

Montgomery County Freedom Schools Collaborative



Freedom Schools is not a camp or a school; it's a movement!
"Harambee" is Kiswahili for "Let's pull together"

Harambee Components:

Hallelujah Chorus

The Quincy Jones arrangement is a nod to Freedom Schools' founder, Children's Defense Fund (CDF) President and civil rights activist Marian Wright Edelman. It reflects her motivation to ensure all children have "a healthy start, a head start, a fair start, a safe start, and a moral start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities" (CDF mission).

Read Aloud

Guests from the community read books from the Site Library or their favorite books they choose to bring. A short biography about the Guest Reader is shared with the children. This time exposes scholars to people of different backgrounds and careers while also reiterating a universal love of learning throughout the community.

Motivational Song

The lyrics of "Something Inside So Strong" provide a daily reminder that the scholars can and will rise above difficulties and injustices to succeed because they are strong and capable. This song ensures that scholars say out loud, at least once a day, "I know that I can make it!" Through repetition, scholars believe the message.

Cheers and Chants

As the most energetic portion of Harambee, Cheers and Chants gets scholars excited for the day ahead while expending some necessary energy so they are able to better focus in the classroom. The Cheers and Chants encourage scholars to recite messages of positivity, self-worth, self-affirmation, love of reading, etc. in a way that is fun and easy to remember. The beats and melodies used are often pulled from music scholars listen to on the radio, making a strong connection and facilitating repetition and memorization of the important messages.

Recognitions

This is a time for SLIs and scholars to publicly spotlight those who have exceeded expectations, achieved special accomplishments, have birthdays, etc. This time maintains the Freedom Schools environment of positive reinforcement.

Moment of silence

This time allows everyone to calm down from the high energy of Harambee to transition to Integrated Reading Curriculum classroom time. We close our eyes, breathe deeply, and prepare to enter classrooms with positivity. The moment of personal reflection ends with "Ashe," which is a Yoruba philosophical concept of the power to make things happen and produce change.

Announcements

This provides an opportunity to announce field trip plans, schedule changes, lunch menus, etc. Scholars do well when they know what to expect. Announcements allow scholars to be active participants in their day and mitigate anxiety around the unexpected.

Freedom School FAQs:

Q: What is Freedom School?

A: The mission of the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is to ensure every child a healthy start, a head start, a fair start, a safe start and a moral start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. The CDF Freedom Schools program provides summer and after-school enrichment through a research-based and multicultural curriculum that supports scholars and their families through five essential components: high quality academic and character-building enrichment; parent and family involvement; civic engagement and social action; intergenerational servant leadership development; and nutrition, health and mental health.
(CDF Freedom Schools Training Manual, 2002)

Q: Why does Freedom School begin with Harambee?

A: "Harambee" is Kiswahili for "Let's pull together." It is a time for our Freedom Schools family and guests to put aside stresses and distractions from the outside world and prepare for a day of fun and learning together. Harambee is a reminder that we have entered a safe space where everyone is valued, encouraged, and capable of making a difference.

Q: Who are these young adults?

A: These are our Servant Leader Interns (SLIs). They are college students who were chosen because of their strong leadership skills and commitment to academics and community. Many are not majoring in education, which provides our scholars role models with a variety of interests and skill sets and demonstrates that scholars can pursue any career they choose. Because they are all so different, scholars are able to better understand that reading is universally necessary to reach future goals. SLIs are trained with SLIs across the nation to approach children, literacy and society holistically by Children's Defense Fund at the Alex Haley Farm in Tennessee. The SLIs lead Harambee, implement the Integrated Reading Curriculum in the classroom, and maintain the special Freedom Schools environment.

Q: Why does Freedom Schools use colloquial or slang words?

A: Freedom Schools meets our scholars where they are. We are helping scholars understand that different types of language are appropriate in different situations. We use this language to help differentiate Freedom Schools from the traditional classroom experience, as well as build confidence in scholars' expression of ideas. Colloquial language allows scholars to connect with their Servant Leader Interns and connect with the meaning behind the songs, cheers, chants, and books we explore. We find that by making the songs and cheers more informal, the scholars repeat the important words back to themselves and others long after the summer is over.

**For more information about how Freedom Schools is building young leaders or to invest in the important work of the Montgomery County Freedom Schools Collaborative,
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