

Each year, Winthrop selects a theme to unite our efforts and prioritize the incidental lessons woven in to each day. Citizenship, the theme selected this year, causes all of us to look deeply at our own biases and our own expectations as we set the course for our children. At the heart of citizenship exists a sense of belonging. It is this understanding, this comfort, and this strength that we hope all children and members of our learning community recognize and own. But, what about the responsibilities that citizenship require? If citizenship offers the connections to our social existence, then what biases do we bring to our interactions? How do we ensure belonging in the midst of biases?

In 2004, Christopher Booker, a British author and journalist, published a book that highlighted our natural need for stories. These stories, found throughout history from storytelling to printed text, help structure lives in memorable, meaningful patterns, and put events in a context of familiarity. Booker argues there are seven archetypal storylines and contends that all stories are told through one of these frameworks. In the majority of these story frames, evil takes on the form of a person who serves to deny a hope, promise or wish. The main character finds identity, community, and a sense of belonging by aligning oneself with others against this evil. In many cases, the evil is personified in a person or group of people.

While not literary characters, we do, indeed, contribute to a story. How do **we** define ourselves, find **our** sense of belonging? Who are we without a villain?

Noted Harvard psychology professor and researcher Gordon Allport is known, in part, for his research on prejudice and discrimination. In the 1950s, Allport classified prejudice along a continuum, from speaking negatively about a group of people to violent expression of one's prejudice. In Allport's theory, the primary basis of prejudice is that the group one identifies with believes it is inherently superior to any other group. Is this implicit bias? Is this where Booker's story frames arise?

Without doubt, it is the driving force of the majority of parents to create a better existence, a better world, for their child. Through sacrifices, decisions, and opportunities we seek to position our children to "do better" than we ever did; and, to "be better" than we ever were. In that vein, our theme of Citizenship can be seen in a different light. Can we develop a new story line, evolving in our understanding of our sense of self and belonging; one that doesn't include an obstacle, personified in a person or a group of people? Can we prove Allport's continuum for just that--a continuum--for which evolution can lead to other designations such as people who see themselves as a part of a greater whole with shared commonalities, interests, and hopes? Can our definition of citizen move beyond entitlement into a shared responsibility to create that "better" world we want for our children?

I believe we can. Progress takes effort just as prejudice against a group of people requires more than one person's beliefs. This year, the Winthrop staff will reflect on our own biases and unspoken prejudices, seeking to "be better." We are determined to create an inclusive story frame for our children. It will take the efforts of all of us to make the term Citizenship truly mean an inclusive sense of belonging. The responsibility inherent in Citizenship requires no less.