

PEACE CIRCLE EXPERIENCE

A Michigan teacher writes about her school's Peace Circle:

Our Peace Circle began in 1989. Its purpose was to help the students and staff realize the importance of peace in their attitudes and behavior at school.

The students and staff gather in the gym every Monday for fifteen minutes. The children arrange themselves in widening concentric circles in the gym. In the center of these circles, we have the U.S. and Michigan flags and a Peace Pole. "Let There Be Peace on Earth" is written on the four sides of the Peace Pole in four different languages.

The students file into the gym quietly and sit in circles, guided by their teachers. Usually we have one class designated as "in charge" for the week, and that class sits in the center so that it is easy for them to present materials. The other classes stand by grade in circles around them. We begin Peace Circle Time with the Pledge, led by the principal. Then we sing a song chosen by the "in charge" class, usually a patriotic song or a song about peace.

The students then sit down, and the classroom presentation begins. Students may have written a play, created art, written poetry or music, or worked on a community project. Peace Circle Time is a chance for them to share their work with the other classes. Ideally, the class will have also worked on a peace goal for the week for all the students, which may be part of their presentation. For example, the class may have focused on teasing. They would then present material on how smiling can be "contagious", and encourage the other classes to work extra hard on smiling at each other for the rest of the week.

We end Peace Circle Time with the song "Let There Be Peace on Earth." We all hold hands, staff and students alike, and sing together.

Since 1989, we have honored students, community leaders, staff members, and parents, and commemorated special events during the course of Peace Circle Time. However, the meaning of Peace Circle remains the same as it was in 1989: it is a peaceful gathering of students, parents, guests, and staff who want to emphasize the importance of peace in our school, in our community, and in our world.