

Educator in the Neighborhood:

**LeeAnne Kreuger, Kindergarten teacher, Pittsburgh Beechwood PreK-5**

LeeAnne has been teaching for 15 years, 10 of them at Pittsburgh Beechwood, in Pittsburgh Public Schools, which is also the school she attended herself as a child. She has taught third grade, first grade, ESL, before coming to Kindergarten. She lives in Bethel Park with her husband, two boys, and no pets (which is “a topic of contention”).



*What's your earliest personal memory of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood?*

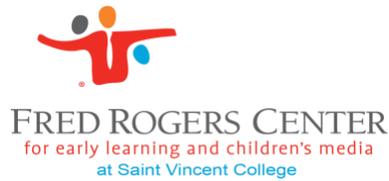
I always think of going to Idlewild as a child. I remember going on the Mister Rogers' Neighborhood ride there. It's now Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood, but back then it was Mister Rogers' Neighborhood. You took the trolley around and you visited everyone in the Neighborhood and you sang the songs.

*What is your favorite episode you've played for students? Why?*

I think my favorite episode was when Mister Rogers visited Koko the gorilla (episode 1727). Gorillas are my favorite animal. I loved how glued to the screen the kids were. And the way Mister Rogers interacted and communicated with her was really amazing.

*Has anything changed in how you approach MRN with your students this year (from the last two years of playing episodes)?*

The approach of gathering three classes of children together in one place to watch and looking for episodes that relate to topics we are teaching hasn't changed. We started to have conversations about what the children were remembering from each episode. We had been set on playing the whole episode from beginning to end to help children slow down and listen. But we are finding that they don't always retain everything from the episodes that we want them to. So, we talked about purposely pausing at times during the episodes to check for understanding. But the closures [from Covid-19] prevented us from trying this. We will try it next school year.



*How has MRN impacted your teaching?*

I would say in the last three years that we've been watching MRN, it's helped me focus on the real importance of Kindergarten. There were times when I was so focused on what the district wanted me to do, that I was missing out on opportunities for play and quiet. And now this is my focus and my purpose when teaching students. I don't know if this is because I started with higher grades and then went down to Kindergarten. It took me a couple of years to understand what is really important for children at this age. As Mister Rogers said, "Play is really the work of childhood."

*What would you say to people who think MRN is out of date or not relevant for child today?*

I would say the messages that Fred Rogers gave all those years ago are still relevant and to-the-heart of what is really important in the growth of our children.

*Which puppet or person of MRN do you most identify with? Why?*

I think I would say Mister Rogers. He's the messenger in the episodes. He's the calm presence that brings it all together. I feel like that's my job in the classroom. I'm the one in the classroom with the job to make sure my students learn in a calm, loving environment full of play and positive messages.

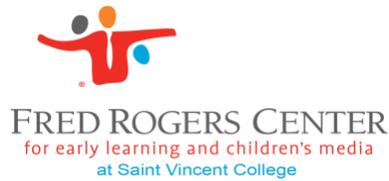
*Besides Mister Rogers, which puppet or person of MRN do your students talk about the most?*

Lady Elaine. They laugh at her and they love when she comes on the screen. As do I. And I've not really had an opportunity to ask them exactly why, but they really have a reaction to her. One student always says, "Oh, I love her!"

*Your students speak many languages at Beechwood; how do you think MRN relates to children who speak many languages?*

In our choices of episodes, we've made sure to choose ones where Spanish is spoken and various cultures are represented. The episodes also do a great job of presenting information visually. What they're looking at can tell the story with or without the talking. When Mister Rogers shows them places where things are made and built... seeing that is enough to learn what is being taught, even if you are a child that speaks a different language. The Neighborhood of Make Believe and the puppets are relatable to every child. From a child's perspective, with or without the spoken language, they can see what the puppets are doing and mimic that with their play.

*What is something you've learned in your readings from the FRC archives?*



I learned just how purposeful and planned the content was that went into the episodes. There were always reasons and something specific Fred Rogers wanted to address. It is amazing to read the process of how it all came together. That goes back to the question you asked about relevance today... MRN, it is like a curriculum, it's a pathway you can follow to teach about social skills and learning about life.

*What are you looking forward to learning next school year?*

I am looking forward to learning how my new class of students will respond to Mister Rogers. We've had classes that really responded to the Neighborhood of Make Believe strongly. We've had classes that responded to the "Picture Picture" teaching videos more strongly. I'm looking forward to learning what this next class will love the most.

*Why do you show MRN to your students?*

I show MRN to my students because I think it's meaningful and I think it can have an impact on how they treat and interact with others. I show it to my students because I love it too, and it gives us time to be together in a quiet and slow paced, important way.

*What message from Fred Rogers do you think matters right now for families at home with children [due to Covid-19 closures]?*

I just read one this morning [from [Fred Rogers Center Instagram](#)] that said: "I believe it's a fact of life that what we have is less important than what we make out of what we have" (*The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember*, p26). It's not about how much of what you want or have, but it's about how you use what you already have. We're here. We're home. We're not acquiring new things or going new places, but we can make and do amazing things with what we already have.

*Is there anything else you'd like to say?*

In reaching out with my parents during this separation, many of them have said they are watching Mister Rogers episodes together. That has felt really good to hear.

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*Educators' Neighborhood* interviews are conducted and transcribed by Melissa Butler.