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Title of Activity: Sweet Fire Study

Classroom Idea Exchange® Hosted by NCTE

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Description (75 words): Girlhood is amazing. Sometimes, though, society seems not to know it. This lesson uses the picture book *Sweet Fire* to challenge the influence of societal limitations and negative self talk in the lives of girls. This lesson makes space for learners to explore the book together, ask questions and engage in collaborative dialogue about what it looks like to resist inaccurate labels and rewrite their narratives.

Activity Grade Level: 3rd-5th grade and beyond

Activity Keywords: Text analysis; self-image; collaboration; speaking and listening; representation; word choice; SEL; self-awareness; CASEL competencies; UDL; Universal Design for Learning; girls' empowerment; student empowerment; Black girls

Activity Learning Outcomes: Learners will: determine the central idea or theme of the *Sweet Fire* text (Ohio Reading Key Ideas & Details Standard 2); participate effectively in conversation and collaboration (Ohio Speaking and Listening Standard 1; and identify personal strengths based on interests and qualities (Ohio Social Emotional Learning Self-Awareness Standard A.2.1.b.)

1. **REQUIRED MATERIALS**: *Sweet Fire* book; blank paper and writing utensil for each student; teacher self-drawing example (face drawn in center of a blank page.)
2. **SEL CHECK-IN**: Gather students in a circle format, if possible. Provide a talking piece that can be passed. Ask a question such as the following and allow each student to answer in turn: " What is one of your superpowers?"
3. Propose an opening question: "If I told you there was "fire" inside you, what would you imagine that means?" Field a discussion. As needed, introduce the idea of "fire" as our uniqueness.
4. Provide a short book introduction, such as, "We're going to read a book called *Sweet Fire*. It was written by a teacher and mom who wants all young people to understand their value. She decided to write it to girls because it was inspired by her daughter and because she knows that they are the ones society often encourages to be quiet, not trust their voices, etc. The message, however, is for everyone. What do you notice on the front cover?" Field a short discussion.
5. **INTERACTIVE READ-ALOUD**: Let students know that you'll be talking about how they see themselves, and for this assignment the class will do some drawing and writing. Distribute the blank paper and writing utensils. Ask students to draw a picture of themselves that can fit in the center of the page without being too small or too large. Show them an example you have created. Emphasize that this is not about perfect art.
6. Start reading the book. After reading spread #6 ("Diva's not who you are, girl…"), go back to spread 5. Invite students to notice the Sweet Fire character minding her business while people make assumptions about who she is. Discuss spread 5's label juxtaposed with spread 6 and the opportunity to *resist/reject* the labels of others. "What are some of the things you have heard said about Black girls, or ideas society has about how they think, act or look? How are these ideas dangerous?" Field discussion. "What about the ideas about people who look like you? How are these ideas dangerous?"
7. Give students a minute or two to revisit the picture they drew of themselves, and write down some labels or ideas others have about them.
8. Have students think–pair-share briefly about what they wrote–or take a few class shares.
9. Continue reading the book.
10. At the end, on the final, wordless spread, ask students what comes to mind as they take in the image. Briefly discuss.
11. After finishing the book, revisit spreads 5-6. Re-read those 2 spreads.
12. Encourage students to rethink what they wrote before on their page about themselves. Ask them to X out the words on the page that don't really match who they are. How can they reframe or rewrite the story about themselves to match who and how they really are? Give them time to write NEW words/descriptions around the page.
    a. Provide time for think-pair-share or whole class share outs of their new narratives.
    b. Have students write a short statement at the bottom of their page (or on the back) to share what they are taking away from the book.
13. ASSESSMENT & FEEDBACK: Circulate to observe whether student writings seem to indicate a rewrite/reframe of negative labeling as well as an understanding of the book's theme.