



Values-based Assemblies

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This document provides background to the resource booklet “Values-based Assemblies” by IVET, which sets out ideas for values-based assemblies. The booklet is available in Home → Resources → Teaching Materials on the Values-based Education website (www.valuesbasededucation.com).

A values-based school recognises the critical role that assemblies have in establishing a positive school ethos based on universal positive human values. A high quality school assembly can nurture a climate that stresses care for the self, others and the pursuit of academic excellence. It further fosters the development of emotional intelligence and spirituality. Spirituality is here defined as that which is concerned with the inner personal world of thoughts, feelings and emotions.

In a values-based school, the academic year could be structured around 22 values (11 each year on a two year cycle), which should have been agreed by staff, governors, parents and pupils. This means that each month the focus of school life and assemblies would be based around one of these values. An example is included below:

Planning for assemblies

- September : Respect
- October : Quality
- November : Peace
- December : Love

What is an assembly?

An assembly is when the school community, or part to fit, meets together to share aspects of life that are of worth. It acts as a medium for communicating matters of significance from one generation to another. In England, an act of collective worship is usually held as part of an assembly as it has been a legal requirement since the 1944 Education Act.

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What makes a good assembly?

1. *The environment*

The physical setting is important in creating the right atmosphere. Look through the following ideas and reflect on whether your school is able to provide these.

- A central focus, such as a display that can help pupils think about the theme of an assembly
- Music that can help create a calm and reflective mood.
- Black-out and spot lighting (if available) help to make assembly time special.
- Power point presentations to project reflective images for pupils and staff to see when coming into an assembly (eg. a beautiful natural scene)
- The leader of the assembly being seated, in an attitude appropriate for a reflective experience, as pupils arrive for assembly.
- All adults in an assembly modelling the behaviour that is expected of its pupils
- Pupils being actively included in all aspects of the assembly
- Pupils can hear adequately

2. *The time*

Consider holding some assemblies on a Monday morning to unite the school after a weekend.

Standards can be set and assemblies during the rest of the week can reinforce these. Pupils and staff can be subtly reminded that they are valued as individuals and have an important role to play as part of the school team.

3. *The use of reflection*

In the assembly plans, there is a section entitled Reflection. This refers to a period of silent sitting where pupils are asked to be still and simply be. The person leading this part may ask questions in order to guide the pupils' thoughts. During this time pupils focus upon positive aspects of themselves and become observers of their thoughts. This is an effective contributor to raising feelings of self-worth.

4. *The leader of the assembly*

Assembly provides an opportunity for you to be an inspirational role model. The pupils and staff will model themselves on you. You do not have to be perfect, but they need to feel you are trying.

5. *The planning*

This is vital, as often last minute assemblies do not provide meaningful experiences. Assemblies which are planned around a known value can then be followed-up in the classroom by teachers. This is why many schools like the values cycle as then individual pupils' thoughts and ideas can be explored back in class as part of legitimate curriculum time. Assemblies should inspire listeners to want to try to be better people.

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How to use the assembly plans

These are not “lesson plans” to be slavishly followed. They are literally mind maps, which show a flow of ideals and connections between ideas, which can be dipped into at any point. They are templates to act as a catalyst for your own thinking. Depending upon your school's context, you can adapt these plans as you wish. The assemblies have been successfully used in schools and cover the values, such as honesty, trust, cooperation, responsibility, simplicity, care, friendship, happiness, love, courage, patience, quality.

A common point for all the plans is the use of high quality stories; this could be based on a persona experience, either yours or a pupil's. However, it must be something that will appeal to the age and stage of your pupils and equally important something you can tell. Eye contact is vital in creating a relationship with your pupils and reading from a book will deprive you of this.

In any assembly, you will only cover a fraction of that which is outlined in the mind map, therefore each mind map has a learning intention, which might span more than one assembly.

The reflection part of an assembly can be of differing lengths depending on how familiar your pupils are to silent sitting. It is recommended that this should be experienced in class first and pupils give the opportunity to discuss how they felt about it.

It is worth taking time to think through the format of assemblies. During a successful assembly you will notice pupils “tune in”, and this will affect how you feel too. Assemblies can become a very positive experience once their influence and impact to both individuals and the school in general is truly recognised and understood. For a more details account of how to develop an inspiring values assembly, please see the resources below.

What are the benefits of a values assembly?

Benefits of a values assembly can include:

- Heightened awareness of the needs of others
- Greater sensitivity to the feelings of others
- Raised self-esteem
- Good behaviour based on self-discipline/self-awareness
- Potential to heighten consciousness
- Development of spiritual, social and emotional intelligence
- Generating a school ethos that is calm, happy and purposeful
- Raising achievements and standards
- Contributing to developing personal autonomy and contentment
- Staff and pupils perceive assemblies as worthwhile

Resources

For further details about how to set up and develop a values-based school, please consult www.valuesbasededucation.com