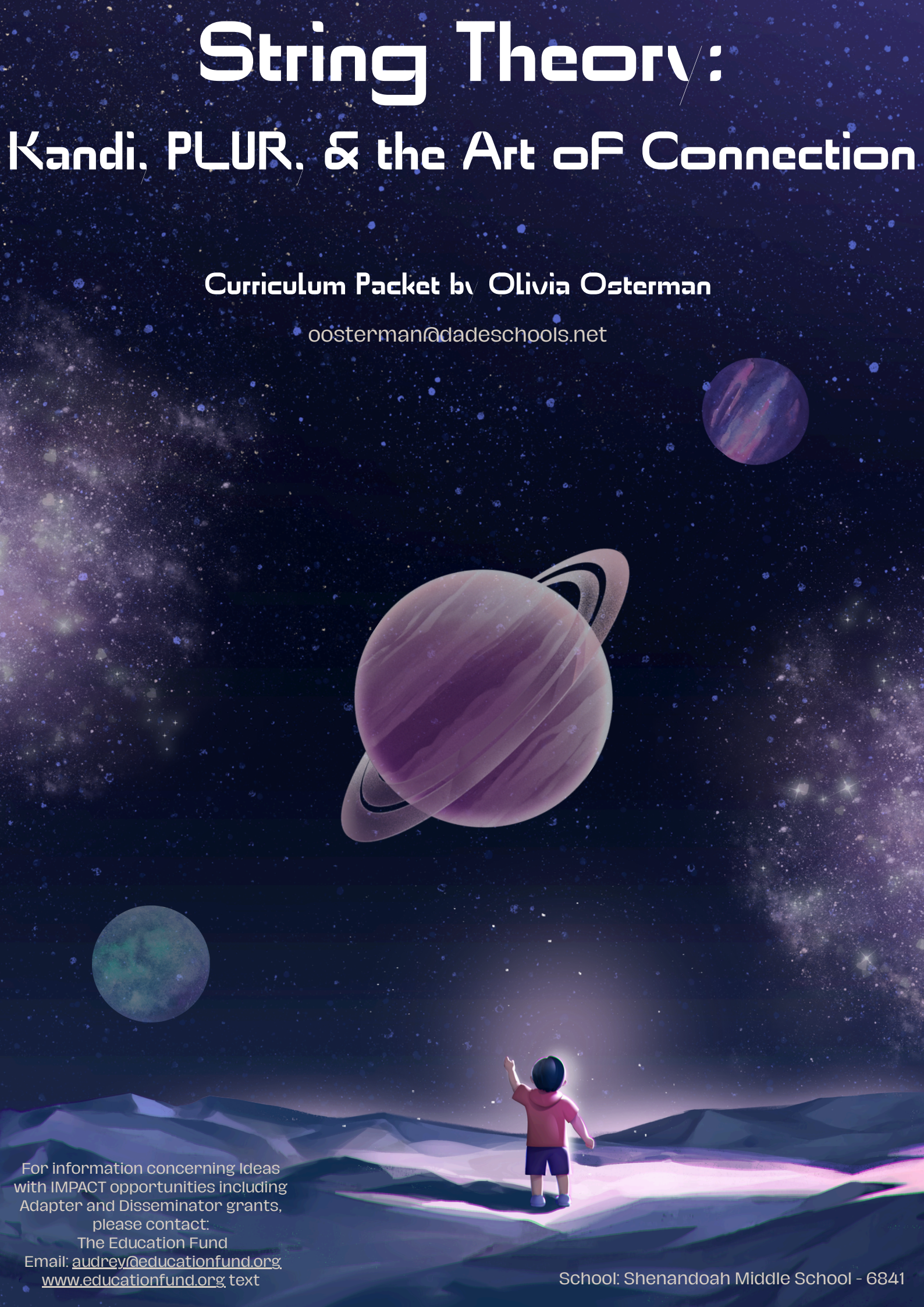
String Theory:

Kandi, PLUR, & the Art of Connection

Curriculum Packet by Olivia Osterman

oosterman@dadeschools.net



For information concerning Ideas with IMPACT opportunities including Adapter and Disseminator grants, please contact:
The Education Fund
Email: audrey@educationfund.org
www.educationfund.org text

School: Shenandoah Middle School - 6841

Table of Contents:



- Preface.....1
- Philosophy.....3
- Goals & Objectives.....6
- Florida Standards.....8
- Course Outline.....9
- Lesson Plans:.....11
  - Lesson Plan #1: Single-Session / Classroom Implementation.....11
  - Lesson Plan #2: Club / Ongoing Implementation (incl. fundraising).....15
- Content Recommendations.....19
- Resource List.....21



PreFace



"We've learned that friendship isn't always easy. But there's no doubt it's worth fighting for."

Twilight Sparkle, *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* (2010)

I first watched My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic in middle school, somewhere between the absolutely brutal ages of ten and fourteen, and returned to it for years afterward whenever I needed something familiar to sit with. It was comfort before it was anything else. It has only been recently, as an adult, that I've been able to absorb the true depth of the show's many lessons and genuinely attempted to incorporate them into my day-to-day life.

Middle school was also when I started experimenting with alternative fashion; scene, emo, goth, cycling through most of it before settling into goth as an adult. Along with the fashion came an attitude I'm not particularly proud of: a kind of pompousness about who I was and who I wasn't interested in knowing. I had decided, somewhere early on, that being "alternative" meant existing a little apart from everyone else, and I carried that posture more or less unexamined until college. I spent that stretch of my life operating on presumption, drawing conclusions about people before I gave them room to complicate those conclusions; sometimes out of bias I hadn't examined closely enough, and just as often out of my own insecurity disguised as discernment.

Here is the part I find truly comical in hindsight: PLUR & kandi were never foreign to me. I first encountered them through scene & emo culture, where pony beads & PLUR bracelets were practically a uniform, and I saw the same language again among cosplayers and convention regulars; different subculture, same instinct toward handmade, wearable belonging.

The entire premise of PLUR is that everyone is welcome, that the beads themselves are a standing invitation. And I rejected that invitation for years, in spite of my own self-induced lonliness, because I was more attached to my own curated exclusivity than to the community actually being offered to me. It's a strange kind of irony to sit with: I was, in some sense, PLUR-adjacent my whole adolescence and missed the point entirely.



PreFace



Finally, in college, once enough distance from who I'd been in middle school, I finally heard what the show had been saying all along, My Little Pony became one of a dozen incredible influences that eventually helped those philosophies on genuine friendship & inclusivity actually land.

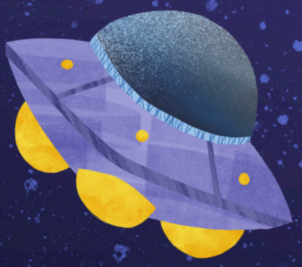
The show's argument was never subtle, but I hadn't been ready to receive it: that friendship is not the reward for finding people like yourself, but the result of staying present with people who are not. That argument extends into the show's visual grammar too. The saturation of color, and the cutie mark each character earns by discovering what is distinctly theirs to offer, treats individuality not as a deviation to be managed but as the very mechanism by which a community becomes worth belonging to.

It's worth noting I wasn't alone in finding that language. My Little Pony & it's many iterations has had a genuine, lasting cultural footing in scene, emo, and LGBTQ+ communities specifically, where people gravitate toward a character the way you'd claim a symbol, and where the show's color palette still shows up in fashion today. I was, without realizing it, part of an audience the show had already found.

I share all of this because String Theory did not begin as a lesson plan. It began as a fairly slow, occasionally embarrassing personal correction. The process of unlearning an attitude I'd mistaken for identity, and relearning, later than I would have liked, that the door PLUR and kandi hold open was never conditional. What I want to give students is the shortcut I didn't take: a small, tangible practice in welcoming people before they've had to spend a decade convincing themselves it's worth it.



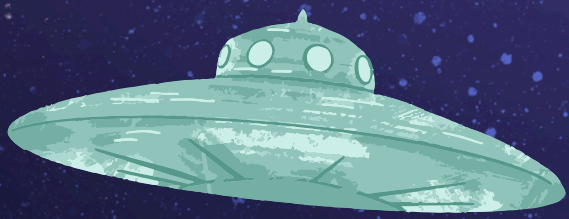
Philosophy



- ## What PLUR Means:
  - The acronym “PLUR” stands for Peace, Love, Unity, and Respect; four words that emerged from 1990s rave culture as an informal code of conduct among strangers sharing the same dance floor.
  - The acronym was never meant to be decorative; it was a working agreement that anyone could walk in the door, regardless of how they looked, dressed, or where they'd come from, and be treated as one of your own. Kandi bracelets became the physical evidence of that agreement. Small, handmade objects traded as a way of saying I see you, and you belong here to someone you'd just met.
  - That same simplicity is what makes PLUR so easy to translate into a classroom: it doesn't require students to understand rave history to feel the weight of the four words themselves.
- ## The Trade as a Call to Action
  - The kandi trade is built around a simple handshake in which each letter of PLUR is exchanged as its own gesture, ending with the bracelets themselves changing wrists.
  - What makes it meaningful isn't the choreography; it's that the trade requires two people to close a physical distance and act, not just feel goodwill from across a room. That small, deliberate motion is the entire philosophy in miniature: connection doesn't happen by accident, it happens because someone decided to initiate it.
  -



Philosophy





- In a school setting, the trade gives students a low-stakes, repeatable way to practice being the one who reaches out first.

The PLUR Handshake



PLUR in Practice: The Bad Book Society

- I've watched the PLUR philosophy work firsthand through the Bad Book Society, the club I founded and sponsor at Shenandoah Middle School, where kandi trading and PLUR values have been part of our culture since the club's initiation in 2024.

- Students who arrived with no shared friend group, no obvious common ground, and in some cases real social anxiety about approaching their peers have used the trade as an entry point.

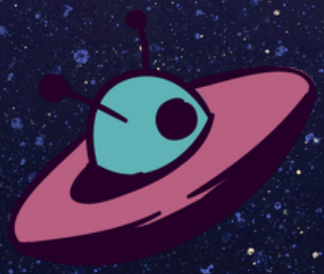
- Kandi trading is a low-stakes, built-in excuse to walk up to someone new.

- What I've seen repeatedly is that the bracelet isn't really the point; it's the permission the ritual gives a student to initiate contact without having to find the right words first.





Philosophy



- That's not a hypothetical benefit I'm hoping for with String Theory, it's something I've already watched happen, meeting after meeting, in my own classroom.

Voluntary Participation & Student Leadership

- A teacher can require a worksheet, but a teacher cannot require a friendship, and treating this section like the previous three would be its own quiet contradiction.

- Community built on mandate teaches compliance, not connection. Kandi trading only works because it's chosen: the student decides who to approach, when to offer a bracelet, and how much of the ritual to actually mean. That choice is also where real leadership tends to emerge.

- In the Bad Book Society, one of my students, Mila, began running "Kandi with Mila," a twice-monthly meeting where she taught me and a group of her peers more advanced designs such as variegated cuffs, charms, techniques well beyond what I'd originally shown the club. No one assigned her that role; she simply had more to offer than a basic bracelet, and the structure was loose enough to let her step into teaching it.

- That's precisely why String Theory is built to hold two very different shapes: a single classroom activity where participation ends when the bell rings, or a club where students return because they want to, and where leadership can shift to whoever's ready to carry it, the way I eventually carried mine.



Goals & Objectives



- ## Goals

Upon completion of this project, students will be able to:

- Initiate social connection with peers outside their existing friend group using a structured, low-stakes ritual
- Identify & apply the values of Peace, Love, Unity, & Respect in a real peer interaction
- Construct a wearable craft object using fine motor patterning & design skills
- Demonstrate voluntary leadership & ownership within a peer community, when given the opportunity to do so

- ## Objectives

By the end of this project, students will be able to:

- Explain the meaning of each letter in the PLUR acronym & its origin in youth subculture
- Construct a basic kandi bracelet independently, using a single-color or alternating-pattern design
- Perform the PLUR handshake & complete at least one kandi trade with a peer
- Identify one peer outside their usual social circle to initiate a trade with, by name or description



Goals & Objectives

- Objectives (Cont.)

By the end of this project, students will be able to:

- Reflect, verbally or in writing, on how it felt to initiate or receive a trade
- (Club/ongoing implementation only) Take on a teaching or leadership role within the group, such as introducing a new design or mentoring a newer member

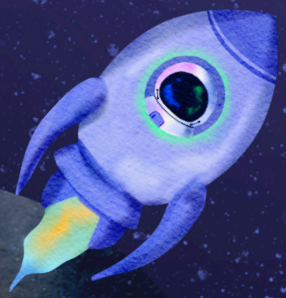


Florida Standards

- **HE.68.CE.1.1**
  - Describe the benefits of compassion in building and sustaining relationships.
- **HE.68.CE.3.1**
  - Demonstrate empathy in a variety of contexts and situations.
- **HE.68.CE.4.1**
  - Describe the benefits of kindness and trust on building and sustaining relationships.
- **HE.68.CE.5.2**
  - Analyze ways to pursue common goals as part of a team or group.
- **HE.68.CE.6.1**
  - Explain ways to apply leadership skills in the school and the community.

Course Outline





• Format Options

This project is designed to run in two formats, so educators can adapt it to whatever level of commitment fits their classroom or club:

- **Single-Session Format** — one class period (45-60 minutes), ideal for an art class, advisory block, or standalone activity.
- **Ongoing Club Format** — recurring meetings (e.g., twice monthly, weekly, etc.), ideal for an established club or student community group, with room to build toward a fundraising model

• Sequence of Experience

1. **Introduction to PLUR** — brief discussion of the acronym, its origin, and its meaning (5-10 min)
2. **Demonstration** — teacher (or student leader) models a basic kandi bracelet and the PLUR handshake/trade (10 min)
3. **Hands-On Making** — students construct their own bracelet using provided patterns and materials (20-30 min)
4. **The Trade** — students practice the PLUR handshake and complete at least one trade with a peer, ideally someone outside their usual friend group (5-10 min)
5. **Reflection** — brief verbal or written reflection on the experience (5 min)



Course Outline



- ## Group Size & Setting
  - **Classroom Setting**: 20-30 students, single session, teacher-led
  - **Club Setting:** smaller, consistent group (10-20 students), student leadership encouraged over time, teacher as facilitator rather than sole instructor

***Fundraising Note (Club Ongoing Format Only): Once a club has an established rhythm, bracelets can be sold to fund club activities, materials, or trips; modeled after the Bad Book Society's existing fundraising practice. Full guidance on this is included in Lesson Plan #2.



- ## Materials at a Glance
  - Pony/Kandi beads
  - Eastic cords
  - Scissors
  - Optional letter beads/charms for advanced designs

***Full materials list, suppliers, & approximate costs are provided in the Resource List.





Lesson Plans



Lesson Plan #1:

Single-Session Classroom Implementation

- **Duration**: One class period (45-60 minutes)
- **Group Size**: 20-30 students
- **Setting**: Any classroom; art class, advisory, or ELA/Health block

BeFore You Begin

- Pre-sort pony beads into shared trays or cups by color for easy access
- Cut elastic cord into pre-measured lengths (roughly 8-10 inches per bracelet, adjustable for wrist size)
- Print or display PLUR handshake reference visual (see Philosophy section, page 4)
- Print basic bead pattern templates if using (optional; see Resource List)
- Designate trade time/space: students will need room to move around and approach peers

Lesson Plans



Lesson Plan #1:

Step One: Introduction to PLUR (5-10 minutes)

- Introduce the PLUR acronym (Peace, Love, Unity, Respect) and its origin in rave culture as an informal code of conduct among strangers.
- Briefly explain that kandi bracelets are the physical, wearable form of that code, and that today's activity centers on both making and trading one.
- **Standard Supported:** HE.68.CE.1.1 (benefits of compassion in building and sustaining relationships)

Step Two: Demonstration (10 minutes)

- Model the construction of a basic single-color or alternating-pattern kandi bracelet, narrating each step aloud.
- Then demonstrate the PLUR handshake/trade with a co-teacher, aide, or volunteer student, so students see the full trade sequence before attempting it themselves.
- **Standard Supported:** HE.68.CE.4.1 (benefits of kindness and trust in building and sustaining relationships)

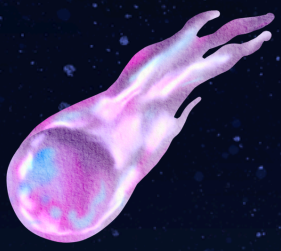


Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan #1:

Step Three: Hands-On Making (20-30 minutes)

- Students construct their own bracelet using provided beads & cord.
- Circulate to assist with patterning & technique. This step is intentionally low-pressure; there is no "correct" design, and simple patterns are just as valid as complex ones.
- **Standard Supported:** HE.68.CE.3.1 (demonstrate empathy in a variety of contexts and situations)
  - As students often help neighbors troubleshoot their patterns, this step doubles as informal peer support practice.



Step Four: The Trade (5-10 minutes)

- Students perform the PLUR handshake and complete at least one trade with a peer. (Ideally someone outside their usual friend group or social circle)
- Frame this explicitly: the goal isn't to trade with a friend, it's to practice initiating contact with someone new.
- **Standard Supported:** HE.68.CE.5.2 (analyze ways to pursue common goals as part of a team or group)

Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan #1:

Step Five: Reflection (5 minutes)



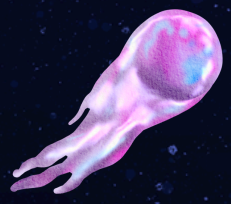
- Close with a brief verbal or written reflection.
  - Sample Prompts:
    - How did it feel to trade with someone you don't usually talk to?
    - What does the "R" in PLUR (Respect) look like in a trade?
    - Would you want to do this again, and why?
- **Standard Supported:** HE.68.CE.6.1 (explain ways to apply leadership skills in the school and the community)
  - Reflection reinforces that initiating connection is itself a small act of leadership.

Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan #2:

Club/Ongoing Implementation

- **Duration:** Recurring meetings (e.g., twice monthly), ongoing across a semester or school year
- **Group Size:** 10-20 students
- **Setting:** Established club or student community group; teacher as facilitator rather than sole instructor

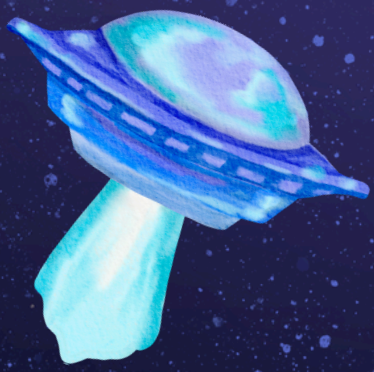


BeFore You Begin

- Establish a consistent meeting schedule and space (e.g., Bad Book Society's twice-monthly rhythm)
- Stock a rotating bead/cord supply, ideally with a small budget or fundraising line item
- Identify 1-2 students with prior kandi experience who might be interested in a teaching/leadership role
- Decide in advance whether this club will pursue fundraising, and if so, loop in administration on any school policies around student sales



Lesson Plans



Lesson Plan #2:

Step One: Establishing Club Culture

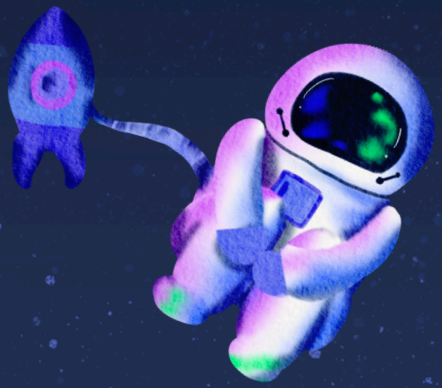
(Ongoing, first few meetings)

- Introduce PLUR and the trade as the club's foundational practice, not a one-time activity.
- Frame the club itself as a standing invitation where new members can join at any point and be welcomed the same way.
- **Standard Supported:** HE.68.CE.1.1 (benefits of compassion in building and sustaining relationships)

Step Two: Skill Progression

(Across multiple meetings)

- Move students beyond basic single-color patterns into more advanced techniques; alternating patterns, variegated cuffs, charms.
- Skill-building can be teacher-led initially, but should transition toward peer-led as students gain confidence (see Step Four).
- **Standard Supported:** HE.68.CE.3.1 (demonstrate empathy in a variety of contexts and situations)



Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan #2:

Step Three: Sustained Trading Practice

(Every meeting)

- Continue the trade ritual at every meeting, prioritizing new members, guests, or students who haven't been traded with recently.
- Over time, this becomes self-sustaining as members begin initiating it without teacher prompting.
- **Standard Supported:** HE.68.CE.5.2 (analyze ways to pursue common goals as part of a team or group)

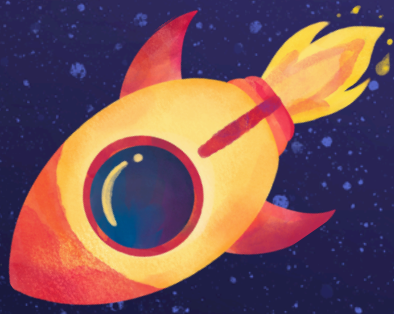


Step Four: Student Leadership

(Once club is established)

- Identify students ready to lead a session or teach a specific skill, following the "Kandi with Mila" model: a member-led meeting focused on a technique they've mastered.
- Leadership should emerge organically rather than being assigned.
- **Standard Supported:** HE.68.CE.6.1 (explain ways to apply leadership skills in the school and the community)

Lesson Plans

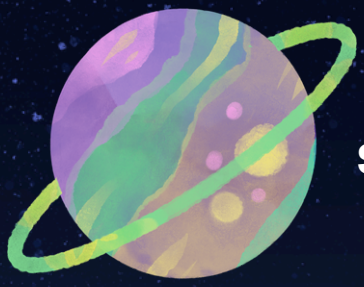


Lesson Plan #2:

Step Five: Fundraising

(Once club has a stable rhythm; optional but recommended)

- Once the club is established, bracelets can be sold to fund club materials, activities, or trips.
- Set clear, simple pricing; keep the emphasis on the club's purpose rather than production volume.
- Assign rotating responsibilities (sales, inventory, design) so the fundraising itself becomes a shared leadership opportunity.
- **Standard Supported:** HE.68.CE.6.3 (discuss ways a leader can build trust of individuals and groups)



Step Six: Reflection & Continuity

(End of semester/year)

- Close out the term with a group reflection on how the club's culture has changed over time; new members welcomed, skills passed down, funds raised and used.
- This reflection can double as an onboarding resource for the following year's members.
- **Standard Supported:** HE.68.CE.4.1 (benefits of kindness and trust in building and sustaining relationships)

Content Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from personal experience. These are shows and films I have watched multiple times and can speak to firsthand, chosen specifically because each one models friendship, kindness, and empathy in ways that connect naturally to PLUR. Educators are warmly encouraged to explore additional resources that better fit their own students, classroom, or personal frame of reference.

TV Shows

- **My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic** — Explores how individuality and differences between friends become a source of strength rather than division; a direct inspiration for this project's philosophy (see Preface).
  - **Program Creator:** Lauren Faust
  - **Years Running:** 2010-2019

- **Adventure Time** — Follows a wildly diverse cast of characters who consistently choose loyalty, compassion, and second chances over judgment, even toward former enemies.
  - **Program Creator:** Pendleton Ward
  - **Years Running:** 2010-2018

- **Avatar: The Last Airbender** — A found-family narrative built on trust, empathy, and learning to see the humanity in people from vastly different backgrounds and beliefs, consistently choosing second chances over judgment, even toward former enemies. Diversity, character growth, and community are all woven through the same story, making it a strong all-in-one reference for teachers.
  - **Program Creator:** Michael Dante DiMartino & Bryan Konietzko
  - **Years Running:** 2005-2008



Content Recommendations

The following recommendations are drawn from personal experience. These are shows and films I have watched multiple times and can speak to firsthand, chosen specifically because each one models friendship, kindness, and empathy in ways that connect naturally to PLUR. Educators are warmly encouraged to explore additional resources that better fit their own students, classroom, or personal frame of reference.

Movies

- **Kiki's Delivery Service** — A gentle coming-of-age story about a young girl finding her place in a new community, and the small acts of kindness that help her belong.
  - **Director:** Hayao Miyazaki
  - **Year Released:** 1989

- **Matilda** — A story about a child who builds her own chosen community and sense of belonging in the face of an unkind, dismissive environment, with kindness and courage as the throughline.
  - **Director:** Danny DeVito
  - **Year Released:** 1996

- **The Iron Giant** — A friendship between a boy and an "outsider" unlike anything he's known, built entirely on trust rather than fear of difference, with a powerful message about choosing who you want to be.
  - **Director:** Brad Bird
  - **Year Released:** 1999



Resource List



1. Craft Supplies & Materials

Item	Notes	Approx. Price
Pony beads (6mm, assorted colors)	1,000-1,500 ct. covers roughly 15-20 bracelets	$8-$12 per 1,000 ct. bag
Elastic stretch cord (1mm)	100m/328 ft. roll covers 40+ bracelets at 8-10" each	$7-$9 per roll
Scissors	Classroom set, if not already available	Varies
Letter/alphabet beads (optional)	For personalized or PLUR-lettered bracelets	$6-$10 per 1,000 ct.
Sorting trays or small cups	For pre-sorting beads by color & preventing beads from rolling off of tables	$5-$10 for a multipack
Charms (optional, club/advanced use)	For variegated cuffs and advanced designs	Varies by source

***A single classroom session (25-30 students) can typically be supplied for approximately $20-$30 total; an ongoing club can budget similarly per restock, scaling with membership size and meeting frequency.



Resource List





2. Suggested Suppliers

- **Oriental Trading** — classroom-oriented bulk packs, good for first-time/single-session purchases
- **Pony Bead Store** (ponybeadstore.com) — kandi-specific retailer with 400+ color options, ideal once a club wants more design variety
- **Amazon** — widest price range, good for both beads and elastic cord in bulk
- **Michaels / JOANN** — reliable in-person option for smaller quantities or last-minute restocks, especially useful with a teacher discount or coupon

***A note on sourcing: budget marketplaces like Temu can be tempting for stretching a classroom budget further, but they carry real concerns around labor practices and product safety oversight. The suppliers above offer comparable bulk pricing with more transparency.

3. Reference Materials

- Basic kandi pattern tutorials are widely available on YouTube and Pinterest.
  - Search "single stitch kandi pattern" for beginner-friendly visual guides
- PLUR history and rave culture context: general web searches for "PLUR rave culture history" return accessible overviews suitable for teacher background reading



Resource List

4. Organizations / Field Trips / Opportunities

- Miami Book Fair — encourage students to treat the fair like a convention environment, practicing PLUR trades with fellow attendees they don't know
- Finn-Con @ MDC — a free anime/gaming convention hosted by Miami Dade College, with a clear academic tie-in and low barrier to entry for students

***These are two starting points based on personal familiarity. Educators are encouraged to research additional organizations, fieldtrips, or guest speakers that connect to their own school community and student interests.

5. Student Work Samples (Optional)

- Include a photo of a finished bracelet or a sample student reflection, if available and able to be scanned clearly.