

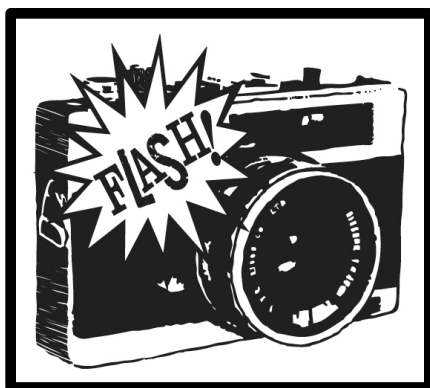


The Urban Assembly  
Bronx Academy of Letters  
Bronx, NY



# [Snapshot]

**Author:** Elana Eisen-Markowitz, U.S. History teacher, UFT Chapter Leader



**Name:** The Urban Assembly Bronx Academy of Letters

**Location/District:** South Bronx, NY / District 7

**Grade levels:** 6-12

**# of students:** about 570

**When did the school open?:** 2003

**Network:** Urban Assembly

**Regents/consortium:** Regents

**% or number of Title I students:** 86%

**2012-2013 State Accountability Status:** "In good standing"

**Most recent (2012) Progress Report grade:** "B" for middle school, "B" for high school

**Demographics of students:** Unscreened admissions, 98% Black and/or Latino/a, 25% IEP, 12% ELL. 78% four-year graduation rate in 2013. The majority of our students in 2012-2013 school year live in public housing within walking distance from school.

**Demographics of staff:** 53 total UFT members (teachers, paraprofessionals, deans, guidance counselor, social worker, payroll secretary). About 85% of teaching staff is white and was educated at elite, private colleges outside of New York City. Very few of the teaching staff are from New York City and only two grew up in the Bronx. Nearly all of the paraprofessionals, deans and school aides are Latino/a and live in the Bronx. The majority of the teaching staff earned a teaching certificate and a masters degree through New York Teaching Fellows or Teach for America (many fewer). 20 total teachers are new to the school in the 2012-2013 school year (due to teacher turnover). More than half of the staff is untenured. We have had three different principals in ten years.

**Other schools on campus?:** We co-locate with three other small public schools. One is a District 75 Special Education public school, grades K-8. We also share a campus with Middle School 203, a 6-8 non-charter public school that has been on NYC's "engagement list" for the last six years and will be "phased out" and shut down by the Department of Education by June 2015. The most recent addition to our campus (Sept 2012) is a charter elementary school called Bronx Success 1, which is currently a K-4 but was approved in March 2013 to grow to a K-8 over the following four years.

**Relationship with outside organizations and/or funding sources:** We have no sustained relationships with community-based organizations. We have non-profits providing enrichment and arts services such as Gnext (Girls Next), Wingspan Arts & Ramapo. Generally, our students have worked with these non-profit programs externally as determined by the administration.

Something unique (and strange) about Bronx Letters is that we have an endowed “Advisory Board” called The Foundation for Letters, which was created by the founding principal in 2003 but is newly filing for 501c3 status. This Board has historically provided funding for the school in terms of its non-DOE funded Enrichment programs like “Writers-in-Residence” and a full-time “Enrichment Coordinator” position, but its relationship with the school as a non-profit Foundation is yet to be determined.

**Mission/focus of the school:** “The Bronx Academy of Letters is founded on the belief that students who can express themselves clearly in writing can do better in any path they choose in life. Our students achieve mastery of the word in the context of a rigorous, college-preparatory environment that celebrates vision, expression, tenacity, inquiry, integrity, and compassion.

Graduates of Bronx Academy of Letters will be articulate, critical readers and writers. They will be visionaries, knowing how to work hard and how to work with others. They will be curious, capable problem solvers, ready to serve their communities with integrity. They will be prepared to maximize their learning and growth during their college years, which serve as a gateway to so much future opportunity and success.”

**Website:** <http://www.bronxletters.com/>

**Scanning?:** No

**Number of SSAs in school:** We will typically have four agents physically present in the building. This can vary depending upon attendance.

**When did your school begin its work with “restorative justice”?:** Spring 2012

# [Testimonial]



## **The Bronx Academy of Letters “Restorative Approaches Menu”**

### ***Prepared & Presented by:***

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- Anne Looser, teacher, Special Education
  - Fernando Restrepo, Dean
- Vanessa Wingerath, teacher, Spanish
  - Peter, student, 9<sup>th</sup> grade
  - Ceiro, student, 9<sup>th</sup> grade

Below you will find the Bronx Letters “Restorative Approaches Menu.” We have a variety of ways that we are working to implement restorative programs at our school. The “menu” of positive behavioral intervention options is divided into three categories: developed programs, developing programs, and programs we want to develop. Please contact us with feedback, comments and/or questions at [info@bxlettersuoft.com](mailto:info@bxlettersuoft.com)

- *Developed Programs:*
  - Advisory - Each student in the school is associated with a small advisory (10-17 students). The advisor (a teacher) is to keep track of the advisory students’ academic, social, and emotional growth. Advisory meets Monday, Wednesday & Friday in the middle school, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays in high school. The Advisories are divided into 6 houses per grade, and an elected House Council delegate represents each house. Advisory time has been used to implement some restorative practices like circles, mediations, and community building activities. Advisory is the only time in the day that is dedicated to students’ social and emotional growth.
  - Community building assemblies - At least once per quarter, the middle school and high school meet in the auditorium for a school-wide, celebratory assembly. Some assembly themes include: school spirit, open-mic performances, House

“Founder’s Day” celebrations, Knowledge Bowl, and other house competition activities.

- Buddy rooms - Middle school students may need to leave class and conference with teachers in order to avoid conflict with other students or teachers. The intention is for there to be one-on-one conversations with students who need time and support to de-escalate conflict with other students.
- Fix It Plans: In the middle school we use Fix It Plan forms to encourage students to be reflective about harm done in a classroom. A student must fill out the questionnaire and discuss with an adult if she/he has been sent out of a room for being disruptive to the educational process.
- Suspension Prevention Intervention (SPI) - Once a student accumulates three discipline referrals, her or his advisor organizes a meeting of adults and students who would like to support them in preventing suspension and, at least in theory, to support them in repairing relationships. The group meets to make a behavioral, academic and/or community service agreement with the student, and if the agreement is upheld, the student will avoid a suspension.

- *Developing Programs:*

- W.O.W. Interventions: Some teachers in the middle school are beginning to transition from Fix It Plans to using *Ramapo for Children’s* W.O.W. conflict resolution tool. W.O.W. stands for What’s Up? Own Up? and What Now? These three prompts create a structure for a discussion between two or more parties (students and/or adults) where each party shares their perspective on the conflict or issue, each party shares how they contributed to the conflict, and finally each party brainstorms realistic solutions.
- Restorative circles - Many teachers use different types of circles in their classrooms and advisory sessions to build relationships with particular students and among groups of students. We are looking to train more teachers to lead these circles more frequently.
- Peer Tutoring and Facilitation - Several students in high school self-contained classes are currently working with students in middle school self-contained programs to work on study skills and advocating for support services. Beginning second semester, this program will be more formalized for a broader group of 12<sup>th</sup> grade students to tutor students in middle school Humanities classrooms.
- Peer Mediation and Mentoring - We already have some students helping teachers to reach younger students and/or their peers in restorative circles, but we’d like to make this more of a part of the culture at Bronx Letters. Second semester seniors who need to be programmed for a full day are great candidates to use their free periods to serve as mediators or mentors. As is mentioned above, these 12<sup>th</sup> graders will likely be trained in one-on-one

mentoring, being a classroom aide and/or trained to facilitate conversations with small groups of other students.

- *Programs we want to develop:*

- Fairness Committee - We are interested in someday creating student-led fairness committees with wide teacher participation that would serve to mediate conflict and establish consequences for harm done to individuals or groups at school – perhaps even to replace current punitive consequences. This commitment would require much wider staff buy in, time, and a shared set of values.
- “Advanced” Restorative Circles - Another option we hope to develop is to be able to use the circle to discuss deeper issues that come up in school. We don’t all have the skills yet to lead these circles. We would eventually like to train students to run circles with other groups of students to address issues such as bullying and re-entry to school upon serving a suspension.
- Student Initiated SPI(s) - We would like to shift the current dynamic surrounding suspension prevention from being initiated by the deans and/or adult advisors, to one where students are more informed and aware of how many referrals they have accumulated, and thus are empowered themselves to advocate for an alternative intervention.

# [Tools]



This activity can be used with all stakeholders as an introduction the idea of Circle Process.

## **Community Building Project: Activity 1**

→ To be completed by School Leadership Team, staff, students in advisory, and parents in a CIRCLE

**Materials:** Lesson plan, centerpiece to bring focus to circle, talking piece that can also be thrown around, index cards (at least one per participant), pens, chart paper & markers for recording

**Rationale and structure of activity:** *Facilitator explains context for larger school community participating in this activity at separate (and multiple) times AND protocol for a circle:*

- for example: "This year we are working on building a meaningful community that can grow and nourish everyone who is part of it. We believe that the first step is to have all constituencies connected to our school participate in an activity to bond us together. This same activity will be done by the School Leadership Team, the Parent Association, all of the staff and each advisory in the school. Then, we'll collect the responses and move forward from there. Thank you all for being a part of this"

- for example, "In a circle, we can only speak when we have the talking piece and we use active listening body language. This is so we can all be aware of how much we are or are not talking and can be sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to say something and be heard – this will be easier for some people than others, but we'll all work on it together."

**Response in circle:** *Each participant will respond to these prompts after the facilitator explains and models – must have talking piece to speak.*

My name is \_\_\_\_\_

I work with Bronx Letters \_\_\_\_\_ / I am in \_\_\_\_\_ grade/I am the parent of \_\_\_\_\_

I feel I belong most \_\_\_\_\_ (time, place, group of people, moment)

**Facilitator reads quote:** *Now, facilitator passes out index cards and explains that she/he will read a quote and then each participant will respond to it on their index card:*

"Somewhere, there are people to whom we can speak with passion without having the words catch in our throats. Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power. Community means strength that joins our strength to do the work that needs to be done. Arms to hold us when we falter. A circle of healing. A circle of belonging. Someplace where each of us can try to be free." - Miriam Simos, *Dreaming the Dark*

**Written response:** (3-5 minutes on index cards) – *Instruct participants to only write on ONE side of card and keep a hold of them – each person will share only the part of this they feel comfortable with.*



1) What communities are you a part of? 2) What makes those communities work?

**Response in circle:** *Each participant will share one part of their response – must have talking piece. Recorder can be but does not have to be the facilitator – should be someone who can write quickly and clearly and be true to students’ words. Facilitator encourages everyone to share & makes sure that recorder is keeping up. Tell participants the circle will go around TWICE. Then, whoever raises hands will get the talking piece to keep adding...*

*“Share one thing that you think makes a community work.”*

*(One person records ideas on board/chart paper titled “What makes a community work for the people in it?” – leave space for questions in next round)*

**Group asks questions and adds to list “popcorn” style:** *Still use talking piece – people raise hands and get talking piece when they want to add. Recorder also writes down questions and additions.*

**Closing circle:** *Facilitator instructs participants to first write silently (1 min), then share in circle*

*“Write one word or short phrase in PEN / MARKER that you think stands out the most from our conversation today or that sums up how you feel about today’s activity. Write it with a pen on the blank side of your card. We will share responses in circle format and put card in the middle of the circle as you share.”*

**Closing announcement of NEXT STEPS:**

- 1) Facilitator collects all index cards and chart paper to submit to Community Building team.
- 2) Follow up: Staff will do this activity on Sept 4. Advisories will do this activity on \_\_\_\_\_. The Parent Association will do this activity on Sept 19. Following this, the Community Building Project will meet to compile a google doc of “what makes a community work” and a list of questions we have. These will be shared with the Bronx Letters community in some way in early October – an assembly, posters, readings, and/or published in The Raven / One Pen.

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**Debriefs will come in a separate email:**

Debrief with **staff** (right after orientation activity): 10 min

Debrief with **parents** (right after PA activity): 10 min

Debrief with **advisories** (the following advisory meeting): 15 min

This is an example of how Circle Process can be used to address harm that’s been done and repair relationships/ restore community. Having a script for a Circle Conference helps ensure that the process runs smoothly and that the facilitator doesn’t unintentionally convey bias or judgment.

## Circle Conference -- Bronx Academy of Letters

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### Circle Process is about:

1. **Relationships** – developing caring connections and finding common ground
2. **Respect** – listening to others' opinions and valuing them
3. **Responsibility** – being accountable for actions taken
4. **Restoration** – repairing harm that has been caused
5. **Reintegration** – ensuring all remain included and involved

### Restorative justice...

1. Shows **equal concern** for victims, offenders, and the affected community
2. **Encourages the offender to feel accountable** for his/her conduct and to be willing to repair the harm to the victim and the community in a way that helps the offender develop competency
3. **Provides opportunities for direct and/or indirect dialogue** within the entire community of people affected, including the victim and offender
4. Encourages those involved to **collaborate in restoring and developing positive relationships**, including the victim and the offender
5. **Empowers those affected** to increase their capacity to recognize and respond to harm and crime in a restorative way

IN ATTENDANCE: facilitator, dean, Ms. G, "RICKY," two other students in the class

### 1. **Welcome & Introductions**

-- Why we are here: RICKY seems to be doing very well in some classes and at some points in the day, while being a distraction and inconsistent in others, specifically third period with Ms. G. We're here to talk about what is going on in third period and make a plan moving forward.

-- How the circle works – talking piece. Nothing on laps in hands. Can pass if you need to.

-- This process is about showing equal concern for everyone affected by the relationships and actions in this room – everyone is included and involved. There is no set outcome – we all have a shared responsibility for coming up with consequences and agreements

### 2. **Opening & Orientation**

- a. What do you need in this conversation in order to feel safe and heard?
  - Ex: We will 'We will speak and listen with respect.'
  - Ex: We will speak and listen honestly
- b. something we respect about Ricky

### 3. Narratives/Storytelling

1. What is going on? Why are we here?
2. Who was harmed? How have you been affected by the incidents we just heard?

### 4. Exploring Options & Creating Agreements

1. How will the harm be repaired? **What needs to happen to make things right?**
2. Who is responsible for repairing the harm? **What do you need to do to make things right?**

### 5. Closing

- a. What can you personally do to keep this agreement?

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Possible agreements/consequences:

## Group Assist—Bronx Academy of Letters

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Group Assist is way to use Circle Process to address a chronic behavior issue. The goal is bring the student together with his or her peers to *describe* the behavior, explain *why* the behavior is a problem, have the student *accept* the problem and the role they play in it, and propose *solutions*.

There are many benefits to choosing this approach:

- **it is safe:** the short format and “*help*” purpose/tone of the protocol assures the student “on the spot” and others in attendance that they can and should trust in the management system
  - **the best classroom management takes place in your classroom;** challenging students trust teachers who will handle their most difficult behaviors and be in charge
  - **it promotes the teaching of positive behaviors** by having students help each other, be honest, and, with their peers and teacher, collaboratively come up with replacement behaviors
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IN ATTENDANCE: facilitator, advisor, another teacher, “RICKY,” two of Ricky’s friends

### 1. **Welcome & Introductions**

-- Why we are here: “RICKY” only has 23 credits and should be senior. He needs *every* class he’s in and has already been absent *\_* times and has been caught cutting classes. No one wants him to be suspended for cutting. We are his teachers and advisors and friends and relatives we want to help create the conditions for him (and all of us to be successful)

-- How the circle works - talking piece. Nothing on laps in hands. Can pass.

-- This process is about showing equal concern for everyone affected by the relationships and actions in this room - everyone is included and involved. There is no set outcome - we all have a shared responsibility for coming up with consequences and agreements

### 2. **Opening & Orientation**

a. Lets first consider how you want to have this conversation together, and what you need in order to feel safe and heard

- We will make eye contact
- We will speak and listen honestly

b. say something we respect about Ricky

3. **Agenda:**

**we are going to describe** the behavior  
**talk about why** is this behavior a problem  
**discuss solutions** as a group

4. **Narratives/Storytelling**

**describe** Ricky's behavior that is concerning  
**talk about why** is this behavior a problem

5. **Exploring Options & Creating Agreements**

**discuss solutions** as a group  
how can we change this behavior together?

6. **Closing**

What will *you* do to keep this agreement

**“Ricky” Circle Agreements** -- Oct, 2013

*Present:* facilitator, advisor, another teacher, “RICKY,” Ricky’s cousin and one of Ricky’s friends (both are also seniors)

<b>What needs to be done?</b>	<b>Who is responsible for making sure this</b>	<b>When? How often?</b>
Get Ricky a <i>real</i> alarm clock	Teacher	ASAP -- Teacher will deliver to Ricky in
Put <i>real</i> alarm clock away from bed	Ricky	When he gets alarm clock from Teacher
Ricky & cousin will BOTH now have gym on Thursdays and Fridays	Facilitator	Every Thurs & Fri at 8am (get up at 7am!)
Ricky & cousin will give each other a spare key to their apartments	Ricky & cousin	ASAP
Ricky & cousin will facebook message each other <i>every</i> morning to be sure that they are both	Ricky & cousin	Monday, Tues & Wed at 8am Thurs & Friday at 7am
Call home to Rickey in the morning to be sure he is	Friend	Mondays, Tuesdays &
Weekly attendance check-ins	Advisor	Every Thursday during Advisory check--in
Lunch reward for if Ricky is mostly in school and on time  This means: absent 3 or fewer times each month AND late 5 or	Advisor & Teacher -- buy lunch All three friends  <i>get lunch</i>	First Friday of every Month.  First one is Fri Nov 3 --- meet in rm132 at 1pm!

This worksheet is a starting place for a conversation with middle school students around establishing democratic norms for classroom behavior that take everyone's views on respect into account and allows all voices to be heard.

### Middle School Community Building Circle Worksheet

6<sup>th</sup>- 8<sup>th</sup> Grade ESL

Produced by Sarah Camiscoli, ESL, 6-12<sup>th</sup> Grade

Name \_\_\_\_\_

<p>What does <b>respect</b> mean to you?</p> <p><i>¿Que significa respecto?</i></p>	<p>What words <b>hurt</b> you or make you <b>angry</b>?</p> <p><i>¿Cuales palabras te hacen daño?</i></p>	<p>What <b>rules</b> do you think are most <b>important</b> in a classroom?</p> <p><i>¿Que te parece son las reglas más importantes en una clase?</i></p>