by Malala Yousafzai. The author, Phillip Hoose won the National Book Award for his book about Claudette Colvin, a historical figure whose story is not well known, and Malala Yousafzai who is the youngest person who has ever been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

**Modality:**

Culturally Relevant Bibliotherapy, writing/poetry/ narrative, and music

**ASCA national Model Domain:**

Academic and Personal/Social

**Delivery via:**

Group – Summer program or growth group

**Age Level:**

7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade – however, the format can be adapted for any age group and demographic

**Indications:**

- Pro-active support for girls reaching adolescence who begin to have questions about identity and are experiencing the impact of the influence of their peers and popular culture.
- Pro-active support for girls of color to promote healthy identities.
- Be able to meet the needs of young people who are reaching developmental milestones.

**Materials:**

The materials needed for this program are minimal for a school. They are:

- Appropriate number of copies of selected books
- *The Big Book of Reproducible Graphic Organizers by Scholastic (optional)*
- CDs of selected music, CD player/sound system or a playlist can be developed of selected music on an IPOD or IPAD
- A photocopier
- Basic art supplies, magic markers, construction paper, scissors, hole puncher
- Equipment to show videos – internet and computer access
- Hand mirror
- Easel/large writing pad
- Large World Map for display

Location: Open space with long tables and moveable chairs – space to be able to gather in a circle, and space for adolescents to move and dance.

**Preparation:**

The strength of this intervention program is in the collaborative effort that will be needed for this program and intervention to be a success. The School Counselor would be expected to collaborate and form a working team with the appropriate teachers, reading specialists, language arts specialists, librarians and any academic support personnel to insure that the two major non-fiction books and the other fictional books have gone through the appropriate approval process, and the appropriate staff needs to ensure that copies of the books are available in the library. The two major non-fiction books (will also aid in meeting common core requirements) should be introduced to all students in the appropriate classes.

The book *Claudette Colvin Twice Towards Justice* tells the story of a teenager in the 1950's who was forcibly removed from a city bus because she refused to give up her seat to a white person. Colvin's story details the events leading to Rosa Parks's activism and bus boycott. Ms. Parks was not the first person to refuse to give up her seat on a city bus. In fact, it was the charges filed against Claudette Colvin and the subsequent court cases and legal decisions that resulted in laying the foundation for Park's activism and the Civil Right Movement. The book *I am Malala* is the story about the Pakistani teenager who was shot in the head by the Taliban because she advocated for herself and other girls to receive an education. Malala's physical recovery was described as a "miracle", and she has become the voice and spokesperson for the need and right for females to receive an education in developing countries.

It is suggested that the collaborative team members would also agree to be co-facilitators for this intervention program. Co-facilitators would be expected to have read all the books, and decisions would be made on what information from the two major books would be presented to the students. Because of the length and depth of the two non-fiction books it is suggested that at least couple two facilitators be selected to “tell the story” of Claudette and Malala, and for these facilitators to select the visuals, and pictures from both of the books that will be used to tell their story. The story tellers should have the presentation skills to be effective in presenting Claudette and Malala stories. Malala has given several interviews and her story has appeared on various news programs, therefore, clips of some of her interviews could be shown in appropriate classes as well as in the program. Selected passages from the book could be used for students to read beforehand or read in the group. These are organizational and process concerns that should be dealt with before the program begins. If the School Counselor has a counseling intern, the intern can be helpful in organizing the logistics of each one of the sessions.

Each session will begin with a morning or afternoon circle meeting; therefore, the team should review and become acquainted with the rules and protocol for the circle meeting. Information about the circle meetings can be found in Culturally Responsive Teaching materials.

**Instructions:**

- Copies of the books should be available to participants before the sessions.
- Copies of the words of the songs provided for each student and the words can also be shown on the internet.

**Session 1****Theme: Cognitive Development/critical thinking/emotional development**

Books: *Claudette Colvin Twice Toward Justice* and *I am Malala*

Facilitator introduces the **Music video:** Beyoncé – *I was Here* taped at the United Nations World Humanitarian Day (2012).

(Students will be given a copy of the words to all musical selections and/or words or illuminated on video screen, tablet or other device.)

**Morning or afternoon Circle meeting:** (With everyone standing) Introductions – Students and facilitators state their names. Facilitators briefly review some major rules for the circle meetings, such as; anyone can pass and decide not to speak. Circle members are requested to state what they “aspire” to do in their life, what contributions they want to make to their family or school, community, country or world. Again, students may pass, and it is acceptable if students are unsure how to respond. The goal is to encourage students to think about the future and that they have the ability to make positive contributions in their lives.

Facilitators explain the purpose of the “I Love Being Me” program. The students are told that the program provides them a safe place to learn about themselves and begin to write their own story. It should also be emphasized that as they become teenagers or as they enter adolescence that it is an exciting and also challenging stage of their life. Basic civility rules should be discussed and students will be requested to review the rules and add to the rules. The rules are posted on the board and students can add additional rules after discussion has occurred about their suggestions.

The two facilitators serving as “storytellers/narrators” will tell the stories of Claudette and Malala. The facilitators will show pictures of both adolescents. Passages from the books should be shared with the girls and the girls should be encouraged to read short passages from the books. In presenting Malala’s story, short video clips of an interview could be shown. The

facilitator should also show where Pakistan is on the world map and where Birmingham, Alabama is on the map.

**Discussion:** After the stories are presented the facilitators might want to use a KWL format to encourage a deeper discussion with the goals of identity and insight. By using this format the girls would be asked: What do you know? What do you want to know? And What did you learn? An important additional question would be to, “explain what the stories of Claudette and Malala mean to you and your life?” Also, ask the students how both girls demonstrated strength, courage and wisdom. The facilitator should write their responses on the easel pad.

**Music:** Strength, Courage and Wisdom by India. Arie

**Activity:** While the music is being played the students will complete the following activity:

Students will be requested to list words/adjectives that describe how they currently see themselves. In another column they are to list words that describe who they want to be in the future. And finally, the facilitator will remind the students that both Claudette and Malala valued education. The students will be requested to write a short essay stating “why education is important to their future.” These assignments are the beginning of each girl’s “book and story.”

## **Session 2**

**Theme: Physical Well-being**

**Music:** *So Fly* – Elle Varner

**Morning or afternoon Circle:** Introductions – Students and facilitators will state “what physical characteristic do you like best about yourself?” A facilitator gives an explanation of session 2.



**Readings:** Facilitators will give an introduction of the books and explain that the books address issues about physical features. A facilitator will read the selection “By Myself”, and then divide the students into three groups and each group will receive a different book. The facilitators will request a volunteer to be the storyteller. The student storyteller will read the book to their group. Each group will discuss the issues presented in the book.

“By Myself” from *Honey, I love* by Eloise Greenfield

Issue – Skin Color; *Tan to Tamarind*

Issue – Hair – *Hairs – Pelitos* by Sandra Cisneros; *Happy to be Nappy* by

Bell Hooks and *I love my hair* by Natasha Anastasia Tarpley

The groups will come together, and listen and read the words to the following music.

**Music:** “I am not my hair” by India Arie (CD Testimony – 11)

**Music and Reading:** “No mirrors in my Nana’s house” by Ysaye M. Barnwell; Sing-along

**Discussion:** The storytellers/narrators will share information from the Claudette Colvin book about the issue regarding Claudette’s physical appearance, specifically her skin color and her hair texture. Students should be given a copy of Chapters 3 and 6 of the book. In these chapters Claudette speaks about these physical characteristics. Students should read the chapters, and student volunteers should read and read aloud Claudette’s perception of herself regarding her physical appearance and about her intellect. Ask the students what they believe Claudette meant when she stated, “For some reason we seem to hate ourselves...”

Discuss Malala’s physical disfigurement because of being shot due to her beliefs and her desire to receive an education. Have the students discuss this situation and what they believe Malala might feel about being attacked and having to cope with her physical injuries. It is suggested

that one of the news interviews be shown so that the students can also hear Malaha talk about the attack and the aftermath of the attack.

**Activity:** Mirror exercise – In a circle, students will pass a hand mirror around and each student will turn to the girl next to them and state “My sister, I like (will name something they like about the other person.)”

**Music:** Sweet Honey in the Rock – “I like it that way – I like being me” (Selection 14 on CD)

Music is being planned while students on working on the ending activity

**Ending Activity:** Students will draw a picture of themselves on card stock paper for the cover of their book entitled – “I love being (student’s name).”

### “What I like About Me” Activity

Students will respond (in story form or as a poem), on lined notebook paper to the following questions:

1. Describe yourself. State what physical **attributes** you like about yourself and explain why.
2. What positive actions have you taken to honor your body? Examples of honoring and loving your body are: exercising, and making healthier food choices.

### Session 3

**Theme:** Emotional and psychological health

**Music:** “I Can Fly” (Yolanda Adams – The Experience CD) Students will have the words and should be encouraged to sing along.

**Morning/Afternoon circle meeting:** In a large circle – introductions and everyone will be asked to respond to “A talent (skill, something I do well) that I have is \_\_\_\_\_”

**Readings/Books:** Facilitators will give an introduction of the books and explain that the characters in these books have similar qualities and attributes to Claudette and Malala. Divide the students into three groups and each group will receive a different book. The facilitators will request a volunteer to be the storyteller. The student storyteller will read the book to their

group. Each group will discuss the book and discuss the skills and the attributes of the major characters in their book. The facilitator will write their responses on the easel pad.

*Wings by Christopher Myers*

*Suki's Kimono by Chieri Uegahi and Stephane Jorisch*

*Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffoman and Caroline Binch*

**Discussion:** The groups will merge together for a full discussion of all of the books and review the list of responses about skills and attributes. The final question for the group is to identify how the skills and attributes relate to Claudette and Malala. A Venn diagram might be useful in showing comparisons. This discussion should lead to helping them identify their own talents, skills, and attributes.

**Music:** “Education is the key” and “When I grow up” by Sweet Honey In the Rock

**Activities:** While the music is being played students will work on their book. Students will respond in writing to the following questions and their responses will become entrees for their book:

1. My gifts, talents, or skills are:
2. Describe what you do well and how it makes you feel when you are involved in the activities.
3. What are your educational goals?
4. Looking in to the future, state what type of careers are you interested in and explain why.

#### **Session 4**

**Theme: Spiritual Development**

**Music:** “Members of the world community” by Sweet Honey in the Rock

**Morning/Afternoon Circle Meeting:** “How are you a good friend to someone – how do you show that you care?” “What do you think you can do to make the world a better place?”

**Readings and books:** *Don't Laugh at me* by Steve Seskin and Allen Shamblin

*Si Se Puede* by Diana Cohn

*Harriet Tubman in Honey, I love* by Eloise Greenfield

**Discussion:** The same protocol should be used from Session 2 and 3 with the small discussion groups of the books. Students will discuss the contributions of Claudette and Malala and the impact of their actions on their communities, their countries and the world.

**Music:** *Me is we* by Sweet Honey in the Rock

**Music:** (Being played while students are working on the following activity that are the entrees for their book)

One of the following musical selections based on school type and setting and cultural factors:

*A note to God* - Charice; *I Hope you Dance* – Gladys Knight or Oleta Adams; *Imagine* sung and performed by Glee

**Activity:** Students will respond to the following questions and the responses will become entries for their book:

1. How do you show kindness? How do you show that you care about other people?
2. Describe how you are a friend to someone.
3. If you could change your neighborhood what would you change and why?
4. If you could change the world, what would you do?
5. If you could write a note to God/creator what would your note/letter say? Other options to the previous question based on the music selected are: Write about your hopes and dreams; or Imagine how the world could be – describe or draw.

## **Session 5**

Catharsis

**Theme:** Being the author of one's own story – “What does loving you mean?” This session serves as a transition point in that the focus is now on the students' individual stories.

**Morning or afternoon circle meeting:** Reading of *Love don't mean* in *Honey, I love* by Eloise Greenfield

**Music:** *Indaba: We Believe in You* – Sweet Honey in the Rock

**Activity:** The facilitators will work with students in finishing their book and constructing the book.

### **Final Session (6)**

**Theme: Telling your story – I Love Being Me**

**Music:** *Video* – India Arie

**Book:** *There is a Flower at the tip of my Nose Smelling Me* by Alice Walker

**Activity:** The Alice Walker book is used to introduce the student stories from their book. Student volunteers read a page of the Walker book followed by each student sharing a selection from their own book.

**Music:** (As a final anthem) “Roar” by Katy Perry

### **Suggested Modifications:**

The design of this expressive arts intervention program is very flexible. Facilitators may need to give more support to some students as they are preparing their entries for their book. It may be that some students will create a “vision board” instead of a book that will allow the students to provide pictures that they have drawn or pictures from magazines to create their story. This program does involve the use of technology so that words of the songs can be displayed through video. Most of the books also have an audio and braille version.

### **Evaluation Plan:**

The content of the students’ book or final product serves as an assessment tool or portfolio. The students’ ability to complete the reading and to participate in the reading and writing assignments, and their ability to reflect about their own strengths will demonstrate improvement in self-esteem and growth in their literacy skills. If a more specific assessment is needed, the activity in session 1 where students are asked to list words that describe how they currently perceive themselves could be a pre-test and the post-test would be to have the students complete

the same activity in the last session to determine if the words change and/or that that they have included additional adjectives that are more positive in terms of self-esteem and empowerment.

It is suggested that for this intervention/program that students' writing would not be corrected.

In working with the students, facilitators may suggest revision or modification of some of their entries but a goal should be that students should enjoy and have fun reading, writing and expressing themselves without being graded or assessed.