



## **Teaching Post-Civil War History in Document-Based Fiction**

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### **Rationale**

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A few months ago I had a conversation with our media specialist about reading. She told me that this has been the first year in her career that the number of books checked out from our media have dropped significantly. She did not give me a number or percentage. She has built the media center from scratch at three middle schools. Whose fault is it, we queried? Nook, Kindle, iPad, technology in general, extra-curricular activities, over- commitment, or lack of interest? E readers promote reading but not all books are available in that type of format. I witnessed my own children voraciously devour books in elementary school and then, much to my dismay, their beloved habit of reading started to fall by the wayside as middle school ended and other interests grabbed their attention. For many students, the journey to construct a soon to be perfect high school transcript means more demands in the area of sports, clubs, and community service. More reading is required as students enter the higher grades and higher level classes. "It's too hard," they complain. "My game didn't end until 9 last night." "It's not fun anymore," was a common objection. Reading, unfortunately, becomes rote on their part. As an eighth grade teacher I often see this. Our school serves a growing population of, for the most part, economically advantaged suburban students. The media specialist and I agreed that it is frustrating and seriously fear – or rather hope – that it is not a sign of coming times. As a middle school history teacher, I do assign fiction and nonfiction books for my students to read in order to help support my curriculum and our Language Arts teachers. I am always in search of methods to build a history library for them to draw from. That being said, I do not teach them how to read the book from a Language Arts teacher's viewpoint; I regard the book from a historical perspective. The basic concepts of knowledge acquisition and interpretation are, however, universal. Reading will provide students with the fundamental blocks for the next level of classes in which they will become engaged.

How do I keep the interested readers on a path of continued reading and at the same time pull in those students who are not interested in reading another book or who are struggling readers? I want to design a unit that empowers me to teach fiction/non-fiction books using the interpretive methods discussed in this seminar. I have a mixed group of students that includes below and on grade level, extending to beyond 12<sup>th</sup> grade level. I spend a lot of time searching for books that might appeal to every one of them. Higher order thinking skills are relevant for all of these groups of kids, whether low, on grade, or above grade level reading ability. I know how to read the book from a historical and interpretive perspective, but how do I communicate to them how to accurately address the interpretive viewpoint? How can I assist my team-mates and address the

Common Core Standards within Language Arts as a history teacher? I want the unit to deliver a smoother transition between historical and interpretive approaches. Interpretation of the text will undoubtedly have many meanings, not just the one that arises from my customary historical perception. This is not just a pretext for building up a reading unit; it also helps my students interpret their reading and opens their reading up to multiple view points. That leads to discussion!

This unit will begin at the end of the second quarter (nine weeks) and progress into about half way through the third quarter of the year. My goal with this unit is to increase their personal knowledge of history in North Carolina and the United States from 1870 through 1900. I want my students to be able to clarify what American citizenship is and distinguish between true citizenship, according to what the *Constitution* and the *Bill of Rights* originally articulated, and the second-class citizenship that was often accorded Americans during this time period. I also want them to understand the sacrifices made by all groups involved in the journey to true equality and becoming a part of the American nation. Finally, to answer that age old question, "Why does studying history matter?" I intend my students to make some sort of personal connection with the author - someone possibly not so different from themselves.

As my students become involved in reading their books, I will be providing them with a variety of primary sources and historical facts to examine. What they read in their novels needs to be verified by historical facts. The author may have been selective in what they left out in the retelling of the story. I believe that it is important for students to have an accurate picture of the time in which the novel takes place. They can compare and contrast the novel with the other sources. We will engage in a variety of strategies to determine veracity of these sources. Primary sources can also be biased in what may be added or deliberately left out. I think my students will have a good selection of verifiable material to help them interpret the novel and primary sources against historical data.

Some of the Common Core Reading Standards I will be addressing in this unit include but are not limited to the following: cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources; determine central ideas of a primary or secondary source in order to provide an accurate account of the source from prior knowledge; identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view and purpose; and distinguish difference between fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text. The North Carolina Essential Standards I will be addressing include: 8H2 - understanding the ways in which conflict, compromise, and negotiation have shaped the US/NC; 8H3 - understanding the factors that contribute to change and continuity in the US/NC; analyzing the democratic ideals which shaped the government of the US/NC; 8C & G2.3 - explain the impact of human and civil rights issues experienced by people throughout the US/NC; and 8C1 -analyze how different cultures influenced US/NC.

## Background

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I teach eighth grade US/NC History in a suburban sixth through eighth grade middle school in Cornelius, outside Charlotte, North Carolina. The school is considered economically-advantaged in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. However, the recent recession has had an impact on the school. Our free and reduced breakfast/lunch percentages have increased from the mid-teens to the mid-twenties. I have about 130 students this year and they are divided into four classes. Due to the above grade level and at grade level distinctions given to Language Arts Honors (at least one year above grade level in reading), Language Arts

Standard (below or at grade level), Math 8 (at grade level), and Algebra I (high school course), my students will also mostly be leveled (not intentionally). I will have two classes of above-grade level in both Math and Language Arts), one class of mixed levels (above-grade level in one of the core classes), and one class that is on or slightly below grade level. My on-grade level class may have students who actually read two to three years below grade level. Scattered throughout these four classes are Exceptional Education (EC) students who may have processing disabilities in Math and Reading. I will also have eight EC Resource children. These students are classified as EMH (Educable Mentally Handicapped), with IQ's of 50 to 75. These students are main-streamed with their regular classmates for Science, History, and electives. Each teaching team consists of four teachers. There are five class periods a day, consisting of about 75 minutes per class. We rotate classes each nine week quarter. So, our first-block class becomes our second-block second quarter, and our fifth-block rotates to first. It allows us to see each student in a different light and to take advantage of those times when a child may be a "sleeper" in first block but come to life in second block!

I have worked with my Language Arts teacher for six years. We are not always on the same team, but have always collaborated about what we do in the classroom, how we teach it, and what new innovative methods we can come up with to deliver our lessons. We were brought back together on the same team of four teachers last year. She knows that I am passionate about the reading process in my history classroom. I count on her to teach the writing process needed in eighth grade before I get into that area. If I am doing an argumentative essay, Lynn sets it up in her class before I actually get into it in mine. We plan our quarters together. By that I mean, for example, that if she is doing poetry, I can start searching for a few poems that I can share with my students from the history time period we are currently studying. One of my fellows shared a poem with our class called, "Sure You Can Ask Me A Personal Question," by Diane Burns. I want to bring this poem into the first week of school when I do a small unit on stereotypes and prejudice before beginning the unit of Native Americans. Lynn and I will collaborate on how I might want to introduce the poem and unit. Our collaboration benefits us all, I believe, in communicating a well-rounded lesson.

My students will engage in three novel units in my class throughout the school year. I use *My Brother Sam is Dead* during the first quarter, all students read this book. My resource students will have access to an audio copy through their resource Language Arts class. My third unit involves a selection of sixteen WWII titles, all of which are non-fiction but one. Titles range from *Summer of My German Soldier*, *Night*, *Code Talkers*, to *Rape of Nanjing* and *The Pianist*. I like the idea giving students options because it makes them responsible for what they choose. By that I mean the book fits their interest level. Students also choose their projects, which vary among multimedia, art, music, and writing opportunities. I believe that if they have to do an assignment of this depth, they should have a choice as to the final product that they, as students, design. I offer about 30 possible final products, but I am always open to new creations and suggestions. In fact, that is how my product list grows from year to year. If students approach me with unique ideas I rarely turn them down because I am curious to see what they will produce. If it is successful, I can include it in next year's list of choices.

How do I arrive at who does what? Students take an interest survey at the beginning of the year in my class. We tally the results together and discuss what this means for them down the road in my class. This certainly does not mean that they are pigeon-holed to do an artsy project just because they rate highly in the visual area; their options are still open. Choice is the key focus when you want students to do a quality project.

A couple of years ago one of my students asked me if I had read *The Land*. I was familiar with the author, Mildred Taylor, but was not aware of this book. I had read her Newbery Award-winning Depression-era *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (1976) and the sequel, *Let the Circle Be Unbroken* (1981). We were studying

Reconstruction and he kept asking me if I had gotten a copy and read it yet. Not satisfied with a week of me telling him I had not had a chance, he gave me his copy and told me I had a week to read it! He was joking, but he knew I would take him up on the challenge. I loved it! It is a prequel to *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. The three books (there are actually seven in the whole series) are based on stories from Mildred Taylor's own family. These were stories she gathered from family get-togethers during her life. In the Author's Note in *The Land*, she explains that the main character, Paul Edward Logan, is actually based on her bi-racial great-grandfather. Dominic, the young man who brought me the book, was also bi-racial. He identified with Paul Edward's journey growing up in a complicated world after the Civil War. If he was this excited about the book, surely I could find other students that would have the same experience. Thus, I created the mid-winter novel study.

Having developed the spring unit on World War Two with the idea of choice in mind, I wanted to develop a similarly based unit on post-Civil War America. This would need to encompass the 1870-1900 time period in US History. So much was happening in the nation and I had to focus on theme more than on the overwhelming content of this time period. We have Reconstruction, a time period of rebuilding, slow simmering racial bigotry, new amendments that would be responses to hatred and the beginnings of the Civil Rights movement. The era of rebuilding meant Westward movement, a time of the transcontinental railroad blasting full steam ahead; a second wave of the Industrial Revolution just in time for the millions of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe to become workers in factories producing goods that would advance America to first place as an industrial giant; and the Homestead Act of 1862. Who could resist 160 acres of land for "free"? All you had to do is sit on it for five years and it was yours! But what was free came at a high cost, not just for the immigrants but also for the original owners - Native Americans. Before the immigrants from Bohemia or Norway or Poland could carve out a hovel to live in, the Native Americans had to be corralled, removed to reservations, and assimilated. The "free" land often turned out to be a nightmare for the newly-arrived families from Europe. Wickedly unpredictable weather, insufficient water supplies, lack of lumber for houses, unbearable loneliness, railroad monopolies manipulating land access and prices for goods sent back to the East, ill health, and lack of success in the promised land killed many and drove an equal number back to bigger cities. But many did stick it out and survived. These immigrants would help feed the world in the upcoming century. Their children and grandchildren would pay the price for poor farming techniques and appalling drought conditions a generation or two later with the Dust Bowl and the Depression. Native Americans were subject to the idea of Phillip H. Sheridan's "the only good Indian is a dead Indian" philosophy subscribed to by the US Cavalry and government, greedy railroad companies, and voracious new immigrants. Geronimo's last reported words to his nephew, "I should have never surrendered. I should have fought until I was the last man alive," echoed the sentiments of three hundred thousand plus Native Americans as they watched their lands being possessed by land hungry immigrants from the cities and Europe.

The books I will utilize in this mid-winter unit will consist of the following choices:

- *The Land* by Mildred Taylor, 2001. Aftermath of the Civil War and Reconstruction for an African American family 1870-1890.
- *My Antonia* by Willa Cather, 1918, revised 1926. Immigrant survival and women's rights in the 1880's-1910.
- *Geronimo* by Joseph Bruchac, 2006. Geronimo's life as told to his adopted grandson, Willie, in 1908.
- *The Children's Blizzard* by David Laskin. A non-fiction book on the 1888 blizzard revealing that the free homestead came with a brutal price.
- *Little Woman Warrior Who Came Home: a story of the Navajo Long Walk* by Evangeline Parsons-Yazzie and illustrated by Irving Toddy, 2005. Written in English and Navajo, this is an account of the

deportation of the Navajo 1864-66. This title will be for my EC Resource students.

## Content Background

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Although the five books seem dissimilar at first glance, they are linked by their ties to the American landscape and the hard-won struggle to keep the land bought or taken by the families featured in them. In the case of *Geronimo*, that chieftain lost his battle to maintain an Apache homeland. All the books I chose reflect the importance of land as a central focus of these people's lives. I also selected the books as an introduction to post-Civil War life in the United States. The books are also connected through their themes of rebirth, gaining a second chance at life and freedom, establishing true citizenship, and paying the penalty for securing or hanging on to a piece of American soil. These issues united some and became hugely divisive for others amongst our population.

*The Land* is the story of a mixed race young man, Paul Edward Logan, who is able to pass as white but is considered African-American. His father is the owner of the plantation that his mother worked on as a former slave. Paul's father also has three children by his white wife, a situation that adds to the story's complexity. Paul eats with them, plays with them, and is educated as his brothers are. This saga is Mildred Taylor's family story. Her great-grandfather leaves Georgia as an angry teenager after the Civil War and moves to Mississippi, where he buys the land that will become so big a part of Taylor's life and the material for her novels. The story's setting is the time period known as Reconstruction, the so-called rebuilding of the South after its defeat in 1865. Paul wants to succeed in this post-war world on his own terms. His life is more difficult than he ever imagined, especially as a man of mixed race in the South. In Mississippi he is accepted neither by whites or blacks. All of Mildred Taylor's books touch on very sensitive racial issues. Some have criticized her use of racist language in her novels, but most agree it is not for drama or effect but rather to reflect the actual sentiment of that era. She writes the events exactly as they occurred. The journey Paul Edward undertakes helps him to find his place in the New South and purchase the land that will become the homestead for the Logan family for generations. Life lessons taught to Paul by his father earlier in the novel come full circle at the end, as he reconciles with him at the conclusion of the story. The very advice his father gives him, "to use his head" and find solutions to problems by himself, allows Paul Edward to buy that land and make it his own. Paul's sacrifices make his family's dreams come true in a time when dreams of "40 acres and a mule" were rarely realized.

Students will start their books before I actually cover Reconstruction. They will read on their own at home, or on their free time before class starts. I usually give five weeks for reading. By the time they have finished the book, I will be well on my way to delving into post-Civil War America and all the changes that resulted. Students will have a good historical frame of reference for their reading. Speaking directly to *The Land* and the Reconstruction era before the turn of the century, I will have given them what they need to fully understand the books. Scenes in *The Land* about the racist Digger Wallace and other KKK characters will be discussed in tandem with the class exchanging ideas about these newly-formed race hate groups and new laws instituted to keep African-Americans from voting.

A whole class project completed earlier in the year on *The Bill of Rights* will be recalled as we look at the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments. Citizenship and voting rights were "guaranteed" with the passage of these amendments in 1868 and 1870 respectively. The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment prevented Congress from making laws to



prevent these equal rights from being realized. The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment did not include women at the time; that would come in 1920. The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment also had sections within it that prevented laws from taking effect which would diminish voting rights for African-Americans. Once Reconstruction ended, so did the "power" of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment. A variety of new laws in the South found their way into the fabric of the act of voting. The literacy test prevented African-Americans and poor whites in the South from voting by instituting little "reading" tests at the polls. Can't read? Can't vote. Oops, you can read a bit? Let me have you interpret this article! African Americans were legally denied the right to have an education in most pre-Civil War southern states. The lack of reading abilities could only be rectified over time. The Freedman's Bureau set up schools throughout the South, only to have many of them burned down or teachers threatened by the night riders in white. Another law was called the "grand pappy" law. This specified that if your grandfather voted in the 1860 election, you could vote. No African-Americans in the South could vote in 1860, hence none in 1870. The last straw was the poll tax. If you wanted to vote you had to pay a tax. This made it difficult for any African-American to vote. Money was hard to come by. Promises of labor were often fulfilled by creating labor camps with guards, as Paul and his friend, Mitchell, experienced. Money would be earned and then taken away for food and a mat to sleep on. Many had to choose between feeding their families or voting. If you did vote, Knights of the White Camellia or KKK paid your home a visit, threatening violence, destruction of farm equipment and animals (making it difficult for you to keep your job), and finally, lynching. Lynching or hanging was not uncommon in the South and continued into the 1960's. It was often used as a threat or done to serve as an example for the rest of the black community. The passage of the 24<sup>th</sup> Amendment end poll taxes, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 legally ended all barriers to voting, but only went into effect 100 years after the Civil War ended. Reconstruction ended in 1876 and left very few people interested in safe guarding the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so voting in many communities in the South fell by the wayside. It was not because of lack of interest, but rather a fear quickly instilled in African-Americans by the old ruling party Democrats of the South.

By the 1890's, a new set of laws governed the South. These Jim Crow laws, (mentioned in *The Land*) were put into place by the Supreme Court case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* 1896. Similar to the Black Codes that followed the Civil War, these Jim Crow laws operated as a separate but equal philosophy. Everything - birth to death, school to church - operated on a separate but equal double standard. It was all supposed to be equal in its separation of the races, but very soon descended into another example of second-class citizenship. Schools, medical facilities, town services, and legal avenues all became divided by color and were inferior, but supposedly "equal," for blacks. Marriage between races was forbidden and not allowed until 1967. These prohibitions affected not just the African-Americans of the South (and in many instances nation-wide) but also other races. A Chinese-American girl in Lum, Mississippi (1927) was denied the right to an education because of her ethnicity. Other ethnic groups including Native Americans, Japanese-Americans (in WW II internment camps), and native Latinos also faced the same set of second class citizenship barriers. *Brown v. Board* (1954) supposedly ended segregation in US schools, but many communities had to be taken back to the Supreme Court once again as late as 1970 (*Swann v. CMS*) in order to "desegregate with all deliberate speed," as the *Brown v. Board* case dictated originally in 1954. My class discusses Charlotte's journey to desegregate in the *Swann v. CMS* case. It took sixteen plus years (after *Brown v Board*) to finally desegregate the schools of Charlotte, North Carolina.

*My Antonia* by Willa Cather was published first in 1918, with the "harsh" ending revised in 1926. The book may be best summarized by the epigraph - "the best days are the first to flee." The universal themes of time, youth, death, and friendship are ever present. The narrator is an adult, Jim Burden. He recalls his childhood through the memories of a friend, Antonia Shimerda, who is a newly-arrived immigrant from Bohemia (present

day Czech). Cather models her character, Jim, on herself. She came from Virginia as a ten year old. Although not orphaned herself, Jim arrives in the barren prairie of the Nebraska Divide after his parents' deaths. The novel is carried out in five sections. Each chapter contains thematic contrasts, such as exploration during a beautiful and idyllic autumn that the children experience in contrast with a bitter winter of death and loss of innocence. As the children grow into adulthood, they gradually lose their innocence. So does the land itself. It becomes productive but eventually fenced in. Not only are the children "tamed," but so is the land. In the love affair between the people and the land they came to conquer, the land conquers them in the end.

The characters are modeled on the people Cather lived amongst herself. Many of the great novels of the time focused on the privileged classes, but Cather featured hard working, earthy immigrant girls who often fell into disgrace. Poverty is the harsh reality of these prairie settlers. They came because of whispered rumors that America's streets were paved with gold and the rivers flowed with milk and honey. European industrialization undermined age old traditions of farming the land. Others, especially Russians came hoping for religious and political freedoms. America offered openness. Immigration policy preferences for northern and western Europe were obvious, but many came from eastern and southern Europe. Laws such as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act squashed non-European immigration very quickly. Although there were many success stories there were thousands more living in dirt or sod hovels through plagues of locusts, unproductive harvests, miserable loneliness that could drive a soul mad, and families split apart by the harshness of the land that could be so life giving. It was not the sort of thing these immigrants wrote home about, so the flow of immigrants continued on for years.

What brought these immigrants to the Great Plains? In 1862, the US Congress passed the Homestead Act. The act gave the head of the household 160 acres for a minimal fee. This is similar to the headright system that Virginia implemented in the mid 1600's. Who could resist this wonderful offer? Included in the onslaught of immigrants were former slaves, single women, and people displaced by the Civil War. They had to live on the land for five years, make some sort of improvement, such as cultivating a farm and building a house of some sort, and the land was theirs. Immigrants only had to have applied for citizenship to take advantage of this deal, but Confederate soldiers could not apply.

Land agents for the railroads traveled to Europe with pamphlets proclaiming the glories of this land for the landless. Railroad companies also sold land around their railroad to the settlers so that these settlers would have access to transportation for their goods. If you were the only railroad in town, you could raise prices as high as you wanted - you had a captive audience. European immigrants felt the Great Plains and free land would offer them an opportunity to escape an oppressive aristocracy; there was no aristocracy in America. But homesteading had a dark side. Native Americans were driven off their land. Games of land fraud became common very quickly. Non-English-speaking families, like the Shimerdas, tried to negotiate with established Americans. Huge companies made applications for many homesteads and one company representative might sign as a "single" homesteader. Huge amounts of acreage would be amassed and large-scale cattle ranches and farms became the norm across the Plains. Settlers soon learned that 160 acres in the old country was a wonder, but in the dry prairies it was not enough. Years of draining water from the deep reserves of the Ogallala Aquifer would create incredible problems in the 1930's as the Dust Bowl encroached. Not all the settlers to the west were good farmers, as Mr. Shimerda finds out. Cather's own father did not do as well as he had planned. Dreams were dashed as the sun beat down on their crops and locusts carried off the rest. More than 60% of the homestead applicants failed to remain on their land for the necessary five years. Eventually the land grants were expanded to 640 acres. The residency qualification was dropped from five to three years. By 1900, over 500,000 homesteading farmers claimed more than 80 million acres of American prairie land.

Last year I read a few selections out loud to my students from David Laskin's *The Children's Blizzard*. Laskin's expertise is in the area of cataclysmic history and weather. I view this non-fiction book as a companion piece to *My Antonia* and also *The Worst Hard Time* by Timothy Egan. Egan's book served as a basis for the PBS special *The Dust Bowl*, produced by Ken Burns. All three books delve into the immigrant experience in the prairies. As I said earlier, a lot of the mistakes made by farmers in the late 1800's had devastating consequences during the Depression. *The Children's Blizzard* recounts the early to mid-January 1888 blizzard that dropped temperatures as much as 50 degrees in a matter of a few hours. The Weather Bureau, such as it was at the time, indicated that a cold wave was heading for the Dakotas, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. This giant Arctic cold front collided with warm, moisture bearing air from the Gulf of Mexico. With this came high winds and very heavy snow. The storm was made even more deadly by its timing: people were at work and children at school. It hit suddenly, giving new meaning to "out of nowhere." A couple of days of unseasonably warm weather sent people into town to shop and enjoy meetings with friends and relatives. Thousands of people were caught in this unexpected storm, including children. The death toll, mostly children, reached 250. Students were trapped at schools, which quickly ran out of fuel. One teacher, Lois Royce, attempted to reach the warmth and safety of her boarding house, only 82 yards away. Visibility was so incredibly poor that three of the smaller children got lost and died. Lois' feet were frostbitten and had to be amputated. Others took shelter in haystacks. Men hitched themselves to multiple ropes in hopes of reaching the schoolhouses and guiding the children back to safety. Songs like "Nebraska's Fearless Maid" were written and recorded about Minnie Freeman, who brought all thirteen of her students to safety in a terror filled half mile journey.

I believe this book continues to illustrate the dangers of living on this "free" land. We have the benefit of hindsight today and can say maybe this land should not have been settled so carelessly. Water to run the acreage was in short supply, and it took deep digging to access the great water aquifers. Lumber was scarce, which meant housing could be nothing more than an earthen or sod house, whose residents became known by the derogatory name of "soddies" in town. People could smell you coming! Earth that, during the days of the Great Plains tribes, had been guarded by grasses with 36-inch long earth-grabbing roots and sunflowers were haphazardly ripped up to make room for corn and wheat. These shallow-rooted crops, when rain became scarce, would dry out and blow away, taking not just the money-making crop but also the life-giving earth with it. Red Oklahoma soil ending up in London in 1935 was not unusual at all. The prairie grasses with their claw-like roots anchored the soil, kept it attached to the ground itself. In a matter of a few decades these settlers destroyed an intricate and complex ecosystem. The locusts, the droughts, and the freezing temperature just added insult to injury for these settlers. Cities, with a myriad of dangers, offered some sort of protection from the elements. This new frontier did not.

The last two books are *Geronimo* by Joseph Bruchac and *Little Woman Warrior Who Came Home* by Evangeline Parsons-Yazzie and illustrated by Toddy Irving. I was introduced to the Yazzie children's book by my fellow in the seminar, LeAndrea James, a Diné (Navajo) Language Arts teacher. As with the other books, I believe it is important to give my students choices and to make those choices in books written by authors who have a personal connection to the culture they are writing about. Author Joseph Bruchac's heritage is Abenaki (Algonquian language family from Northeastern US and Quebec) and I felt he could speak to the children through his experiences as a Native American. My YNI colleague, LeAndrea James teaches reading to her Navajo students. Very few Native American cultures throughout both North and South America had a written language before Columbus arrived; the Aztecs were one of those groups. The Cherokee created a written language after the arrival of white settlers. The Navajos' journey to a written language took place much later in their history, shortly after the advent of World War Two. So, while she teaches reading in English, she also teaches her students to translate text into Navajo.



Both books handle the story of loss of land and culture in the mid to last days of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Navajo story is called the Long Walk and echoes a similar walk taken by the Cherokee in the late 1830's, called the Trail of Tears. The Navajo were deported and attempts at ethnic cleansing were made starting in 1864. The book focuses on Džánibaa and her family's tale of survival. Much like the Cherokee 25 years earlier, 9,000 Navajo were rounded up at gunpoint from their homelands in eastern Arizona and forced in January to walk over 450 miles in 18 days. Their journey ended at Bosque Redondo. Over 200 died on the journey. Their destination was an area that contained about 40 square miles. It was cold in winter, burning hot in the summer. Mescalero Apache (long time rivals) already had been moved there, there was a lack of water and firewood, and infestations like army worms devastated what little food they had. Džánibaa's journey gives her a profound sense of herself as a Navajo woman and of the culture she struggles so hard to keep. In 1868, after many failures and overspending on a losing idea, the experiment was finally abandoned. Union General W.T. Sherman, creator of an American version of total war and the long march to the sea over Confederate territory, signed the Treaty of Bosque Redondo, which allowed the Diné (Navajo) to now return to their homelands. This was about 3.5 million acres held within their four sacred mountains. Unlike many other tribes across the West, the Diné were able to increase their reservation to 16 million acres. The Long Walk also made the Diné a more cohesive group, something unintended but definitely important for their future survival. This book is written for second graders. I think I will probably use it for the majority of my little resource group, based on what my EC liaison has shared with me in regards to their reading abilities. Last year the teaching assistant that travels with them took 10 minutes a day and read the book to them at the end of their Language Arts self-contained class. We will work on activities for them and I will probably put them into groups of four each. I will also use the book with my other students when discussing Native American culture during the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The fact that the book is also written in Navajo (above the English paragraphs) will be interesting for many of my students to further delve into.

The last book is *Geronimo* by Joseph Bruchac. The book recounts the life of Geronimo after his capture in 1886 and his journey as a captive through Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Florida, and finally to Ft. Sill in Oklahoma. At one time, 5,000 American soldiers chased Geronimo through the Southwest landscape. The story is told through the eyes of his adopted grandson, Little Foot. The Apaches had long been thought of as the most brutish, terrifying, and semi-human of all the North American tribes. They were amongst the last to surrender to the US Army. Perhaps the fact that the women were responsible for constructing and maintaining the wickiups, native homes, gave White Eyes (Americans) a bit of a disconcerting chill! Like many of their brethren, the Apache held a mystical and religious view of the land they were given to care for. They were a loose grouping of tribes who came together in the end to fight off white encroachment upon their land. For a short while they even worked with the US Army against their common enemy, the Mexican Army. The Mexicans had been responsible for massacring Geronimo's mother, first wife (he had at least eight), and first three children. He is said to have undergone a rebirth after this event. At the end of his life, Geronimo said that he regretted his surrender. Perhaps, as he watched the assimilation of his people, he had a change of heart. Geronimo had over twenty years of captivity to watch the slow Americanization of many of his people, especially the children.

The author begins each chapter with little fragments of newspaper articles, biographies, and interviews, which seem to "anchor the book in a more emotional first person narrative within a bigger picture." Bruchac shows Geronimo as shrewd capitalist, media star, brilliant storyteller, and fierce soldier. Sad is the recounting of how some of the Apaches hoped to align themselves with the Americans in order to help the Americans capture Geronimo, only to be stripped of their weapons and dumped in the same surrender train with Geronimo.

Two photos that have always stunned me come from the Library of Congress. They are a before and after of

Geronimo's tribe. One shows the young teens in their tribal dress while the other sepia-tone photo is of the same group, now assimilated/Americanized and civilized. Their hair is cut and styled to look like that of little Jim Burden from *My Antonia*, and they wear suits and drab uniforms more suited to a big city private school. Various education programs were started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to "re-educate" Native American children to the white ways. Children were removed from their native homes and tribal influences and sent away to government-run boarding schools. The goal was to make these children productive and patriotic American citizens. Only English was spoken, native names disregarded for new American names, and military-like schedules were instituted. Farming was hailed as the great occupation to be taken up when they were returned to their native lands in late teenage years. This education was mandatory. Complaints about the costs and poor teaching practices ended the program in the mid-1920s, but the damage had been done. Young adults were returned home with American ways and no knowledge of how to even speak their old native languages. In this way, many Native American languages were lost by the 1920's. There was no one the elders could charge with keeping the language alive.

For Geronimo's people, things improved a little. In 1912, 183 Apache returned not to Arizona but to the dwindling population of the Mescalero Reservation in New Mexico. They had to pay for their voyage back "home." They sold their 6,000 head of cattle to pay for the journey. They were allowed to bring their horses but not the great spotted dogs that had been part of their ancestors' lives for generations and had served as pack animals before the discovery of the Conquistadors' horses. Once the train stopped in New Mexico, the doors opened, and out bounced their beloved dogs and three parrots! Not all rules were meant to be followed, after all. In Arizona, the old homeland of the Apache, it is said the mountains, pinon- trees, wild turkeys, and coyotes still wait for Geronimo to return.

I hope that students will question what they read, think about what the author of their book wants to take away from this reading, and compare and contrast these readings with primary sources. Asking questions about what they read for this unit will require a careful examination of the writer's thoughts and claims, as well as the quality of the writer's supporting evidence. What might be missing? What might not be inferable in their reading once they compare it to other sources and class discussion?

## Strategies

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In mid-December I will set all the books out on the center table in my room for students to browse through. I tell them the story of how one of the books was assigned to me by a former student. I like to give advance descriptions of the books in great detail so as to give them an idea of content, difficulty level, author's comments and ideas, reviews of the book by former students, and some internet searches that might add additional information that could assist them in choosing a book. I do give them a basic idea of the types of projects they might endeavor to produce in February. Emails will have been sent home with particulars about each book. I like parents to see what's going on before the big assignment. I encourage the purchase of used books through various sources and also ask parents for donations of books to give to students who may not have the money for a purchase. This has been quite successful in previous years. I also expect to apply for a grant through [donorschoose.org](http://donorschoose.org). This charity is a way for people to donate directly to a specific project at a public school. I am going to ask for ten copies of each book in September. Projects like this in the past have been funded within six to eight weeks. Students who cannot afford a copy can come to me privately and check one out. I expect a purchase or check out from local libraries to have been made by the time students return

from the holiday break. The goal is to start reading after the first of the year and finish the book by the second week of February.

I do not want everyone in the class to read the same book. I can usually get even unmotivated kids to actually work on this because they remember the activities that we did with *My Brother Sam is Dead*; group work and class discussions mean everyone is learning and having fun. Each book will be accompanied by the same type of activities. My goal is to have about a quarter of each class reading a particular book. That sets up the lesson for more diversity. If seven or eight kids in a class are reading the same book, that will allow them to share within one or two small groups, and there won't be any loners. They will have support in doing activities, and sharing may bring about some more creative projects. My EMH resource students will all be in the same class, so that size group will work well for them, too.

There are some activities that my students will have done in the previous months that will help build or scaffold into their reading activities for this unit. The stereotype and prejudice lessons that I do the first week of school when I begin Native Americans will have been utilized several times as I add new immigrants to the mix, starting with Colonial settlement in 1607. There is familiarity with this, and they can answer some of the questions as they read. Answers are placed into their interactive notebooks. Students will be familiar with the SOAPSTONE model. This also will have been covered since week two as we do a lot of primary sources. This is:

- S = Subject of the piece
- O= Occasion, time, place, setting
- A=Audience, who is this directed to
- P=Purpose, why was this piece written, painted, etc.
- S=Speaker, who's voice is telling the story
- TONE=Attitude or emotional characteristics of the piece

AP (Advanced Placement) classes in high school use this a lot and many middle schools adopted this practice several years ago in order to familiarize kids with this early so that there are no surprises for them in high school. There are also several more writing components to this Document Based Question format that help with the interpretation piece. It is a great asset for the kids to have this foundation when evaluating and interpreting primary sources. For this unit, combining the novel with primary sources, and verifiable facts should bring about a well-rounded decision when assessing the historical accuracy of the novel. The writing pieces in this AP-DBQ element are also a part of the Common Core and Essential Standards in North Carolina.

How do I check that my students are actually reading their book? I am in the process of looking at each book again and determining what I think should be completed each week. I absolutely do take into consideration the reading levels of the kids, whether they are readers or not, and other assignments ongoing in my class and others. There will be little reading done during my class time. I am not saying "none," but this is not their Language Arts class, where they might be able to read for a set thirty minutes. They should not plan on reading on a daily basis in my class. They have home, before class, and lunch. I will assign particular chapters or pages of approximately equal length for each book. Synthesis and interpretation questions will be done at least once a week. Fellows in this seminar shared some wonderful tools to do just that. E. M. Miller from Chicago uses a Responding in Writing sheet that asks what the piece says, what it means, and why it matters. Jeff Weathers from Daly City utilizes OAT's: Observations (perceptions of sound, sight etc.), Associations (memories triggered), and Theories (what is discovered when combining O and A). Another activity I liked was the diamond fold from fellow Andrea Kulas. The folding process creates a diamond in the center of the paper with four triangles off to the sides. The diamond is synthesis and the four triangles could serve as vocabulary

(written and illustrated), compare/contrast with actual historical events, personal connections, or solutions to problems that the characters encounter. Another interpretation tool I want to use is the PAPA Square. It is similar to a SOAPSTONE activity but in a slightly different format. These all offer me multiple ways to get to the heart of the text, characters, events, and author's opinions and purpose. There are also some additional tools I have used in the past to develop critical reading skills that I will utilize. A fellow teacher gave me some links from the ESC Online Writing Center that contain questions relating to the authority of the writer, author's perspective, logic of the writer's argument, ways in which the writer gets your interest, writer's use of language and style, and ideology that informs text. There are also several good items to pull from this site when checking for actual reading, understanding, and interpretation.

I will have some weak readers in my classes. A recent introduction to my repertoire of tools is the book *When Kids Can't Read* by Kyleene Beers. My team Language Arts teacher responded to me when I mentioned the book, "Haven't I told you about that before?" This is another positive in working collaboratively with others on my team. Although I will be getting the reading scores from my LA teacher early on in the year, teachers from the previous grade level will have met with us to give us a sort of heads up about kids who have reading or math issues. I might encourage a student to read a book at a lower Lexile reading level if I have this information ahead of time. The book will also guide me with specifics when I do come across a struggling reader. I hold before-school tutoring and working lunches every day for kids to work or catch up on stuff. This would be a perfect time for one or two students having issues to come to me, away from their peers and possible embarrassment.

Students keep an interactive notebook with them at all times. Their work is recorded in the table of contents, taped in after grading, used when studying for tests, and also for quarterly reflections. There is a section towards the back that is reserved just for novel study units. Notes, small one-dimensional projects, video reflections, and propaganda (what really happened v. what is presented) all go in this notebook.

The strategies and activities I will use in this unit will help me achieve my goal. I will increase their personal knowledge of a particular historical time period while also answering the questions and addressing issues which deal with citizenship or lack of true citizenship, sacrifices made by all parties involved who wanted land, and why studying history really matters.

## Activities

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This unit will take five weeks for individual reading away from school, three weeks for coverage of historical material and checking for reading, and then an additional two weeks for students completing projects at home.

Pre-Activity: This is done at the start of the school year. I am listing this because students will have completed these several times already and these activities scaffold into the ensuing activities that I will do with this new unit. As they do this throughout the year I can smoothly transition into new material without having to explain it again. Some of the activities done earlier in the year come from Teaching Tolerance. The activities I do include a reading of "Sure You Can Ask Me A Personal Question" by Diane Burns.

- Take a quiz on facts and attitudes about Native Americans from [pbs.org/weshallremain/libraries](https://pbs.org/weshallremain/libraries) that was designed for the PBS series *We Shall Remain*. Examine editorial cartoons from the "Using Editorial

Cartoons to Teach Social Justice" lessons <http://www.tolerance.org> that detail strategies in teaching editorial cartoons: What do you see in the images, what does the text say, what events from past or present are within the picture, and what is the artist trying to say?

- I also use their lesson at this time on hate, racism, and FRAME (facts, reflection, assumptions, maintain open mind, expand your experiences). We do a lot of these same activities within the context our chosen historical era many times. What the students are comfortable with, having done it before, allows me to move on more efficiently. I will also utilize the OATs, responding to writing, SOAPSTONE, and diamond analysis fold from August on. There would be no surprises when they have to do it in the activities listed below.

Activity one: ½ hour needed. Supplies: A copy of the five books being read, eBook web addresses for Kindle/Nook users, web addresses for used books, new book prices, donation box, student reviews from the one class who read *The Land* last year, reviews from *New York Times*, goodreads.com, and Scholastic Books.

- I will introduce the books, talk about content, main characters, discuss Lexile reading levels, give them ways to buy the book, solicit donations of books for kids who won't be able to get a book or check one out at the library, and let them see student and news reviews. They will ask me questions while this is going on and I will also hold a whole class question and answer period. Emails discussing the assignment will be sent home that day so parents and students can talk about the choices.

Activity two: 10 minutes – 20 minutes every Tuesday for the next five to six weeks. Supplies: Their book, interactive notebook (for storage of papers) and alternating KWL, diamond analysis fold, responding in writing sheet, and OATS sheet.

- Each Tuesday (not Friday because things tend to pile up with tests in other classes) students will answer questions that I have chosen in regards to each book. The first time we start the activity with a KWL as to what they know about their particular time period historically. They can fill these in throughout the book study period. K=Know, W=Want, L=Learned. So, what they already know, what they want to learn, and what they ultimately learned.
- The other forms will be used to check on reading as students progress. For instance, what do the laws mentioned in *The Land* or *Children's Blizzard* mean? What is said about the Jim Crow Laws or the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment in *The Land*? In *The Children's Blizzard*, the author mentions the Homestead Act. What does that mean for the immigrants and why does it matter? The diamond analysis could be used for descriptions of the major characters in all the books with the center diamond being reserved for how the traits of the characters compare/contrast or overlap. OATS would be perfect for observations on the particular region that is the key character in each book. The sight, the smell, the feel, and the taste (food from the land) of the land can all be described. All the major characters have an attachment to the land. How do the kids translate this? The visual, smell, taste, and hearing of O and A combined trigger memories. What can the students discover from these? I would like to alternate the forms not only each week but in different classes on the same day. I have a system for checking to see that they did their reading before too much sharing might occur. Forms will be stored in the novel section of their interactive notebooks.

Activity three: 15 minutes a week every week for the next five to six weeks on a Wednesday. Supplies needed: Interactive notebooks, novels, and forms they worked on during the previous class.



- I will put kids in groups of like-books. They will elect a reporter each time they do this so as to spread around the opportunity for sharing with the class. After a short compare and contrast discussion, the reporter will share with the other groups in a whole class discussion. A good reporter needs to remind the rest of the class what their book is about so as to alleviate confusion between the five different books being read.

Activity four: five minutes every day. Supplies needed: Political cartoons and primary source drawing, photos, and paintings 1865-1900 along with the SOAPSTONE and Library of Congress rubrics.

- I will utilize these as warm-ups. The cartoons and primary source drawings will be taken from the vast collection of *Harper's Weekly* (especially those of Thomas Nast), Library of Congress Political Cartoon Collection 1865-1900, and the National Archives Political Cartoon Collection. There are thousands! Every subject is touched upon - nothing is held sacred. I will switch out and put in some letters, journal entries, shipping bills of lading for immigrants, etc. Some are disturbing but my students have been looking at these since the second week of school. The idea is to look at everything about US History, not just the pretty parts. SOAPSTONE and Library of Congress both have worksheets that engage students with political cartoons and primary sources. I would have students put the blank forms in their notebook - saving paper - and then just answer the questions about each cartoon or photo/illustration in their notebook. Sample primary source sheets are also posted on large boards in my room. Here are some of the examples I am going to use:
- *The Land* - Political cartoon "One Vote Less" Richmond Whig ([www.learnnc.org/onevoteless](http://www.learnnc.org/onevoteless)) and "Worse Than Slavery" Thomas Nast from *Harper's Weekly*
- *Geronimo*- Before and after photos of the Apache, before and after assimilation, "Educating the Indians" front cover *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* Library of Congress, "School Begins" political cartoon Library of Congress
- *The Children's Blizzard* Illustration for "Thirteen Were Saved" Song and Chorus published by Lyon Healy, Chicago
- *My Antonia* Homestead Act of 1862, Freeman's Homestead Application, Proof of Improvements, and Certificate of Eligibility from the National Archives, photo of the Central Pacific Train 1880's National Archives, History of the American West Photographs from the Denver Public Library

Activity five: Five minutes several times a week. Supplies needed: Same cartoons and primary sources used in the previous lessons and a choice of the authority of the writer, logic of writer's argument, and ways in which the writer gets your interest worksheets. I can switch these up as I go. I now want to take these same items used in the previous lesson (and any other primary source pieces) and have the students interpret the authority and logic of the author/illustrator. With drawings and political cartoons an excellent worksheet is the way in which the writer gets a person's interest.

- How does the writer/illustrator get the student to identify with him? Give examples
- Does the writer/illustrator assume that you have particular interests or maybe values?
- What does the writer want you to believe? And what supporting evidence does the author provide?
- What information do you have about the writer? Is he/she knowledgeable? Why/why not?
- What biases might be present?

These questions can be asked of any of the written, photographic, or illustrated materials used in the class. I will have students work with shoulder buddies once or twice a week. One week it is the person to the right of you, next to the left of you, etc. Change it up before they get too comfortable.

Activity six: Three weeks Supplies: Videos (*Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman, My Antonia, Geronimo, We Shall Remain* series), lecture/discussion materials on Reconstruction, Movement West, second wave of the Industrial Revolution, and Native American displacement, paper, online text Discovery Education, color pencils.

- We will watch only bits and pieces of the videos as we discuss this time period and the immense changes taking place. Our school system is in the process of purchasing the online text through Discovery Education. There are many resources, lesson plans, questions, quizzes, and activities that can be utilized by the students. Students will also be constructing a foldable booklet illustrating various new vocabulary words found in this unit.

Activity seven: Two weeks Supplies needed: Project rubrics. These will be started in the classroom with groups meeting about project choices. About 95% will be done at home. Some students will want to partner with another to work on a project. They will meet with me individually or as group to discuss their potential choice. I am interested in what resources they want to use and whether or not they are "dreaming too big or not enough." Some students go overboard and then get overwhelmed. Others will do the bare minimum. I know them well by now and will try to coach them in the right direction. Here are the project choices:

- Life size character paper dolls with character traits and personality illustrated onto the doll. Some students may choose to do a change of clothes for their doll in order to illustrate changes in the main character as the book progresses.
- Interactive videos with scenes from the book. Students have done split screen in the past and answer questions from the audience (only a few allowed) and then the answer is chosen and the video played according to the question choice. A regular recreation of a scene(s) is most typically done. This can be a group of two to five.
- Acting out in a skit the goals, dreams, motives behind a particular character(s).
- Historic personification through an inanimate object in the book.
- Creating and illustrating a comic book about the novel.
- Creating a soundtrack for the novel using music from that time period. They would have to do modern renditions of the songs or music, which can be done.
- Create a newspaper with all the characters and events in the paper. Ads, editorials etc would be in this newspaper.
- Re-write the story for a second grader and illustrate it. Computer generated on illustrations are ok
- EMH resource students will do a little foldable book called a snail. It has sixteen tiny panels that can be illustrated with the characters and events.

## Appendix - Implementing District Standards

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- 8 H 2: I use this to explain the impact of economic, political, social and military conflicts within the United States. I am coming out of the Civil War into Reconstruction, so this would cover citizenship and immigration laws.

- 8 H 3: I use this to explain how migration and immigration contributed to the development of the nation, especially with westward movement and Native American assimilation. How does this migration affect the

landscape? What is the place of big business (i.e. railroad monopolies) in motivating settlement of the West? This also covers how various groups have impacted the economic and social climate of the nation.

- 8 C & G 2.3 This applies to the democratic ideals that shaped the government and nation as a whole. I am examining how the *Constitution* is not being applied even-handedly across the board. Reconstruction creates new amendments but there is little in place to guarantee that those rights are implemented and kept in place for all citizens. Students are examining the impact of human and civil rights in the South during and after Reconstructions, in the West with immigrants and displaced Native Americans.

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Erdrich, Louise. *The Plague of Doves*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008. Again, another book more suited to read for 9<sup>th</sup> grade. A brutal story of murder on a North Dakota farm, wrongful accusations against the Ojibwe, and generations of suffering. Also by a Native American author.

"SOAPSTONE Worksheet." SOAPSTONEteachersites.schoolworld.com/.../files/Alicia

This really helps to put primary sources into perspective. Great worksheet.

The Southern Poverty Law Center and its' educational offshoot, Teaching Tolerance. Lesson plans that help students come face to face with all sorts of racism and stereotypes. They will send you a myriad of free educational materials if you sign up. All are high quality. They include lesson plans, worksheet, DVDs, and magazines.

*The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. DVD. Directed by Bob Christiansen. Classic Media, Inc. 2005. Actually produced in the early '70's. A 100 plus year old former slave recounts her journey from 1863 to 1963 in the Deep South.

The National Archives and the Library of Congress offer tremendous lesson plans and activities for any era of history. Wonderful primary source documents.

*Harper's Weekly Magazine*. Just click on images and you will find thousands of political cartoons from the mid 1800's to 1916. Much like Britain's *Punch*. Amazing source for Thomas Nast political cartoons. Thought provoking.

## Notes

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