



Greenfield Public Schools

Superintendent's Address

2018-2019

Greenfield High School Auditorium ~ Greenfield, MA

Good Morning, Greenfield Public Schools Teachers!

Welcome back!

First I'd like to welcome our new & returning teachers and staff ! We hope your summer was filled with learning & with fun, and we are glad that you are back with us for the wonderful year ahead.

This year our convocation theme centers around someone that many of you know – Mr. Rogers. How many of you have seen the recent documentary? (Hands) Excellent! If you have not, the film is playing at the Garden Cinema through Wednesday and it's well worth it – if there's interest, perhaps we could even go as a group.

How many of you watched Mr. Rogers as a child? How many of you watched Mr. Rogers as a parent?

Now the show was geared towards young children, but his message embraced difficult topics facing adolescents as well, like race and sexuality and gender identity. But whether you were a fan of the show or not, Mr Rogers had a deep respect for children, and he understood 3 key things that made him a great educator.

- 1) ***Feelings*** - Mr Rogers understood that children have a rich emotional life, and believed by addressing children's emotions, you could make them manageable. By talking deeply and openly about their greatest fears and happiest hopes, children everywhere felt that he knew them and that they could trust them. Because of that, they were easily able to learn from him. A recent NPR piece described the science of socialemotional learning as *just now* catching up to what Mr. Rogers knew then, and made the bedrock of his show – meet students' social-emotional needs first, and meet them where they are. From seemingly small fears and worries – like a child asking, "Do haircuts hurt?" to more complex topics like confusing current events, disability, or race, Mr. Rogers was not afraid to address children's fears head-on. He provided reassuring advice in words they could understand, to address common childhood fears.

He focused on expressing those emotions in a positive, often creative, way and gave children – and adults - tools to manage those sometimes strong feelings with songs including the beloved bath-time song, “You can never go down the drain.”

In helping children understand and manage their feelings, he focused on empowering them by helping them make healthy decisions that would last them their whole lives.

In the simplest terms, he understood the *rich inner lives of children* and how important that was to *unlocking their potential*.

- 2) **Listening** – Mr Rogers was good at listening. This might seem funny for someone known for broadcasting a television program, which might seem like you’d be more focused on talking than listening. But those that knew him described the hours that were poured into every episode, and how the stories he told and the themes he wove were based on thousands on thousands of conversations with real children. When interacting with children, he was famous for making bad tv – including on Oprah – because of his uncanny knack for listening to children to the exclusion of most else. By listening to children, he was deeply in tune with their world, their needs, and their hopes. His programs were not an adult’s idea of what children wanted so much as they were a reflection of what he heard children telling him mattered most to *them*. They were, in a word, child-centered, because he listened. The result was a show that may have seemed odd, slow, or boring to adults, but yielded generations of young people that grew up feeling listened to, and loved, if only during his program.

- 3) **Words matter** – Mr. Rogers understood that children are very literal and he took great care with every sentence and word that he spoke. In a now-famous episode about a visit to a doctor’s office, the script read that the doctor or nurse would “blow up” the blood pressure cuff. Fred Rogers is said to have voiced over that in the final episode, saying instead, “puffed up the cuff,” not wanting to confuse children. In fact, he was so precise with his language that friends and colleagues on the show took to calling it “Freddish” – the painstaking approach to language that he used on the show. It was inspired by a deep understanding of the developmental level of the children he was speaking to, based in research, and his own experience talking to children. It was also un-erringly positive, even while embracing difficult topics.

In fact, there was even an illustrated manual made in the 70’s called, “Let’s Talk About Freddish,” a loving parody of the demanding process of getting all the words just right for Rogers.

Per the pamphlet, there were nine steps for translating into Freddish:

1. "State the idea you wish to express as clearly as possible, and in terms preschoolers can understand." Example: *It is dangerous to play in the street.*
2. "Rephrase in a positive manner," as in *It is good to play where it is safe.*
3. "Rephrase the idea, bearing in mind that preschoolers cannot yet make subtle distinctions and need to be redirected to authorities they trust." As in, "Ask your parents where it is safe to play."
4. "Rephrase your idea to eliminate all elements that could be considered prescriptive, directive, or instructive." In the example, that'd mean getting rid of "ask": *Your parents will tell you where it is safe to play.*
5. "Rephrase any element that suggests certainty." That'd be "will": *Your parents can tell you where it is safe to play.*
6. "Rephrase your idea to eliminate any element that may not apply to all children." Not all children know their parents, so: *Your favorite grown-ups can tell you where it is safe to play.*
7. "Add a simple motivational idea that gives preschoolers a reason to follow your advice." Perhaps: *Your favorite grown-ups can tell you where it is safe to play. It is good to listen to them.*
8. "Rephrase your new statement, repeating the first step." "Good" represents a value judgment, so: *Your favorite grown-ups can tell you where it is safe to play. It is important to try to listen to them.*
9. "Rephrase your idea a final time, relating it to some phase of development a preschooler can understand." Maybe: *Your favorite grown-ups can tell you where it is safe to play. It is important to try to listen to them, and listening is an important part of growing.*

(Source: The Atlantic, *Mr. Rogers' Simple Set of Rules for Talking to Children*, June 2018: <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/06/mr-rogers-neighborhood-talking-to-kids/562352/>)

However, one of the most powerful ideas of his programming was not anything you would have seen on his program. It is the simple, and powerful notion known by all great educators that real lessons are not taught, they are emulated. The people around us teach us to be great not just with their words, but also with their actions.

"Attitudes are caught, not taught," he had said. He said, going on "The teacher sets the attitude of the classroom -- and that attitude is contagious. Children learn from their teacher's example, from the way the teacher respects each child and from the way the teacher expects children to treat one another. Children need to learn that they don't have to like everyone -- but they do have to be courteous to everyone."

It will be no surprise to you then that Mr. Rogers had a deep respect for teachers, given his emphasis on being firm and fair, kind but structured, and most of all, respectful. In an interview in the 1980s he said *"When I was very young, most of my childhood heroes wore capes, flew through the air, or picked up buildings with one arm. They were spectacular and got a lot of attention. But as I grew, my heroes changed, so that now **I can honestly say that anyone who does anything to help a child is a hero to me.**"*

When asked in an interview what advice he had for teachers, he said:

"No matter how old or young we are, we learn best from people who **care** about us."

Simply, and plainly, Mr. Rogers said:

*"The most important people in a child's life are that child's **parents and teachers.** That means parents and teachers are the **most important people in the world.**"*

So this year, let's make Greenfield Public Schools **our** neighborhood – a place where we meet and reach every student based on their own unique strengths and differences, and where every one knows that they are valued and accepted just the way they are.

Thank you.

Works Cited

Mr Rogers' Simple Set of Rules for Talking to Kids

- <https://www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2018/06/mr-rogers-neighborhood-talking-to-kids/562352/>

Mr. Rogers Talked To Kids In A Secret Language Called 'Freddish,' And The Rules Are Very Simple: // www.littlethings.com/mr-rogers-how-to-talk-to-kids/
Fred Rogers - Wikiquote: https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Fred_Rogers

<http://mentalfloss.com/article/31936/20-gentle-quotations-mister-rogers>

Education World

Interview https://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/profdev016.shtml

Watch Mister Rogers' heart-warming message to his grownup fans:

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/nation/watch-fred-rogers-heart-warming-final-message-grownup-fans>

(For Goodbye message only, click

here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9OqyUuCYos>)

Mr. Rogers' Songs & Related Links:

Youtube: Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood Opening Theme / Won't You be my

Neighbor https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eInUUfyqa5o&list=RDhdyeVM_mjHg&index=12

YouTube: I'm glad you are the way you

are https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HN1ygrDiq90&index=11&list=RDhdyeVM_mjHg

YouTube: You are my friend <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=98wVFsIt-MQ>

PBS Kids Songs Lyrics, "You Are Special" - <http://www-tc.pbskids.org/rogers/songs/print/youAreSpecial.pdf>

PBS Kids Songs Lyrics, "It's You I Like" <http://www-tc.pbskids.org/rogers/songs/pdf/youilike.pdf>