

Tell me who your friends are and I will tell you, who you are

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Part 1: Practical Guidance and Didactical Approach

Background and keywords:

In his book providing key strategies for teaching boys, Biddulph (2003) stated that girls in today's Western world possess more self-confidence than boys. Self-confidence is frequently linked to the position a child occupies within the group, who supports him and his inner circle. Friends and groups/cliques are especially important to children during puberty years. It is common knowledge that at that age, children start gradually detaching themselves from their parents and home life, as they become more independent.

Often parents dictate to their children, which friends are desirable and which are not. As Helga Gürtler so eloquently puts it, parents want their children to have friends that greet in a friendly manner, wipe their feet before coming inside and know how to speak "in a civilized manner". Often parents are not very good judges of which children make good friends and which others are merely, only figuratively-speaking good at "buttering them up". Children themselves have completely different criteria, when it comes to meeting others and making new friends. It is very important that choice of friends is not merely based on physical appearance, rather than personal traits. Often children choose their friends on the basis of criteria such as modern clothes, beautiful possessions, a great deal of pocket money, or "simply being cool".

Similar topics:

Friendship, group composition, culture, personal traits, discernment

Materials:

The Estonian children's film (2005) Röövlirahnu Martin /Der magische Kater/ Mat The Cat!

Plot: After moving to the country, ten-year old Martin finds it difficult to get used to his new surroundings. His greatest rival at school is Kevin, a spoilt, rich boy, who manages to court Maria's favour with all his fantastic possessions. Martin, on the other hand, appears to be really disaster prone. His grades are not the best and this makes his single mother unhappy.

So Martin withdraw "into his own world", a wooden house on a huge cliff. He can hardly believe his eyes when a tomcat addresses him. The bizarre creature, which can actually speak and occasionally turns into a strong boy and does magic, becomes his friend. It is not long before the two are inseparable and together they succeed in winning Marta's heart and even solving Martin's school problems as well.

- Worksheets (photos)
- Bulletin board
- Pictures
- Colourful slips of paper

- Pens
- DVD (Film sequences 3.33 – 5.28)

Duration:

2 teaching units of 45 minutes each

Number of participants:

- 20 to 25 boys and girls in a class
- 4 to 5 children in small groups (for group work)

Age:

9 -12 year old boys (and girls)

Aims:

To become more skilled at:

- observing human behaviour;
- making decisions;
- justifying one's opinion;
- thinking through friendships.

(Short) explanation:

The teaching material includes film photos and film sequences. Pupils will work alone in order to best make their personal assessment of themselves and then in small groups. Before watching the movie, they are to decide, based on outward appearance, which of the two boys they would like to have as their friend. An experiment carried out at one school in Estonia with 10 to 11 year olds, showed that most of the pupils chose Kevin (one of the movie actors) as the character they wanted to be friends with. After watching the movie, their opinion changed. With the help of the worksheets and through the teacher's group moderation, the pupils should come to realize that often outward appearances are deceiving.

Reflection:

With the help of the teacher to moderate, a discussion will be held at the end of the lesson in order to draw conclusions.

- Do you know someone who is very popular, even though he is rude and rowdy, just because he has expensive belongings that attract other children?
- What do you think is the reason for that?
- What could be done about that?
- Can someone, from their own experience, report about how someone judged another person wrongly because of their outward appearance?

Variations (Continuation):

Rather than only watch film sequences, show the whole movie which lasts 75 minutes (then follow the other steps outlined).

Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

Just like the body undergoes considerable changes during the growing phase of puberty, so does the outward appearance of young people as well. They become very much preoccupied with their own appearance. Young people are self-conscious about their body and often look at themselves in the mirror. Due to hormonal changes, they encounter skin problems; Boys and girls pay a great deal of attention to their figures and their weight. Moreover, appearance is viewed critically, with role models (i.e. from films) playing an important part in the lives of adolescents. Group pressure is growing and the child who fails to conform runs the risk of social rejection.

Many parents are horrified about the way children are dressing nowadays.

Certain groups in society intentionally set themselves apart from others by following a distinctive dress code or fashion, such as punks and skaters. Everything still revolves closely around the latest fashions, which change from one year to the next. With the passage of time, young people have become more dependent on each other. This means that they want to have what others have. No one has the courage to wear clothes or to listen to music that is not popular with other young people. They also feel that they are buying a better quality product when they buy a name brand product rather than a "no name" product. Through advertising, especially using popular role models such as top athletes, brand-name products have become even more idealized and have gained additional prestige. In fact, brand-name clothes have become even more important today than ever before. Young people do not at all shy away from cost and efforts when it comes to their image. On the contrary!

Social inequity is noticeable among young people: those who do not have enough money to spend on brand name clothes are not considered cool by the others, as very few people consider the price-quality ratio to be important. The price is irrelevant, the important thing is to be "in". It would also appear that a person, who does not wear brand-name clothes, will even have problems finding friends. Due to their pride, there are very few young people who take a stand against brand-name clothing or renounce other material possessions. In fact, it is common knowledge that other materialistic objects are growing in importance in addition to clothes. These are the so-called status symbols, which are often the prerequisite for a person's acceptance into a group. At this age children become increasingly reluctant to undertake activities with their peers however.

In order to make objective decisions for later life, in order to smoothly socialize with others and in that way to find and protect one's own identity, young people need to be supported by their families as well as by the competent educational actors in schools.

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Worksheet 1**Individual work**

Look at the different pictures.
Describe both of the boys. Fill in the table!

Photo 1	Photo 2
Appearance: What comes to mind is ...	Appearance: What comes to mind is ...
Character: I expect him to be ...	Character: I expect him to be ...

Which of the two boys do you like so much that you would like to get to know him better? Why?

Photo 1



Photo 2



Work in the plenary classroom

The name of the boy on the first photo is Martin, the boy on the second photo is called Kevin.

The teacher prints both pictures in a large format and hangs them on the wall. The teacher hands out small slips of paper. Each pupil should write one trait, per slip of paper, for each boy. The slips of paper are pinned to the pictures on the wall.

Group compositions:

Those pupils who want to be friends with the person on the first photo, form one or two groups as per the teacher's instructions.

Those pupils who want to be friends with the person on the second picture, form one or two groups as per the teacher's instructions.

Group work:

Each group first discusses together their reasons for choosing the boy, they chose, on the photo.

Lastly, each group will present in the plenary class group, the general conclusion they reached.

Worksheet 2

Our friend Martin looks / Kevin looks:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

He has the following traits:

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.....
.....
.....
.....

We want to be friends with him, because

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.....
.....
.....
.....

Worksheet 3**Individual work**

Working with the film sequence

1st option: DVD (3.33 – 5.28 minutes)

2nd option: Film sequence 1 (<http://www.casperworld.com/filme-2.html>)

Watch the film sequence!

What is happening in this film sequence?

Martin	Kevin
<p>What is he doing? He is ...</p> <p>What is he saying? He is saying that he ...</p>	<p>What is he doing? He is ...</p> <p>What is he saying? He is saying that he ...</p>
<p>I liked that. (why?)</p>	<p>I liked that. (why?)</p>
<p>I did not like that (why?)</p>	<p>I did not like that (why?)</p>

Working in the plenary classroom or in groups

The teacher draws the attention of the pupils in the groups to the personality traits that are pinned next to the photos. The teacher hands out to the pupils, slips of papers in a variety of colours. The pupils have the possibility of writing additional traits on the slips of paper and pinning them onto the wall.

This step should be explained. It gives the children the opportunity, before they exchange the slips of paper provided, of changing their minds after they have seen the movie. Their new position should then be justified during the plenary session.

Final discussion to draw conclusions

The teacher moderates this discussion aimed at formulating some conclusions.