

# Report from the Field: Peace Literacy in K-8 Classrooms

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Four years ago I was searching the web for some information about peace education programs, and I came across Paul Chappell's work in Peace Literacy.

Intrigued, I bought his first book, *Will War Ever End?*, and read it over the course of a weekend. I was struck by its simple common sense, and, at the same time, its profound insights about the nature of our complex relationship with war and violence.

At the time, I was teaching as a K-8 learning specialist in a school that had a peace program, and, reading the book and pouring through the Peace Literacy lessons I found on Paul's website, I realized we had a lot of work to do to bring our program up to date.

While we talked about things like empathy and respect, while we used words like conflict resolution and restorative justice—all good things—we did very little to help our students understand the root causes of conflict, and to give them specific, concrete skills toward conflict resolution. *We set up ideals for them to meet, without giving them the understanding or the tools to meet them.*

I started bringing Peace Literacy into my middle school advisory class. We began with Lesson Plan One ([peaceliteracy.org/](http://peaceliteracy.org/)) and learned about the Fires Beneath Aggression, The Power of Respect, and the Power of Calm. The next year, we moved to The Landscape of Human Needs, and the year after, went through most of The Constellation of Peace.

As an advisory teacher, I was part of a cohort, and integrating Peace Literacy into our lessons, I saw our advisory program evolve over the course of those four years from a mishmash of topics to a focused course with a cohesive core of values, concepts, and skills. Our conversations with our students deepened, and yet had parameters and a vocabulary which allowed us to have the difficult conversations meaningfully and effectively. We tackled issues like cynicism versus skepticism, realistic versus unrealistic peace, and why people love video games, in a way that was open, inclusive, and compassionate.

I saw my students grow as thinkers, develop confidence in expressing their points of view, and learn to have discussions that were thoughtful, honest, and productive.

I created a set of Peace Literacy lessons for our elementary school, and found that the Peace Literacy content was easily adapted to the developmental needs of students K-4, and that the outcome was the same: students liked to talk about how to build a strong and inclusive community, they liked to discuss the very real issues they faced, even if it was what to do with a classmate who teased, or pushed their way to the front of the line. They felt safe because we sought to understand and problem-solve together. There were no bad guys, and we worked as a team to make things better.

Finally, I have grown as a teacher and as a communicator through my work with Peace Literacy. This is the added, extra benefit! I use my Peace Literacy skills all the time, from learning to see the fires of distress beneath my own and others' aggression, to meeting challenges with creative problems solving solutions.

It has been a journey that I have been grateful for, and I hope that others will also see how effective and practical these skills are. Above and beyond all else, I love that they give realistic hope in a troubled time.

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