



Defining Culture through the Lens of Literature and Text in Kindergarten

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Introduction

In American culture tales of the Wild West are almost mythic in stature. There is lawlessness, chaos, a promise of great riches, and a rooting tooting good time. That's a lot like teaching kindergarten. Lawlessness: many kids come in without a framework for how to behave in a group, much less a school. It takes a little time and a lot of work from the sheriff (I mean teacher) to set things right. Chaos: I imagine that kindergarten is very much like a cattle drive. Members of the herd keep trying to drift off in at least nineteen directions at once. You've got to keep your lasso close at hand to wrangle them back together. Great riches: I'm not talking gold here; I'm talking ideas. Kindergarteners are amazingly open to sharing their ideas. This gives me, as a teacher, a rare and wonderful view of connections being formed within their minds. Finally, a rooting tooting good time: just as the west was a great frontier, so too can kindergarten be a frontier. It is like a frontier on multiple levels. To the students a new class is a new land full of strange and wonderful people and things. To the educator the students are unknown, with vast potential to discover. Teaching kindergarten is exhausting work but the students' growth, the freedom for creativity, and the just plain fun that kindergarten allows makes it all worthwhile.

I work at Kathleen Wilbur Elementary School in Bear, Delaware. Wilbur is a K-5 public school of almost 1,200 students. The school draws from a fairly wide stretch of geography in the Colonial School District. Our 1,200 come from a variety of social and economic backgrounds. This naturally makes the pool of common background knowledge relatively shallow and I will be spending a fair amount of time developing background knowledge for lessons in this unit. I am a kindergarten teacher at Wilbur, though in the past I have also taught third and fourth grade as well. Wilbur has nine kindergarten classes and our class sizes fluctuate between 16 and 22 students. My class last year consisted of 19 students, 10 female and 9 male. Of that class, I had a student who received support for speech, students who received services as English Language Learners (ELL) and one child who needed extra support for behavioral issues. I anticipate a similar class make-up this year.

When I saw the description for Jessica Brantley's Literature and Information seminar, I felt it would be a fantastic fit for my kindergarten curriculum. The seminar focuses on including both literary text and nonfiction text in the teaching of reading. Indeed we blurred the lines between the two. We examined nonfiction text that was written with narrative traits such as figurative language. We also dissected literature that was rich

with history and we could pull from it facts and information about a topic. Seminar leader Brantley wrote “the kinds of skills required to read are not divisible into neat categories”. This is perfect for kindergarten because five and six year olds do not have any concept of these different categories. In fact, one of our jobs in kindergarten is to begin developing an awareness of different types of text for our students. But, much as we did in seminar, so too in kindergarten can we blur these lines we draw. The focus in my class will be to have the students identify fiction and nonfiction through their particular mechanics (narrative elements in fiction, table of contents and charts in nonfiction) while twining both types together to teach a concept. This approach will allow me to divide the reading materials into categories without dividing the “skills required to read”. So it’s time for me to saddle up, and begin blurring some lines, building some connections, and developing a unit that’ll have more kick than a sarsaparilla.

Rationale

Prior to the organizational session for Literature and Information, the seminar read *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* by Anne Fadiman. This book largely focuses on the disconnection between the Hmong and American medical cultures. Initially, this book was very difficult for me to link to the teaching of kindergarten. However, I was struck by the sense of culture in the narrative, and began to focus on the idea of culture.

Culture is abstract and difficult to explain to a kindergartener. It is also easy to spot when a culture is different from your own. A student might notice that someone is wearing something that doesn’t match their own clothes. They may not recognize an item that someone is eating. These differences can be used to highlight the concept of culture. Why is culture important to kindergarteners? It is important because many different cultures dovetail in my class. Just as multiple cultures come together to form a community in a neighborhood, so to do they combine to make my class. My students are learning to function as a school community.

The concept of community flows through most everything that we do in kindergarten social studies. For example, Delaware Geography Standard K.G3a requires that *students will be able to identify types of human settlement, connections between settlements, and the types of activities found in each*. This geography standard is addressing community. When the standard refers to “activities found in each” it could be focusing on elements of culture. One way we differentiate between human settlements is to examine what makes them different from one another. When cultures do not align it is easy to see. This is a way to contrast communities.

Many of my students have never left Delaware. Some have never left their home town. They have a rudimentary concept of what their community is like, but no idea that other communities are much different from their own. They cannot envision different communities for they have never experienced that difference. Culture is an easy way to get children to see a different way of life and therefore see differences in their own and other communities as well.

This brings me back to the idea of culture and the book by Anne Fadiman. I had no knowledge of the Hmong culture and only an outsider’s view of the medical culture. Yet after reading and experiencing *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, I felt a familiarity with both the Hmong and medical cultural viewpoints. I thought to myself that it would be a wonderful way to explore community with my students, if we were to focus on cultures that were different from the one we experience every day in and around Wilbur Elementary.

I will focus on the study of Chinese and Mexican cultures. The reason I selected these particular cultures is that my students will likely have some familiarity with them, but will not know them well. Another reason that I chose to explore Chinese and Mexican culture is the availability of children's books that would be beneficial for my unit. When I teach culture I introduce it to the children as a "recipe." To explore a new "recipe" they will need to look at the different "ingredients." I use this analogy because children will be familiar with the concept of a recipe. They have likely helped their parents prepare some sort of food and recognize that different ingredients go together to make the recipe. The "ingredients" that I choose to focus on are the clothing, music, food, language, and celebrations of the culture. These are relatively easy for the kindergarteners to understand as they experience these "ingredients" in their own culture regularly. I also selected these "ingredients" because they are easy for kindergartners to see and hear. Whether we are reading about the Spring Festival, the Day of the Dead, or Thanksgiving, the students will relate to eating special foods with the people they love. For example, on Thanksgiving we may eat pumpkin pie but on the Day of the Dead Mexican children may eat candy skulls. The bulk of our readings and our lessons will center on these special aspects of culture that are unique to Chinese and Mexican cultures.

I believe through the reading and sharing of quality literature and nonfiction texts written for children, the students will be able to "see" and "feel" other cultures. I have written how children can recognize differences in cultures. They will also find similarities between cultures through making connections. Children can easily connect to the Day of the Dead because it is like Thanksgiving in many respects. Both celebrations focus on family and friends. The connection will tie the concept of Thanksgiving to the concept of Day of the Dead and the children will use that link to remember details about the new concept.

Through this sharing of reading, I will guide the children to develop our own class definition of culture. This can be done by comparing and contrasting the "ingredients" of different cultures. Just as one can describe a recipe by focusing on ingredients, we can define a culture by sharing a similar focus.

The final pieces in the process will be to involve the class in telling stories about these foreign cultures. They will also incorporate details pertaining to the cultures from the stories we read together in a story of their own. This process will strengthen student skills in the areas of social studies, reading, and writing. As we do-si-do through this unit amazing learning is taking place. Yee Haw!

To prepare myself for the teaching of this unit I knew that I would need to strengthen my own understanding of Chinese and Mexican culture. To learn more about the cultures I decided to mirror the journey my students will soon be undertaking. I have chosen novels and informative texts about both cultures to read. Obviously they are books for adults, but I found my research to be instructive. I now have clearer background knowledge of the cultures. While I am certain that some student will bring up some detail I am unprepared for (they always do), I feel much more comfortable going into this unit. Because of mirroring the kids' experience (both in seminar and on my own), I am confident that this twining of fiction and nonfiction can help my students gain knowledge of other cultures and deepen their understanding of their own.

Content

Culture

Culture can be a touchy subject to teach. My class will develop a list of “ingredients” that make up Chinese and Mexican cultures. There are some things to keep in mind when generating our list. China and Mexico are huge nations. Within each nation there are different regions. Each region has unique attributes. This diversity is reflected in regional cultures. With a nation such as China, there are many different cultures. Even within a community, differences exist between individuals. If I were doing a web on culture in America, I could include hamburgers. To generalize that all Americans like hamburgers is a stereotype. It is false. The kids will understand this idea but they will need reminders of this fact as we add “ingredients” to our list.

Chinese Culture

Background knowledge for the class

One of my early steps in preparing for the unit was exploring my class library to see what books I already had that could help me teach the unit. I examined literature and nonfiction written for children to find the mechanisms for delivering knowledge of Chinese culture. I found many valuable sources. Because my students are very young, most of these sources are picture books. Picture books are a great choice because students will pick detail out of not only the text but also from the rich artwork and photos on the pages. Pictures help make abstract ideas more concrete for the kids. Through the books listed in the bibliography of my unit the students will see and hear of Chinese food, clothing, songs, traditions, language, and holidays. With some guidance, I can also expect my students to gain an appreciation of some Chinese customs such as the respect for elders as well as their devotion to ancestors who no longer walk among them. For a better idea of what you may find in my chosen collection of picture books look to the annotation in the bibliography.

I will also be using the novel *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson* by Bette Bao Lord. This novel was the first resource that came to mind when I settled on Chinese culture. I can remember reading the story and really picturing the differences between my world and the world of the tale. I recall the extended family all living together in China in the first chapter. This was not how my family worked. This point had me considering how it would feel to live in an arrangement like that. When a reader connects to the story in that way, it is a sign of engagement with the words. This is a novel more typically associated with fourth or fifth grade curriculum. However, in the past I have used similarly leveled texts with my students and found them able to digest the content with some help. Just as I can take an off-level resource and adapt it to my needs in kindergarten, other grade levels can take the process through which I am guiding my students and adapt it to deliver their content. Bette Bao Lord’s novel follows a young Chinese girl, Shirley Temple Wong, who leaves her native China and immigrates to New York City to be with her father in 1955. Much Chinese culture can be drawn from this story. For some ideas of what can be found in the story refer to the annotated bibliography of this unit. As it is a challenging story, I will feel out the class as to whether we should focus on portions of or the entire text. I will definitely read chapter one, as the chapter is set in China.

I will be further able to expose the children to Chinese culture through the use of the Internet. Chinese music (both traditional and modern), video clips of parades, dances, clothing, and architecture are only a search away. Readily available online there are many examples of Chinese New Year’s celebrations featuring

acrobats, lions, and paper dragons. You can also share footage of Chinese architecture and clothing.

Background knowledge for myself

Prior to beginning my work on this unit my knowledge of China might have been summed up as: it's really big; it has a lot of people that are usually shorter than me; eggrolls are good; I think Bruce Lee has something to do with it; and they have pandas. While none of that is incorrect, it is insufficient if one intends to teach about Chinese culture.

To better prepare for the teaching of this unit, I chose to read a combination of literature and nonfiction text. Through both types of reading my background knowledge was increased. I grew in my knowledge of this culture and made many discoveries.

Chinese culture is similar to American culture in two main ways. Both cultures are rooted in their national story (granted China's story is a much longer tale). Both cultures include glorious and inglorious aspects.

Adeline Yeh Mah writes "Girls were a cheap commodity in China."¹ The word commodity suggests that the girls were property. Much as the word commodity could be used to describe the slaves in America's shameful past, so too can it be applied to the girls of China's history. As recently as the 1930's "women in China were expected to sublimate their own desires to the common good of the family."² This common good of the family would often take the form of an advantageous arranged marriage. Couples would be promised to each other without their voices being heard, frequently when they were children. Then, "the marriage system became the severe bondage of women."³ After marriage the woman became the property of the man and was more or less his slave. The woman's family did not see this enslavement as a problem. This old Chinese saying demonstrates this viewpoint, "a married daughter is like the water that is thrown out of doors"⁴. While this information is not going to be directly taught to the kindergarten students, it can be seen (in a gentler form) in the treatment of Shirley Temple Wong's mother by her father.

In China, family is exceedingly important. Elder relatives are viewed with enormous respect. Family is important to the point that Chinese names are written surname first followed by the personal name. This identifies a person's family before the individual is named. This is because in China the family is of greater importance than the individual. The concept of *face* is tied to a person's honor. As the person is first identified by a family name, *face* also impacts a family's honor. Nothing is of more importance than *saving face* in Chinese culture. For an individual, *losing face* would cause the entire family name dishonor. "Losing face is the ultimate disgrace."⁵ Great respect for elders coupled with a fear of a younger family member *losing face* for the entire family makes for an interesting power dynamic. The elders of a family can and do make decisions for young clan members, even adults. The questions of whom to marry, where to live, and which job to take, could all be decided by an elder of the family. This respect of elders in Chinese culture will be evident in several resources but none so clearly as Bette Bao Lord's work.

The art, food, and customs of China are impressive and have spread throughout the world: Bruce Lee is an artist. The name is evocative of physical punishment and domination. Bruce Lee studied and became a teacher of martial arts. In China Wu Shu (martial arts) is considered an art form much like painting or sculpture. In her text on Chinese culture and customs Chai writes "The true goal of Wu Shu is not to beat up somebody, but to attain spiritual enlightenment for oneself through the strict physical and mental discipline

that Wu Shu requires.”⁶ Bruce and others like him through film have enabled Wu Shu to go worldwide. I have chosen to mention Mr. Lee and Wu Shu even though they are not directly related to any of the books that I intend to use in class. Martial Arts could be a strong connection to China for some students. I most always have at least a student or two in class who are attending martial arts classes in the community. It would be engaging for the students to share a few video clips of Wu Shu as part of our exploration of Chinese culture.

Traditional Chinese food has spread beyond the borders of China. Like America, China is a vast nation with communities that are as diverse as the geographical regions they occupy. Such regional diversity causes cultural diversity. This variety extends to the food. In the northern region noodles are a major component of dishes. In the south the noodles are often replaced with rice. The bold diner may sample fare from the Sichuan province, which feature spice and heat. Whatever the form, Chinese food is easily recognizable. It is also very prevalent in several of my resources.

Language and music are components of culture. Several of my classroom resources include Chinese words and phrases. Reading these Chinese terms will not only be a valuable exercise in using context to understand an unfamiliar word, but it also demonstrates this aspect of culture. Music will also feel very different to the students as the lyrics are in a foreign language. They will hear it as different. The choices of musical instruments can also make the sound of the music unfamiliar. Though we will not find the music of China in our texts, we can enrich the lesson with clips from the internet.

Finally, customs such as festivals and holidays are essential to Chinese culture. All over the world communities celebrate holidays. In China many of these special occasions are marked by festivals. Some examples would be the Lantern Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, and the Spring Festival (better known in America as Chinese New Year). As Chinese men, women, and children emigrated across the globe, these festivals spread. Chinese New Year is the specific topic of a couple of my non-fiction resources.

Mexican Culture

Background knowledge for the class

Just as I started the Chinese portion of my studies by looking through my classroom library, I also sought books featuring the Mexican culture. I was able to find many stories that were either set in Mexico or set in America but focused on a Mexican community. From these materials the class will be able to identify several examples of Mexican clothing, music, holidays, traditions, language, and food. Using those examples the class should then begin developing a sense of Mexican culture and ultimately to define culture as a concept.

This may shock and confuse many, including most of my non-Hispanic students, but Taco Bell isn't all that Mexican. It's true! Dr. Pepper is not a traditional Mexican beverage. Nor does an authentic taco look, smell, or taste like its fast food American cousin. Authentic Mexican cuisine can be found in several of my sources. From enchiladas to tamales to watermelon punch I'm am sure to hear the question "Is it almost lunch?" repeated many times throughout our readings.

Mexico boasts some spectacular holiday traditions. The children will easily relate when we read of a birthday fiesta. It is possible that they will have heard of Cinco de Mayo. Through our readings they will learn more about the meanings of and the traditions associated with that holiday in May. Initially, I think my students will equate the Day of the Dead with Halloween. It won't be just because of its proximity to trick or treating on the

calendar. It will be because of the many skeletons and skulls that appear during the celebrations. There is also a connection to the Chinese culture when the kids see how the deceased ancestors are greatly respected on the Day of the Dead.

Background knowledge for myself

I've only traveled abroad one time. That trip was to Puerto Vallarta in Mexico. I remember being struck by the magnificent landscapes of the region. The Pacific Ocean was a beautiful sight. I enjoyed watching pelicans fly past the hotel. When my party traveled inland we encountered rugged mountains and isolated blue lakes. The natural beauty was undeniable. Puerto Vallarta is a tourist destination. As a result I did not get a great feel for authentic Mexican culture. While Spanish was spoken everywhere, signs of the tourism industry also abounded. Along the coast, ships offered pirate themed tours and a few blocks away McDonald's stood ready to dole out Big Macs. I needed to develop background knowledge of Mexico prior to teaching this unit.

Carlos Fuentes highlighted the dark sides of Mexico in his novel *The Death of Artemio Cruz*. Fuentes speaks with the voice of his title character as he ponders Mexico and says "you turned your eyes northward and lived with the regret that a geographical error kept you from being a part of them."⁷ Artemio further states that when you look around Mexico you see "the nakedness of this poor country."⁸ It seems little wonder that Fuentes' character would gaze enviously at life in Mexico's northern, wealthier neighbor.

Mexico is not wealthy. It does, however, have a successful tourist business, as evident in my personal trip to the country. This seeming benefit carries with it a hidden danger. Guillermo Bonfil Batalla and Nestor Garcia Conclini, both anthropologists, point out "as Mexicans attempt to cash in on 'Mexicaness' it has led to 'a perceived lack of tradition or authenticity'."⁹ This loosely translates into Mexico cheapening its culture by transforming into what meets tourist expectations. It cannot be denied that Mexico is a financially poorer nation than America. It is also accurate to say that many Mexicans look northward with hope in their hearts. It is little wonder that so many stories, including some my kids will hear, feature Mexican immigrants settling in America. These stories of Mexican immigrants show the Mexican culture by placing it aside the American culture. This makes it easy for students to compare and contrast the two.

Finances aside, Mexican culture has much to offer the world. "Spectator sports were a way for Mexico to present itself to the world, and they were also the source of immense national pride."¹⁰ Baseball, jai alai, boxing, and rodeo are all popular athletic events in Mexico. However, the most beloved of all the team sports is soccer. Soccer draws huge crowds. It is of little wonder that soccer pops up in stories of Mexico frequently. Even Dora the Explorer has taken time from her wanderings to play a game of soccer with her good friend Boots.

If my future classes are anything like my class of 2014, they will be professional wrestling fanatics. I cannot count the number of pictures or sentences that were turned in starring John Cena or Triple H. If there was one wrestler who probably was featured more than any other it was Rey Mysterio. Mysterio is a luchador- a masked wrestler in the professional wrestling matches called "Lucha libre." Lucha libre is exceedingly popular in Mexico and it features matches in which the *tenicos* (good guys) battle the *rudos* (bad guys). Generally speaking the *rudos* cheat to defeat the *tenicos*. But it is a sweet victory when after several battles the *tenicos* comes out victorious. I do not have a book that features lucha libre but if my kids from last year are any indication an internet video of this slice of Mexicana will be greeted with much excitement. I highly

recommend that you screen and choose carefully videos prior to class. School phones would likely start ringing if six year olds went home with stories or bloodied masked warriors dispatching each other with chairs to the head.

The Mexican culture features some fine food. And so do many of the stories my class will read. Enchiladas, salsa, quesadillas, and dishes made of some of the hottest peppers around are all very popular. In a link to our study of China, rice is also a staple food. Most of my students will be surprised to learn that one of their favorite treats is a Mexican original, hot chocolate.

Literature and Information

It is nothing new to pair a story and a nonfiction text together to teach a subject. Indeed, with the arrival of the common core it seems more essential than ever. Usually these pairings are provided by the local school district as part of a packaged curriculum. In my experience however, these pairings are often made around random topics, or some sort of character trait that is being taught. For example, a canned curriculum may focus a unit on snow or *being a good friend*. While these are themes are fine, I believe that the pairings can be much more powerful when wrapped around a science, social studies, or even a math concept that the children are required to learn. This sort of pairing will teach the concept while giving valuable exposure to both types of writing. Stories are an ancient and powerful teaching tool. Students could learn about snow or *being a good friend* and that would be okay. However, if I am required to teach them about trees or community, why should I not address those standards while also addressing standards of language arts? Teaching across the curriculum is not new. What it is; is effective.

One thing that was highlighted for me in seminar was that; if I want a child to analyze a topic, nonfiction seems a good way to go. However, if I want my student to emotionally connect to a text perhaps fiction would be a better vehicle. That being said, through careful picture selection and choice of wording even a nonfiction piece can bring about an emotional response. Conversely, a well written piece of children's literature can inspire very thoughtful discussion on a topic. When fiction and nonfiction are used together, a fuller picture of a concept can be established. Imagine, if you will, how powerful it could be to feel Spring Festival through the eyes of Shirley Temple Wong, as you also observe images and learn facts about the event in an expository text. Literature and information are two different types of readings. They are however inextricably intertwined. Concepts can be better taught when we as teachers engage both the learners' logical and emotional centers during a lesson.

Essential Questions

I will be focusing on three essential questions during this unit. My first essential question is; what is the definition of culture? A definition could be that culture is a pattern of shared behaviors of a specific group of people often related to the group's language, religion, cuisine, social habits, forms of art and music. This answer would be inappropriate for a kindergarten audience. An answer that I will be working towards is that culture is *a way of life*, or that it is the way groups do things. This answer is very broad but so is culture. A second essential question to be asked is; what are the ingredients that make up culture? In class we will be exploring clothing, food, music, holidays, traditions, language, and possibly religion and values (if the class broaches the subject) as an answer to our question. My final essential question is; how are different cultures

the same? How are they different? There are many answers to this question. It is best just to run the unit and see what the kids come up with. An example of a similarity may be that Chinese and Mexican cultures both greatly respect their elders. A difference may be in the sounds of traditional music of each culture.

Strategies

Listening Comprehension

In Kindergarten the students cannot read stories, but they are asked to comprehend stories. This takes the form of listening comprehension. As the teacher reads a story, students are expected to follow along paying special attention to details from the text and the pictures that accompany the words. Some of the details that I could specifically ask probing questions about are the characters, the setting, and the events from the beginning, middle and end of the story.

When we discuss characters, students should be able to answer questions that relate to our study of culture. What are the characters wearing? Are they eating anything that seems new to you? Do they speak any words that are unfamiliar to you?

Students are questioned about setting. By carefully paying attention to the setting students can pick up details about the culture. Some guiding questions could be; what can you see about the house that looks different? Are there any paintings or pictures hanging on the walls? What does the town look like? What kinds of things can you observe during the parade?

Plot would also be useful to discuss. Sample questions could be; what does the character do next? Why do you think that happened? How is this event different from what you are used to?

Making Connections

Throughout the unit I have mentioned making connections to the stories. This is a great comprehension strategy. I regularly ask the students to share what the story brings to mind for them. It is essential to model this strategy for the kids. Modeling is of course just doing the activity yourself first while talking through your thinking aloud for the kids to hear. But beware, whatever you model, you will get parroted back at you. I always try to connect a story to some event that I know the kids won't be able to connect to themselves. For example, that part of the story reminds me of when I first drove a car... Giving an answer like that models the connection strategy but it also keeps them thinking, as no five or six year old can convincingly say they have also driven a car. I would probably hear a lot of stories about the riding of bikes, though. I hope that as the unit progresses students find connections between the Chinese and the Mexican cultures. I am, however, absolutely certain that they will find connections between each culture and our culture found in New Castle, Delaware. That means the kids are connecting the texts to themselves. This is a skill which will serve them well far beyond kindergarten. Being able to connect a story to them selves, to a different story, or to the world at large is a skill that is practiced by good readers regardless of their grade level.

Graphic Organizers

A strategy for organizing material is to use a graphic organizer. Using graphic organizers is practically

mandated by the Common Core State Standards. Beyond that though, the use of graphic organizers helps students to arrange and retain information that they are learning. Organizers do everything from sequencing to comparing and contrasting. I am using a web to track our discoveries of the cultures and a T-Chart for comparing and contrasting the Mexican and Chinese cultures. A large variety of graphic organizers can be found online by using a search engine. If you would like to see examples of T-Charts or webs, run a web search. One good site for finding graphic organizers is www.fcrr.org.

Picture Sorting

I will be using a “blind sort” to introduce the unit as well as to assess how we did as the unit closes. Doing so will bookend the unit nicely in my mind and allow me to see the students’ growth. A blind sort works like this. I will print out a variety of pictures depicting clothing, foods, traditions, holidays, architecture, and other “ingredients” of culture. These pictures will feature both “ingredients” from Chinese and Mexican culture. Each child will get one picture. They will then without guidance have to find other people whom have pictures that seem to fit with their own. I will tell the kids that in the end there should be two big teams. This should stop the kids from forming many little partnerships with their buddies. At the end of the sorting we will discuss why they think all members of the team belong together. This can be a powerful way for kids to start discovering the differences between our two cultures of study.

Kindergarten Writing

In kindergarten writing is not just considered words, sentences, and paragraphs put to paper by the child’s own hand. Right in the CCSS kindergarten writing is defined as “using a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing.” What this means is, if a child were to draw a picture to express their idea it is considered writing. A student relaying their story to me as I transcribe is writing. A child putting letter strings together is writing. Different children have different levels of writing skill. I will be teaching this unit in January or February. By that point of the year I anticipate many students will be at least attempting to sound out words. We will be writing for different purposes in this unit. The students will be writing expository pages to show examples of the different cultural “ingredients”. They may draw a sombrero and then copy letters as I spell the term, or attempt to sound the word out themselves. They could draw a paper dragon from Spring Festival and then create a label for their art. We will also be writing a story which will feature elements of the cultures. They may draw a child bowing to a grandfather. They could attempt to sound out the words in a sentence that says as much (though I most always require a picture too). They could even dictate what they would like to say about an event for me to record.

Objectives

There are four umbrellas under which a variety of standards fall that will be addressed by this unit. The first area addressed involves the reading of literature. While reading literature the students will be expected to ask and answer questions, both about the content and narrative elements (character, setting, and plot) of the story but also of any unfamiliar words that they may notice. Further they will be actively engaged in the group reading. A specific list of standards addressed can be found in the appendix section of this document.

The reading of informational text will also be a curricular area of focus. Once again, students will ask and

answer questions about the text. Again they will be focusing on unfamiliar words. In place of narrative elements, the students will ask and answer questions about key details from the writing. They will once again be actively engaged in the reading process. A specific list of standards addressed can be found in the appendix section of this document.

A third area of study will be writing. In kindergarten, writing always includes drawing, dictating, and actual writing. Students will be practicing two sorts of writing during the unit. The first is narrative in which their writing will focus on an event or series of events. If they write a series of events they will have to link them together. The class will also write an expository piece in which they will supply information about a topic. A specific list of standards addressed can be found in the appendix section of this document.

Delaware state social studies standards will be addressed. These standards address the students' ability to identify types of human settlements and describe connections between differing settlements and the activities of those communities. Further, student will begin developing a respect for other cultures and will recognize that it is an important foundation of the American civilization. A specific list of standards addressed can be found in the appendix section of this document.

Classroom Activities

Activity One: "Blind Sort"

I have found that picture sorting is an especially valuable activity in the classroom. It forces the students to look at pictures and think critically about connections between those pictures. I have found that to make a sort *blind* adds another level of challenge to the activity. It raises the level of rigor and higher thinking. My class will be doing a blind sort to begin this unit.

To prepare for the blind sort, I will search online for the words Chinese and Mexican. I will be looking for pictures that seem to showcase some aspect of the culture being sought. To narrow the search I can pair the words Chinese and Mexican with a second term such as clothing, architecture, food, holiday, celebration, etc... As I review the results of my search I will be selecting pictures that are evocative of the culture. Printing these pictures will be the next step. Teacher's tip: if possible laminate the pictures. They will hold up considerably better after lamination.

Shuffle the pictures together so that Chinese and Mexican pictures are randomly piled together. I gather the class and begin explaining our challenge. "I will be giving each of you a picture. You can look at the picture but do your best to hide it from your neighbors for right now." I will then distribute one picture to each child. When everyone has a picture we are ready for describing the activity.

I deliver the directions in a manner that sounds similar to this set of instructions. "When I say go you will be able to show your picture to other students. Your challenge is to compare pictures with your classmates. Try to find pictures that you think belong together. You are going to get into groups that go together. When you are all done sit together with your team. Here's a hint, when you are all done and everyone is sitting with a team there should be two teams. The teams may not have the same amount of students in them. Go."

Chaos will now ensue. At least it looks that way. I have done blind sorts during formal observations before and

have been told that it looks disorganized but that the class is excited, engaged, and thinking. Brace yourself! It also gets a little loud. I don't set a timer for this sorting. I do circulate throughout the students listening to discussions. Students will be justifying their thinking throughout the sorting. They will be having disagreements, helping each other decide which group to join, and thinking, thinking, thinking.

Once everyone is seated in a group I collect and display all the pictures together for each team, one team at a time. We can then have a discussion in which kids will explain their picture and talk about why it fits with their chosen team. If the team cannot agree that a picture belongs, we can discuss it together. If they are still not certain it may be best to set that picture aside in a special location until we can make a decision at a later time. This would be an excellent time to introduce a graphic organizer. I could create a giant web or T-Chart and place the pictures right into the organizer itself. I would create one organizer for Chinese culture and a separate for Mexican culture. This method of organization will make it simpler to identify the individual "ingredients" and the "recipe" for culture.

Our discussion will now revolve around the pictures. Some probing questions might be: What kinds of things do you see in the picture? And, why do you think these pictures fit together? Through these discussions we will begin to develop a sense of those "ingredients" of culture. As the "recipe" for culture becomes less murky, we build knowledge of culture and come closer to our definition.

I will repeat this same sorting activity with different pictures at the conclusion of our unit. In this way I should be able to assess the learning that has taken place. I expect that the process of sorting would be much smoother and the students' accuracy in pairing pictures together improved. I could adapt this second sorting to assess individual students by creating a worksheet of pictures to sort and make it an individual assignment.

Activity Two: "Readings: Questions and Answers"

The crux of this unit is the pairing of texts for the purpose of offering the students a deeper understanding of culture. To this end, I will be looking for commonalities between the texts I tie together. As I read the books to the class, they will have two distinct jobs. Foremost, they will focus on the content of the readings. They will actively engage with the story or text. To keep the level of engagement high, I will ask probing questions throughout the readings. A second focus, which is important for our defining of culture, is the seeking out of those "ingredients" of culture. At the conclusion of each reading we will pull forth the identified "ingredients" and add them to our graphic organizers from the previous activity. As, some pairings will be multicultural, it will be important to always have the students determine whether the new element should be added to the Chinese or Mexican organizer.

Probing Questions

During the readings, I will ask a series of probing questions and encourage students to ask questions of their own about what they have heard. This "ask and answer" routine will directly address language arts CCSS. It makes the children think. It forces them to mentally attend during the readings. It will allow them a better understanding of the content shared.

Areas of focus for the questions could be the narrative elements (characters, setting, and plot) of a story. For example; why do you think Maria wore her mother's ring? What do you notice about the setting in this picture? In a nonfiction piece, this focus shifts to key details from the text. Why is food left on the altars of ancestors during the Day of the Dead ceremonies? What are some ways the community celebrates Cinco de Mayo?

Unknown vocabulary frequently appears in reading activities. This will be especially true while studying other cultures. When a word like *ye-ye* is included in a story. It is an opportunity to dig deeper into the Chinese culture. Asking and answering questions about new vocabulary is also in the CCSS.

Asking questions that lead the children to make connections is important. Questions like; how is a *fiesta* like a birthday party? How is it different? serve multiple purposes. They help the children better relate the reading to themselves. They also explore how different human settlements are connected. That relates to social studies standards.

Pairing Texts

As every teacher will likely have access to different reading materials for use with their class, I won't take much space addressing my specific materials. What I will do is give an overview of how I will be pairing materials together with a few specific examples.

Seminar leader Brantley often linked fiction and nonfiction in our topics of discussion. We would read an article detailing the history and current state of feminism and then follow it up with a discussion of a picture book with feminist overtones. In this way I was engaged on multiple levels with the learning. Following that model, I will be linking the novel *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson* with the informative text *Chinese New Year: A Festival of New Beginnings*. Through these readings the students will feel the experience of Shirley Temple Wong while they are also thinking about facts of the holiday from the nonfiction text.

Seminar leader Brantley also paired similar texts together to aid in my learning. The *Declaration of Independence* and the *Communist Manifesto* are, in form, very similar documents. Although they are similar their message is radically different. By pairing two similar pieces together the messages from each were underscored for me. I too will pair similar text together to examine the differences. *Adelita: A Mexican Cinderella Story* and *Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella Story from China* are both versions of the classic Cinderella story. They are exceedingly similar. Because of how alike they are the differences will stand out. Those differences are because of the cultures in which the tales are set.

Defining Culture

At the end of the readings I will lead the students in an examination of our graphic organizers. We will list the different "ingredients" of culture and develop our classroom definition of the concept. I will guide students to defining cultures as the way a group of people live. Reminding the kids to be wary of stereotypes would be appropriate at this time.

Activity Three: "Recipe Writing"

Nonfiction Informational Writing

The students will begin this activity by choosing either the Mexican or Chinese culture. They will then be creating a booklet focused on the "ingredients" of that particular culture. The booklet will include a cover, and

one page per “ingredient” that we discussed in class. Likely, the book will be five or six pages in length.

The cover is to include a title (perhaps Chinese culture), the author’s name, and a full color picture (illustration, photograph, magazine clipping, or printout from the internet) that would be appropriate for such a book. Each page will include a colored picture featuring an “ingredient” of culture and a sentence that describes the picture. For example, if the student drew a picture of a Chinese Dragon they may write a sentence relating how dragons often appear during Spring Festival parades.

Kindergarten students’ writing will include a combination of pictures, dictation, and words. I would also expect that most if not all of the “ingredients” in the student book will come directly from our graphic organizers constructed over the course of the unit.

This book could be created in the traditional manner with paper, pencil, and art supplies. However, it could be completed using an I-Pad app such as Bookabi. The use of technology during this writing process would greatly increase the excitement factor for some children.

Fiction Writing

The student will also write a story that showcases one of the cultures. The story will include at least one character, a setting, and an event. I would expect that this story will be at least a paragraph including details that could indicate the culture. To complement the text, students will create an illustration that goes along with their writing.

An example might be that “Tad went to a parade. In the parade Tad saw many skeletons and skulls. After the parade Tad went home and put some food near a picture of his great grandmother. Tad has fun on the Day of the Dead.”

Again, this writing could be completed with paper, pencil, and crayons or possibly using an I-Pad app like Bookabi.

Annotated Bibliography

Resources for My Background

Chai, May, and Winberg Chai. *China A to Z: Everything You Need to Know to Understand Chinese Customs and Culture*. New York: Plume, 2007.

This is a most valuable resource on the culture of China. I found it particularly useful for researching the concept of face, festivals, martial arts, familial relations, and holidays.

Fadiman, Anne. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997.

I’ve included this novel in the bibliography because it was my inspiration in the choosing of culture as my

focus.

Fuentes, Carlos, and Sam Hileman. *The Death of Artemio Cruz*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1964.

It is a historical novel of Mexico. It is steeped in Mexican culture and largely focuses on the post-revolutionary period in Mexico. It provides background information on the Mexican nation.

Gao, Xiongya. "Women Existing for Men: Confucianism and Social Injustice against Women in China." *Race, Gender & Class* 10.3 (2003): 114-25. *Race, Gender & Class Website*. Jean Ait Belkhir, *Race, Gender & Class Journal*. Web. 9 July 2015. .

This journal is a study of the treatment of women in China.

Mah, Adeline Yen. *Falling Leaves: The True Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter*. New York: Wiley, 1998.

A novel deeply rooted in the Chinese culture. It largely focuses on familial relations and the role of women in China.

Meyer, Michael C. "Mass Media and Popular Culture in the Postrevolutionary Era." In *The Oxford History of Mexico*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

This is a massive tome on the history of Mexico. I found that chapter 20 was very valuable in highlighting the modern culture in Mexico. It featured information about media in Mexico, Mexican government and corruption, sports, and lucha libre.

Yang, Gene Luen, and Lark Pien. *Boxers*.

This graphic novel depicts the concept of honor and losing face. It also showcases martial arts and is set upon a backdrop of historical China.

Yang, Gene Luen, and Lark Pien. *Saints*.

This graphic novel highlights the reverence for one's elders. It also depicts the Chinese deference for things and people of western cultures in historic China.

Resources for Use with the Students

Chen, Jiang Hong, and Boris Moissard. *The Legend of the Kite: A Story of China*. Norwalk, Conn.: Soundprints, 1999.

The focus of the story is the Kite Festival. It could be used to build background about China.

DePaola, Tomie. *Adelita: A Mexican Cinderella Story*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2002.

This book tells the Cinderella story with a Mexican slant. It includes much Spanish language in the text and is steeped in Mexican culture. It could be compared and contrasted with both the Chinese Cinderella tale (Yeh-Shu) as well as the traditional Cinderella.

Doering, Amanda F. *Cinco De Mayo: Day of Mexican Pride*. Manakato, Minn.: Capstone Press, 2006.

This is an expository text that focuses on the holiday of Cinco de Mayo, It explores the history, meaning, and traditions linked to its celebration. As a possible extension the book provides details on how to make a piñata.

Doering, Amanda F. *Day of the Dead: A Celebration of Life and Death*. Mankato, Minn.: Capstone Press, 2006.

This is an expository text that focuses on the holiday of the Day of the Dead. It explores the history, meaning, and traditions linked to its celebration. As a possible extension the book provide details on how to make paper flowers.

Krull, Kathleen, and Robert Ramirez. *Harvesting Hope the Story of Cesar Chavez*. Prince Frederick, MD: Recorded Books, 2004.

This book focuses on the civil rights leader Cesar Chaves. It features the Spanish language, adobe houses, and the struggles of immigrant workers who came to America.

Lord, Bette, and Marc Simont. *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*. New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row, 1984.

Throughout this book Chinese culture is present. At times the main character experiences problems in the American culture because her Chinese upbringing does not always match her new life. It also demonstrates the respect for elders and family in China. Chinese celebrations and customs are also depicted in the story.

Louie, Ai, and Ed. Young. *Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella Story from China*. New York: Philomel Books, 1982.

This is the story of Cinderella with a Chinese slant. It ties to Spring Festival and could be used to build background of China or to compare and contrast with either the Mexican version of Cinderella (see Adelita) or the traditional Cinderella.

Matheis, Mickie, and Dave Aikins. *Kai-lan and the Ladybug Festival*. New York, N.Y.: Simon Spotlight/Nickelodeon, 2010.

This is one of a series of picture books featuring a Chinese girl named Kai-Lan. Within this story we will be exposed to a festival, as well as much Chinese language. I would consider comparing and contrasting Kai-Lan with Dora the Explorer.

Schaefer, Lola M., and Gail Smith. *Chinese New Year*. Mankato, Minn.: Pebble Books, 2001.

This expository text gives great detail about the Spring Festival

Sievert, Terri. *Chinese New Year: Festival of New Beginnings*. Mankato, Minn.: Capstone Press, 2006.

This is an expository text that focuses on the Spring Festival. It gives many details of the traditions of Chinese culture. It also provides directions for creating a Chinese dragon craft for an art extension.

Soto, Gary, and Ed Martinez. *Too Many Tamales*. New York: Putnam, 1993.

This picture book is about Christmas in a Mexican house. It shows many details that will show similarities to our American culture. It also features Mexican food and traditions.

Yamate, Sandra S., and Denise Prowell. *The Boy Who Loved Dumplings*. New York, N.Y.: [Newbridge

Communications], 1994.

Examination of the pictures and text reveal the following Chinese dumplings, Chinese writing, a wok, and chopsticks. These can images can help build our “ingredients” of culture.

Z, Katacha, and R. W. Alley. *Fiesta! New York?:* [Newbridge Communications], 1994.

The pictures and text in this book detail preparations for a celebration. It includes details on foods, music, clothing, and traditional Mexican names.

Appendices

Appendix A: Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts for Kindergarten:

Reading Literature

RL.K.1 with prompting and support, ask and answer questions about the key details in a text.

RL.K.4 with prompting and support, ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.

RL.K.10 actively engage in group reading activities with purpose and understanding.

Reading Informative Text

RI.K.1 with prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

RI.K.4 with prompting and support, ask and answer questions about unknown words in a text.

RI.K.10 actively engage in group activities with purpose and understanding.

Writing

W.K.2 use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic.

W.K.3 use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events, tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened.

Appendix B: Delaware State Standards for Social Studies for Kindergarten:

Geography Standards

K.G.3a students will be able to identify types of human settlement, connections between settlements, and types of activities found in each.

Civics Standards

K.C.2a students will understand that respect for others, their opinions, and their property is a foundation of civil society in the United States.

Notes

1. Adeline Yen Mah, *Falling Leaves: The Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter*, 100.
2. Adeline Yen Mah, *Falling Leaves: The Story of an Unwanted Chinese Daughter*, 25.
3. Xiongya Gao, "Women Existing for Men: Confucianism and Social Injustice against Woman in China", 115.
4. Xiongya Gao, "Women Existing for Men: Confucianism and Social Injustice against Woman in China", 119.
5. May Chai and Winberg Chai, *China A to Z: Everything You Need to Know to Understand Chinese Customs and Culture*, 76.
6. May Chai and Winberg Chai, *China A to Z: Everything You Need to Know to Understand Chinese Customs and Culture*, 169.
7. Carlos Fuentes, *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, 27.
8. Carlos Fuentes, *The Death of Artemio Cruz*, 27.
9. Michael C. Meyer, *The Oxford History of Mexico*, 638.
10. Michael C. Meyer, *The Oxford History of Mexico*, 660.

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