

Twenty-five out of 25 hands raised when I posed the question – “How many of you are a little disappointed to be in school today?” It was October 12, and in six Sun’s meeting circle, I sensed a polite, but quiet frustration. No student had a friend outside of FACT who had to be in school this day. The classes morale was understandably low.

I couldn’t really blame the students. Like them, I would’ve enjoyed sleeping in a little later, and catching up on some reading and errands. Still, I knew that as a teacher, I had to try and find a way to shift the attitude. Otherwise, it would be a very long day. I told the class that three years from now they’d be in high school and would never again have to wake up early on Columbus Day. Unlike their future classmates, however, they would have a better understanding of the history of America and a more balanced view of the world and its cultures. Knowing six Sun still wasn’t quite convinced, I reminded them that regardless of their feelings, they WERE in school and not approaching the day with a good attitude was a surefire way to have a bad day.

To the class’ credit, they began the day’s activities with positive energy. The Many Points of View Day committee did an amazing job of creating engaging, meaningful, and age-appropriate activities. Students enthusiastically studied and analyzed pictures that changed meaning depending on perspective. They were eager to share what they saw and help their friends solve the pictorial riddles. Later, four outstanding plays were written and performed. A few normally unassertive students took on leadership roles and as I filmed the performances, I sensed the classroom community building. Students were working hard, engaging in meaningful discussions, and laughing the entire time.

Witnessing this reminded me of what a special place FACT is.

The mission that lends itself to ideas like having school on Columbus Day was the reason I wanted to teach here in the first place, and it’s this same ideology that has led hundreds of parents to sign their children up for our community school. While the rest of Philadelphia’s educational community laid around at home, I found myself happy to be at work.

At the close of the day, six Sun did their normal closing meeting routine – wishing each other a good night, reciting the Peace Builder Pledge, and engaging in a one-minute silent meditation. After making announcements, I posed another question – “How many of you are happy you came to school today?” Again, 25 hands raised, only this time I wasn’t looking at dejected faces. Students were smiling, and it occurred to me that three Columbus Days from now, these same students might find themselves wishing they didn’t have the day off.