

## **Let's Circle Our Wagons!**

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Picture this scene if you will. The settlers have been traveling many dusty miles through dangerous Indian Territory. Their leader is watchful. There is an air of alert tension. Children no longer run happily alongside the family wagons but are huddled inside in fear. The silence is deafening. Suddenly it happens; they hear the chilling war cries and their worst fears are realized. Do the wagons scatter, every man for themselves? No, of course not! At the awaited signal, the wagons form, with military precision, into a tight circle ready to battle the enemy. Every able bodied man, woman, and even some children grab their weapons and are ready.

Now I am going to pose what might seem like a couple of silly questions. Which direction will they fire? Where is the enemy? For those of you who, like me, may be fans of frontier stories, the answer seems obvious. They fire out of the circle at the warriors on the outside, right?

In our lives today, in our schools and in our churches, we have an enemy. Unlike the settlers of times gone by, however, we seem to forget who and where our real enemy is. Sometimes we even become the enemy ourselves! The enemy of our churches, and more specifically our church schools, is, of course, the devil, who will do anything and everything to destroy us. It seems laughable to imagine the early settlers firing into the circle of wagons at each other instead of at the enemy, but upon close examination of ourselves, I think you might find that we do exactly that. Rather than forming into a tight circle and facing the devil and his forces outside with a united front, we all too often fire into the circle at each other! Sometimes the devil finds some of his best allies within the circle itself. How sad.

This idea was shared with me by our Superintendent of Education at a recent workers meeting. I cringed at the very real applications that can be made when we look at our behaviour in this light. Do I present a united front against Satan or do I spend my time firing into the circle instead? What about in our classrooms? Can we teach our students to use this principle as well?

How many of us as, teachers, have problems with students firing putdowns at each other? Anyone have bullies to deal with? Since being reminded of the "wagons in a circle" concept, I have been trying to teach it to my students as well. They, too, laugh at the idea of the pioneers firing at each other instead of the warriors attacking them. When they think of Satan as their enemy and realize how they sometimes treat each other, however, they become a bit more serious.

I asked my grade 5/6 Bible class to imagine a perfectly peaceful and united classroom. What would it look like, sound like, and feel like? They came up with some wonderful ideas that I compiled into a checklist that now sits at the front of my classroom. We take a few minutes at the end of each day to grade ourselves on how we did. Did we pull together into a circle or did we allow Satan to use us against each other with

disobedience, sloppiness, and unkind words? Here is the list my students made to describe their peaceful classroom that is pulled into a united circle:

1. Looks clean and tidy – no garbage on the floor.
2. Students are working quietly.
3. No put-downs. You would hear positive words.
4. Feels kind.
5. No pushing, shoving or hitting.
6. Sounds like a sanctuary with no yelling or screaming.
7. You would feel safe, like you could not be hurt in any way.
8. People would be helping each other.
9. People would be nice to you and you would be nice to people.
10. Everyone would feel happy.

Why not challenge your own students to “put their wagons in a circle”? Have them develop their own ideas of what this means and keep track. I can assure you it has made a big difference in my classroom. I hope you give it a try!