



Filling Our Own Shoes

Goals are inspiring. Thinking of ways to arrive at them, however, is more challenging and, ultimately, more rewarding! Here is an activity that stretches your students' thinking as they explore the specific characteristics required to turn dreams into realities. Use it as a follow-up to "Possible Dreams" (pages 80–81) or as an enrichment activity for a study of leaders and leadership. Students work in teams to create and "fill" shoes with the traits and skills that lead to success. The shoes students craft are larger than life – as are the leaders about whom students are thinking.

Learning Objectives

Through this activity, students will:

- think critically about traits of leadership
- identify qualities of successful people
- consider how to turn dreams into realities
- think and work cooperatively

Product

Large shoes (approximately 3' x 5') constructed by student teams

Related Curriculum

Language Arts, Social Studies, Art

Materials

- overhead projector and transparency made from "One Filled Shoe" reproducible master (page 72) or copies for each team of three students
- large sheets (approximately 3' x 5') of white butcher paper (one sheet for each team of three students)
- scissors

- markers, pens, or fine-line markers
- other decorative art materials such as paints, shoelaces, ribbons, glitter

Time

Two or three 40-minute sessions

Preparation

Before class begins, write the following questions on the board:

- What does it mean to "follow in someone else's footsteps"?
- What does it mean when someone says, "Those are hard shoes to fill"?

Activity Steps

1. Introduce the activity. After students are settled, ask them to ponder the questions on the board. Depending upon your room arrangement, you might invite them to discuss the possible meanings of these statements in quotations with one or two other students, or with the other students at their table. Allow 5–10 minutes for the discussion.

2. Discuss the ideas as a class. Solicit ideas and write them on the board. Lead a carefully orchestrated discussion in which you help students to unravel the meaning of these two statements. You might wish to provide specific examples in which each might be made.

Move the discussion to a higher level by asking:

- What kinds of characteristics are generally associated with people we admire? With people we consider to be leaders? With people who are successful?

- How do you think these people achieved their status or goals?

It isn't necessary to get into an in-depth discussion about the definitions of "leadership" or "success." Your purpose is to have students generate a list of characteristics. Again, list these ideas on the board. You might wish to categorize the ideas into specific topics, such as characteristics, personality, or work ethics.

Now have students revisit the two questions originally discussed. Explore extensions of their original ideas.

3. Personalize the ideas in small groups.

Divide students into teams of three. Challenge them to think of ways that they can "fill their own shoes." Display or distribute the example provided in "One Filled Shoe." If your class needs more specifics, you might wish to designate a certain number of personality characteristics (such as honesty) and a specific number of strategies (such as taking risks) to include on their shoes.

This step of the activity requires a good deal of guidance because many students will be content with their initial thinking. Encourage students to really consider the traits that lead to success and the challenges leaders may have encountered in their lives. Monitor groups and encourage the members to stretch their thinking.

When the teams have finished this step, ask them to mark with an asterisk (*) the ideas that represent their best thinking. These are the ideas that they will include on their shoe. You should review this list.

4. Design and create shoes. Have groups plan the design for their shoes. Stress that they are to be as creative as possible, and that the design of the shoe should reflect the personalities of all of the group's members. After approving the design, distribute the paper and other art supplies and give the go-ahead for the students to construct their shoes.

5. Share the finished products with the class. Provide an opportunity for the teams to share their work and ideas with others.

6. Display the shoes. These shoes will make a wonderful display, whether suspended from the ceiling of your classroom or "marching" along the walls of the school hallways.

For Surefire Success

You might introduce this lesson by having a student interview you as you role-play a leader you admire or think your students would find interesting. If you choose to do this, prepare ahead of time a series of questions for the student interviewer to use. These questions should focus on your journey toward "greatness."

Classroom Extension

You can easily adapt this activity to fit into a lesson on specific people (perhaps as a conclusion for a unit on biographies) or within a specific area (such as "scientists"). If you choose to use this lesson as a connection to a specific topic or unit of study, you might direct each group to focus on one specific individual. For example, during a study of U.S. presidents, each group could select a little-known president and include personality characteristics, barriers he overcame, and goals he achieved.

One Filled Shoe

Here is a shoe inspired by a team of fourth-grade students:

