Dream Study

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Purpose:
A small group activity advancing middle grade students' social and emotional growth.
Dream study promotes self-knowledge - "the inside me" - encourages empathy, observation, and ability to explore difficult feelings. It shows that we value and respect our own inner lives as well as others'.

Materials Needed:
• ABOUT DREAMS, by Suzanne Saldarini, illustrated by Lou Simeone, ORI Academic Press, 2013.
Available on Amazon. http://orinyc.org/About-Dreams-Saldarini.html
• Paper, pencils, crayons or markers.
• A quiet meeting space for 6 to 12 students.
• A co-leader if desired

Procedures and Process:
A. Read ABOUT DREAMS. Begin preparation with attention to your own dreams. Two to three weeks before activity with students share dreams with someone you trust; try Freud's method, i.e.
Write the dream as you remember it.
  1. Notice dream references to the previous day ("instigators") and,

  2. Collect ideas linked to each part.

  3. Try not to censor your thoughts ("associate freely"); let the dream take the lead.

  4. Observe new ideas, memories, thoughts, feelings and wishes as they emerge.

  5. Others may contribute to this process but only you, the dream's author, understand the dream's real message.

B. Schedule two to three 30-40 minute sessions for students; adjust to students' maturity.

Prepare any communications to others in your setting concerned with your function
(see Follow-Up and Limitations, below).

C. SESSION ONE
  1. Introduce topic of dream study; create a safe and comfortable discussion environment. Review and/or list behaviors that show good listening skills. Let students spell out how they know good listening is happening. Invite comments on their own experience with dreams: Do they remember them? Do they wonder where they come from? Do dreams bring them what they wish for?

  2. Read aloud PART ONE of ABOUT DREAMS. Use questions like: What do we know about Truman and his life? Can anyone identify with his experiences? Have any of you had scary dreams? Faced difficult conflicts? How did Truman deal with his angry feelings? Any ideas about other ways he might cope? Do you have special ways to ease angry reactions? Writers, artists and dreamers sometimes use symbols to express ideas; can you see symbols in this dream?

  3. Some children will spontaneously share their own dreams in the course of discussion; model good listening, i.e. encourage dreamer's own ideas - do not "diagnose." Given our aim of respecting each person's unique inner experience, good listening becomes key. With the dreamer's permission others may share ideas about its meaning, but the dream belongs to the dreamer. (See web-link for further hints and discussion).

D. SESSION TWO
  1. De-brief and re-cap: Encourage discussion of Session One. Watch for segues to ABOUT DREAMS, PART TWO, or simply introduce concept that study and observation produce ideas about how our minds work. Read aloud PART TWO.

  2. Invite children to draw and share pictures which might illustrate conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings. Invite some to draw ice-berg analogy.

  3. From the story, imagine Truman's conscious and unconscious feelings…

  4. Dream themes and content: Discussion will show that dreams share common themes and content. Flying, naked in public, frozen in place, attaining a longed for item or achievement are examples. Advanced students might survey dreamers in their age group, researching themes and content (PART THREE offers some general categories).

E. SESSION THREE
  1. Read PART THREE

  2. Review concepts of conscious and unconscious, welcome and unwelcome thoughts. Do you think we can have secrets even from ourselves?

  3. Discuss why scientists group items for study; do Freud's dream categories make sense with students' own experience?

  4. What made Dr. Freud a good listener?

5. Enjoy Aunt Serena's silly dream. What questions might help her understand? Who is the best expert on this dream's meaning?

6. Can students name people in their own lives who are good listeners?

7. Thank students for good listening and hard work.

Follow-Up Activities:
Share project with relevant in-house experts; e.g. librarian, art, music and science teachers, coordinator for gifted students, language arts teachers, school nurse, school psychologist, etc. The world of dreams connects too many aspects of human experience.

Schedule "drop-in" times when students can visit with any post-project concerns or ideas.

Theoretical Rationale and/or Research Base:
Psychoanalytic theory provides the theoretical rationale for ABOUT DREAMS. Frederick Redekop's thorough and readable text, PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACHES for COUNSELORS (Sage Publications, 2015) speaks to questions today's counselors might raise about Freud's place in contemporary counseling. I have also relied on findings from researchers collectively known as dream workers; these ideas are exemplified by the work of Montague Ullman, M.D. (see APPRECIATING DREAMS, A GROUP APPROACH, Sage Publica-tions, 1996). Brenda Mallon in DREAMTIME WITH CHILDREN (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2002) provides rich clinical and developmental material, as do Alan Siegel, Ph.D and Kelly Bulkeley Ph.D. in DREAMCATCHING (Three Rivers Press, 1998). Intrepid readers willing to tackle a primary source will enjoy Freud's ON DREAMS a brief, condensed version of his classic, THE INTERPRETATION of DREAMS. ON DREAMS is avail-able in the Dover Thrift paperback series.

Limitations:
Consider your school community. Who needs to be advised about activities you provide? Colleagues? Ad-ministrators? Parents? Schools vary in expectations and customs regarding classroom projects; appropriate communication is part of good planning.

Never press any student to share a dream or participate beyond their own comfort level. Again, a major goal for DREAM STUDY is to demonstrate respect and empathy for each person's inner experience..

Practice Settings:
   School Counseling