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Biographies and Autobiographies: Portraits of Peace Builders

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Introduction

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.” - Mahatma Gandhi

With this inspirational and motivational thought, I chose the topic of my unit as developing young peace builders in our community, using literature and information as well as self-reflective learning activities. My first grade students will learn more in depth about different literary genres while at the same time discovering the characteristics and importance of peace builders we read about to awaken their own value and embolden them to contribute to our community even at their young age. They recite our PeaceBuilder pledge at school every morning, yet make limited concrete connections to what it can really mean in their young lives and in their future. Our pledge flows as follows, “I am a peace builder, I pledge to praise people, to give up put downs, to seek wise people, to notice and speak up about hurts I have caused, to right wrongs, to help others, I will build peace at home, at school, and in my community each day.”¹ We will take a look at the vocabulary and phrases of this pledge, using storyboard ideas from our third and fourth grade buddies and the PeaceBuilders activities with our Foothill Family Counseling partner in preparation for this unit.

Using both fiction and nonfiction will help me teach peace builders as role models in a familiar storybook structure such as *Jingle Dancer*, and then in an unfamiliar yet important fact finding literary structure of biographical nonfiction such as the National Geographic Readers series and the book *Amelia to Zora*. And then there are *Grandfather Gandhi* and *Seeds of Change*, where students can focus on analyzing character traits of peace builders in the comfortable structure of a storybook, yet in picture book biography form. I look forward to students building confidence as readers and learners as they compare and contrast the types of literary works. This is a good way to transition and enhance their reading experience while learning character traits and facts about influential leaders of peace.

Students will learn about heroes, leaders, and peace builders through various literary works in the form of folktales, poems, and biographies. I am eager to share what I have learned in my research and seminar discussions about literature in various genres of fiction and nonfiction. For instance, I look forward to incorporating age appropriate exploration of gender roles, multicultural role models, and hero (peace builder) characteristics. Many great ideas for classroom activities were shared in our collaborative seminar group,

which I will include in this unit. Two examples include, identifying familiar Disney characters as peace builders, and a “wax museum” presentation of selected influential people. The literary works of different categories will allow students to not only learn about literature, but also through writings, explore what makes a peace builder special and discover how they themselves are special. Even as children they can contribute this most important kind of wealth to our community.

I hope that this unit will inspire students to tell their stories and to dream of ways to build upon what Tara J. Yosso refers to as “community cultural wealth.”² I will delve into folktales, poems and biographies with the hope of sparking higher-level thinking and discussions around building peace in our community. I believe it is edifying for these young students to identify the qualities and skills within themselves for which they can be proud. They have such an important role in our community and society at large, and need to be able to share and express themselves as they develop into great leaders and peace builders.

Overview

Our students have valuable cultural wealth that they bring with them to school. Until this past year, I would unintentionally look at our students (and families) with the lens of deficit thinking that focuses on cultural poverty and its disadvantages rather than the wealth students bring to our school and community. Now with a new perspective, I see families in our community who share this positive strength of cultural capital. The way Yosso explains the types of cultural wealth, called aspirational capital, is encouraging and positive:

... aspirational capital is the ability to hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality. Yet, aspirations are developed within social and familial contexts, often through linguistic storytelling and advice (consejos) that offer specific navigational goals to challenge (resist) oppressive conditions. Therefore, aspirational capital overlaps with each of the other forms of capital, social, familial, navigational, linguistic and resistant.³

With this new lens, I hope to pass on this perspective and positive learning attitude to my students as we lay the groundwork to build them up as peace builders in our community.

Our school, Mount Pleasant Elementary STEAM Academy, is part of a small community in the eastern foothills of San Jose, California. We currently serve 363 students (Kindergarten through 5th grade) in general education with a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM). We provide English Language Development (ELD), Structured English Instruction (SEI) in kindergarten and first grade, English Language Arts (ELA) Intervention, a Reading Partners program, Homework Clubs, and an after-school program equipped with its own trained staff. We also partner with counseling agencies to support students and families through the inherent tensions and stressors in our area. Several non-academic after-school activities are offered as well ranging from athletics to traditional cultural dance.

The school demographics provide important information for our teachers to keep in mind about the different cultures students are representing and services they are receiving during the school day. Approximately

eighty-seven percent of our students are Hispanic, eleven percent are Asian, one percent are Caucasian, less than one percent African American, and less than one percent American Indian. Eleven percent of our students require Special Education services, Fifty-five percent of our students are English Language Learners, seventy-three percent receive Free or Reduced Lunch, and ninety percent are English Learners, Foster Youth, or eligible for Free/Reduced-Price Meals (unduplicated count 2014 used for California's new Local Control Funding Formula - LCFF).

In the most recent years we have refined our teaching strategies to align with the new Common Core Standards and movement to provide educational goals that support students in deeper comprehension levels, creating lessons intent on developing the five "C's" - Critical thinking, Creativity, Collaboration, Communication, and Civic engagement. Our district has also applied a more culturally encouraging perspective to better connect with our students, and to empower them with the cultural wealth they already embody.

Rationale

As our school and district align with the latest Common Core State Standards each year, we seem to be moving away from what was once our mandatory literature and reading curriculum. We have more freedom to build our curriculum with teaching strategies such as Project Based Learning units, using our district's reading curriculum as a resource, and Daily 5™ strategies with our Guided Reading (See Teaching Strategies section below).

I have noticed over the past two years to now of this new shift in our district to Common Core standards, we are in the midst of a slow transition allowing more teacher input in the selection of literature in the primary grades, rather than a strict directive to "be faithful to the curriculum." And now that we have this opportunity, I want to consider ensuring best choices regarding literature. The difficulty with this freedom to choose is the time it takes a teacher to research best choices. The Yale National Initiative has allowed me the time to research this subject, and I hope the resources shared in this unit save time and direct teachers to valuable information of appropriate literature for primary grades.

Some ideas in this unit that may also help guide primary grade teachers on this literary journey, include research and information on subjects such as examining and discussing gender bias, inclusive and correct cultural representations of role models, and heroes and heroines promoting peace and justice. It can be challenging to teach young children about conflicts of inequalities and the abstract, higher-level issues regarding gender, ethnicity, class, and race. Even though these types of ideas are not usually directly addressed in detail during class, I think they could indeed be expanded upon and could invite colorful discussions and even reflections with our young scholars, especially if they are more advanced. Encouraging this higher-level thinking is an exciting prospect to bring to our young students, in turn exciting and empowering them as learners.

Content Objectives

The dualism of my unit addresses peace builders in literature and information. “Peace building” is a term we use at our school referring to our Peace Builder pledge and all the ways to build character together. Now through this unit we can select great quality literature to shape a wider foundation for academic and social understandings needed for developing a mindset of building peace. I look forward to my students discovering their own peace builder qualities, and then forming aspirations for how they envision contributing to our community.

I would like the students to learn about specific people who have built peace in our community and our country such as Cesar Chavez and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The reasons why we celebrate these heroes with national holidays will unfold in the study of these figures of social justice. Students will be able to learn about heroes and heroines, and different types of influential peace builders by studying these global inspirational role models as well: Mahatma Gandhi, Florence Nightingale, Mother Teresa, and Wangari Maathai.

The type of literature and information that I plan to use includes picture books, photographs, and videos, which are all visually important for teaching young children, especially second language learners. I look forward to the rich discussions sparked by observations, disseminating meaning and purpose set forth by the illustrator and author together. The clarity and truth observed in photographs, poetry, and biographies imprint images that either invite readers into the text to look more closely for meaning or they jump off the page to engage readers.

I plan to use a variety of literature, and have students produce their own stories in each genre that we study. The majority of read alouds will be in the form of picture books as

Houriha explains, “They are vivid, enjoyable, easily understood, memorable and compelling. They appeal to people of all ages, but for children who have not yet achieved the ability to reason abstractly they provide images to think with.”⁴ I am looking forward to using fictional literature without feeling like a rebel against the Common Core shift to nonfiction literature. In this unit, we will explore folklore and fairytales along with other categories. I am encouraged in the deeper levels of my teaching with this reminder that, “Our most basic concepts, such as time and causation, are embedded in the stories told to children from infancy onwards, and for this reason we feel there is truth in the shape of stories even when we know their content is fantasy.”⁵

Along with literature, students can apply their learning by participating in a “100 Acts of Kindness” project, stepping beyond what they can do at home and reaching further out to the community. A culminating project will be for students to find their voice in writing their own self-stories as peace builders and their dreams for their future selves. Creating this learning environment for sharing unique life experiences will hopefully foster the idea that every person has an important life story to share, to hear, and to respect.

My hope is for scholars to develop a deeper connection and understanding of building peace from literature, information, and application. Furthermore, through the process of discovering and sharing their own unique stories and hopes for the future, the seeds of peace will be planted to help them better address larger social issues they will encounter living in our community that require tolerance and compassion, such as bullying, gangs, and even racism.

Gender Bias

This unit is influenced by the Yale National Initiative (YNI) 2015 seminar, “Literature and Information”, such as the alertness I have formed regarding references to or connection with female characters having their own space and time, the use of color connotations around them, and how they are empowered.

On this literary journey to lay down a firm foundation of peace builder qualities, it will be interesting to explore student thoughts on how gender in children’s picture books can affect readers, especially young readers. How interesting it will be to observe the illustrations and text in picture books to see the gender roles, how they are portrayed, and positive characteristics. The books parents tend to read to young children are picture books. We are told, “children begin to distinguish between male and female during these young formative years prior to first grade.”⁶ Rich discussion could be sparked as students seek beyond identifying the female and male characters in illustration and text to analyzing the author’s intent for these characters. For example, we will be reading the fun story of *Zog* by Julia Donaldson. A strong female character is portrayed that does not seem to conform to expectations of her peers or society. We will use the two-page List of Character Traits, a free download from TeachersPayTeachers.com, to highlight peace builder traits we find in the story’s characters. (Please see Internet Resources for this link.)

Through research, I am reminded that we need to be selective in the literature we present to our students regarding gender bias. There are negative effects of the underrepresentation of female characters. It is suggested that it is limiting to girls’ aspirations for careers, in future parent role modeling, and in their personality characteristics as well as the perpetuation of any prior sexist biases they may have already had. It has been found that “Children who read biased books later made more stereotypic toy choices. Based on these and other studies, Tognoli, Pullen, and Lieber (1994) concluded that gender bias in children’s books gives boys a sense of entitlement and lowers girls’ self-esteem and occupational aspirations.”⁷ Also, in a study of 200 top selling books and Caldecott award winning titles, “There were nearly twice as many male as female title and main characters. Male characters appeared 53% more times in illustrations. Female main characters nurtured more than male main characters did, and they were seen in more indoor than outdoor scenes.”⁸

Keeping this data in mind motivates me to seek literature to combat these tendencies. For example, the book *Amelia to Zora*, by Cynthia Chin-Lee, is an A to Z book of twenty-six influential women with great character and accomplishments. *Rosie Revere Engineer* is a fiction book about a girl who learns about pursuing her engineering dreams with persistence, mentioning great women visionaries such as Bessie Coleman and Amelia Earhart, and explaining in the Historical Notes at the end the nod to Rosie the Riveter, the women’s figure of strength and contribution to war efforts during World War 2 with the slogan “We Can Do It”. I look forward to introducing students to high quality children’s books such as these that combat and help balance out gender bias tendencies.

Multicultural Role Models

It can be challenging to teach young children about conflicts of inequalities and the abstract, higher-level issues regarding gender, ethnicity, class, and race. I am encouraged that not only in my district, but nationally as well, we seem to be scaffolding and fortifying our approach to address global connections and cultural diversity in our classrooms. I agree with Morgan, “Teaching students to have multiple perspectives at a young age is likely to reduce problems involving prejudice or discrimination and is an important component of early childhood education.”⁹ I have included Morgan’s list and website compiled by various national associations advocating for educating young children and the use of culturally authentic books of high quality.¹⁰ (Please see Teacher Resources)

Some ways to check on the cultural authenticity of books is to read the jacket and notes the publisher provides about the author and the illustrator, as well as to check any critiques in journals or online. Since it can be a challenge, it may help to keep in mind these two things when searching out books for your class: cultural authenticity and equal representation. Not all books depict cultural groups accurately, and not all cultural groups have equal representation so books may be difficult to find. One of the most controversial examples in my research involves the misrepresentation of Chief Seattle, leader of the Suquamish and Duwamish people of the Pacific Northwest, and a speech that he gave in his native tongue regarding giving up Native land to early settlers. A haphazard process created an implausible product that was transcribed from notes, translated, and adapted by outsiders. There are also inaccuracies about him in a popular children’s book called *Brother Eagle, Sister Sky*. This award-winning book features text and illustrations that incorrectly portray the culture and message of Chief Seattle and his people due to the author and illustrator imposing their misunderstandings as well as imposing their own European American perspectives. For instance, horses are illustrated many times yet Chief Seattle was not from a horse culture (nor did he wear feathered headdresses, fringed buckskin, and live in a tipi)¹¹ and his people are transparent and ghostlike in contrast to the prominent solid European American blue eyed boy and family on the cover and at the end of the story. The illustrator actually stated that he was trying to represent all nations as most shared the same philosophy. Clearly, the visual stereotypes of Native Americans are perpetuated with these types of inaccuracies and misrepresentations. (Please see Internet Resources for a link to accurate information on Chief Seattle and the Suquamish.)

Not only are there misrepresentations of cultural role models, there is also a lack of availability of culturally authentic children’s books. For example, in Mendoza and Reese’s research, they found more copies of the book *A Day’s Work* were available even though it portrays a stereotypical “lazy Mexican” family perpetuating that stereotype, than the book *A Gift from Papa Diego*, a culturally accurate and respectful book about a Mexican family. It is important to keep in mind that publishers are a factor in the availability issue. *A division of a giant publishing house produces A Day’s Work, whereas a small publishing company produces A Gift from Papa Diego.* (Please see Teacher References for a great list of small multicultural publishing companies.) Along with the issue of availability, there is also the restriction of time that teachers rarely have to spend on searching and evaluating high quality and culturally authentic children’s books. Please see the lists of books and websites in the Teacher Reference section of this unit to save time.

Teaching young children about social justice through role models with whom they can identify will help them develop and appreciate multiple perspectives whether similar or different to their own. Finding literature that correctly represents cultures of those students in our classrooms provides an important and empowering

mirror to perceive their richness and envisage their generosity of wealth. For instance, stories like *A Gift from Papa Diego* and *In My Family/En Mi Familia*, poems from *Cool Salsa*, and information about Cesar Chavez, Dolores Huerta, and Frida Kahlo enable my Latino students to make cultural connections discovering similarities of character strength within themselves. It is just as crucial to expose students to cultures differing from their own, providing a window of examination for deeper understanding and acceptance of others.

I have found that my students connect most readily with ideas and learning related to family and children, thus I would encourage consideration of including traditional and modern family structures when looking at role models within and beyond the family unit. For instance, the book *In My Mothers' House* tells a simple story of a growing family of two moms and three adopted children from other countries. I find these words encouraging, "Interest has also grown in children's books with accurate, respectful portrayals of gay/lesbian people, women, people with disabilities, and religions other than Christianity."¹² A great resource for multicultural role models is the beautiful project by photographer Marc Bushelle entitled, "The Black Heroines Project,"¹³ depicting his five-year-old daughter dressed as influential women and peace builders, with added documentation and commentary.

It is important to correctly represent all cultures reflected in and not in the classroom. Even the smallest inaccuracy can lead to cultural misunderstandings and embarrassment for anyone whose culture has been wrongly portrayed with a distorted mirror or window.

Let us be culturally enlightened teachers, knowing that anyone in our community can be ill informed, or well informed about other cultures. We can be role models in using book selections of high quality and that are culturally correct.

Heroes and Heroines: Analyzing Character Traits

I am interested in using literary works that promote peace and justice, especially through the main characters. As teachers we build bridges to connect our students with content, skills, and strength of character. We seek out manners of freedom, justice, solidarity, tolerance, peace, and understanding, further promoting respect for the values of cultural identities especially through quality and authentic literature. For example, I will be using *Seeds of Change: Planting a Path to Peace*, the story by Jen Johnson about Wangari Maathai, and *First Day In Grapes*, a story by L. King Perez about Chico and his migrant family living in California.

According to Hourihan, the hero story and his adventure is always the same spanning from classic literature such as Odysseus to timeless fables such as Peter Rabbit, and further forward reaching to current computer games. He goes on to say, "The hero story has dominated children's and young adult literature, passing on the traditional values to each new generation. Most authorities on children's literature assume that hero tales are unequivocally good for children, as morally and mentally nutritious as apples and wholemeal bread."¹⁴ Even if the hero or heroine start off with selfish goals or poor choices, I am looking for them to overcome these with redeeming qualities and character to promote building peace and seeking justice. I am planning to use the above mentioned literature genres about peace builders and influential people to draw students away from honoring the clever trickster as a role model or hero. Abrams mentions that in his research younger children prefer their favorite character, Bugs Bunny, a trickster whose manipulative and deceiving behavior is how he attains his own selfish goals.¹⁵

Some believe the trickster; however, can help with understanding socialization. Abram tells of this importance as he writes,

...it can be argued on behalf of a socialization interpretation that the child uses the trickster genre as a way of mastering developmental tasks. Psychosocially, the tales develop from concern over self-management (five years), to autonomy from parental control (seven-to-nine years), and peer-group relations (ten-to-eleven years); cognitively, they move from gullibility (five-to-seven years) to logical trickery (eight-to-eleven years),¹⁶

and perhaps independence and logical thinking. He goes on to say, "Play prepares one for many potential societies, and the trickster prepares the child for many potential revolutions in behavior and manners."¹⁷ The trickster does have its rightful and respected place in literature, and even perhaps in the dualism that Hourihan also points out between the hero and adversary. Students will have a chance to look at character traits for both peace builders and tricksters during lessons and activities included in this unit. We will identify good qualities of tricksters because not all are bad, yet I plan to emphasize the main character's authentic qualities and practices that lead to seeking peace and social justice beyond oneself and contributing to the greater good as a peace builder.

Poetry

Children's poetry tends to evoke a response of delight and fun in our class as students naturally enjoy the aesthetics of sound and rhythm. Most are aware of nursery rhymes and songs with simplicity of words and cadence. Students can already identify and make connections by hearing the oral elements of poetry, but not in depth with the written text as a reader. I am excited to combine the cognition and aesthetic reading, so the students can comprehend the vocabulary as they recognize sound and rhythm. Laying this foundation with poetry allows students to then think about Rosenblatt's questions for deeper understanding, "What caught the interest most? What pleased, frightened, surprised? What troubled? What seemed wrong? What things in the child's own life paralleled those in the poem or story?"¹⁸ I look forward to reading from *Fairyland* of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which includes such poems as "I'd Love to Be a Fairy's Child" by Robert Graves, "The Flowers" by Robert Louis Stevenson, and "Fairies" by Langston Hughes.

Sedgwick reminds us that we need to expose children to a wide variety of poems. He goes on to say that this is a way to combat racism, and I agree as it is an inviting way to observe cultures of others or our own. As mentioned previously, *Cool Salsa* by Lori Carlson, is a collection from Mexican American poets that conjure up colorful images and even memories of fiestas and family gatherings with which students can culturally connect. The children's book, *Emma's Poem* by Linda Glaser et. al, directs students to our national motto of "Give me your tired, your poor Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free . . ." as they learn about the poet Emma Lazarus and her interest in the journey of immigrants. Working with poems, students practice writing skills, reading and writing for pleasure, and learning the content and importance of this literary genre. For example, multicultural poetry in our reading curriculum, California Treasures anthology, not only helps students connect with other cultures, but also helps to realize that "poetry isn't merely current, but about the past and the future, and about lives lived now and then in all sorts of different cultures."¹⁹ Students will

expand their vocabulary with terminology such as “line”, “stanza”, “rhythm”, “meter”, but most importantly they will expand their cultural awareness. Through poetry, students will not only recognize gender roles, multicultural role models, and heroes, they will learn to write their own creative stories and dreams in this medium of literature.

Picture Book Biographies

Keeping in mind that students need the scaffolding of structure and modeling in order to write their own self-stories as portraits of peace builders by the end of this unit, the literary genre of biographies establishes a solid path to gaining insight and information students can appreciate, especially if using picture book biographies. Quality books of this type, which are also culturally authentic, are more likely to have less racial bias. True visually accurate representation of people from diverse backgrounds sets up students for appreciating and embracing cultural differences (and similarities). Building students’ self-esteem through correct cultural portrayals as well as highlighting contributions of their specific groups edifies and validates them in their hearts and minds as important pieces in our community.

Picture books provide great learning opportunities for students, young and old, and across genre boundaries. Picture book biographies specifically “offer, among other things, exposure to ways of thinking about other human beings. For the child, illustrations and text combine to create particular views of individuals as well as groups of people complete with messages about what those people are like.”²⁰ A great introduction to biographies and creating self portraits is to use Julius Lester’s *Let’s Talk About Race* to engage students, spark discussion, and embrace higher thinking about how we all have a story to share and listen to with tolerance, kindness, and respect for one another.

Students embracing this welcoming attitude will be ardent about stepping into wonderfully illustrated biographies of peace builders and social justice figures representing various cultures such as Martin Luther King, Jr. (African American), Cesar Chavez (Mexican American), Florence Nightingale (English), Malala Yousafzai (Pakistani), Mahatma Gandhi (Indian), and Wangari Maathai (Kenyan). It will also be great to pair these with nonfiction biography books such as National Geographic Readers and Time for Kids whenever possible. I will also use YouTube.com to play clips of video and audio from some of these peace builders such as Martin Luther King’s “I Have A Dream” speech, Mahatma Gandhi’s speech recorded in Kingsley Hall, London in 1931, and Malala Yousafzai’s acceptance speech of the Nobel Peace Prize. The visual and audio will create more ways for students to connect with these influential peace builders.

Writing Self Portraits

Our self-stories, or portraits, will tell each student’s story as an accumulation of life experiences as they wish to express it, even if they are only children. Portraits in various forms of writing, through the lens of young six and seven year olds sounds like a delightful endeavor and yet empowering with an important strength of character. They will also have opportunities to be creative in sharing their past and dreaming of their future. They can explore ideas of how they apply their peace builder traits in the world. Drawings will be used in all

their activities as this not only is a form of writing, but it also greatly supports their oral and written language development and practice. Even though research has shown that there are stereotypical products when young boys and girls express themselves in drawings, it is also a good assessment of prior knowledge. Young children's drawings are their expressions and manner of making sense how they choose, whether fictional or mysterious and magical.

Teaching Strategies

Local Partnerships in Our Community

The Clinician 1 of Behavioral Health of our local counseling partnership, Foothill Family Community Health Center, has taken it upon herself to learn our PeaceBuilders program used at our school so that she can build a solid learning of what it looks like for our young students to become peace builders as a part of our school culture. She has initiated summer camps for students whom teachers recommend, and students she has been working with during the school year that could benefit from and become peace builder role models in the coming year. She has also initiated collaboration in the first trimester with Transitional Kindergarten and Kindergarten teachers at our school to lead lessons in our classes about being peace builders. She also offers lessons as needed or requested at times throughout the school year. We will work together with our counselor and grade level teachers to have her lead lessons transitioning us into this unit with reference to vocabulary and phrases in our PeaceBuilder pledge. For a fun entry event into this unit, we can also include our third and fourth grade buddies in this collaboration with their published work done last year using this same idea of vocabulary and phrase-by-phrase interpretation.

We are also fortunate to have a partnership with our city art museum, San Jose Museum of Art, where they send docents as art teachers to work with our students once a week for eight weeks. One of the assignments in their curriculum last year was for students to create themselves as superheroes with a specific cause. This year, we can collaborate and coordinate our peace builder type of hero as a theme for that assignment. They have great fun expressing themselves through art, according to the specific instructions of how to use and combine the tools of an artist. They can further practice their skills in illustrating their stories according to the genre of the week, expressing themselves in this important mode of early writing.

Project Based Learning

Project Based Learning (PBL) starts with this entry event into a unit and is a great strategy to help teachers plan effective and engaging lessons as a process to reach a high quality end product. As an example of an end product of a project, students will create a way to present their self-stories as portraits of peace builders and members of our community to a public audience. This may well be another fun "wax museum" activity, with students expressing their own important bio information. Coordinating my unit in conjunction with our grade level PBL will be done collaboratively in the beginning of the trimester or the trimester preceding the unit and will involve plugging in the components of the unit into our PBL template which features more detailed elements of competencies.

The PBL planning involves eight main areas of competencies for the teacher to address. The first element is "Significant Content" which ties the project to the Common Core and Content Standards, such as our Writing W2: Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic and

provide some sense of closure. The second element is “A Need to Know” which involves creating a list of questions students have and considering what students need to be successful in reaching a high quality end product. The third element is “A Driving Question” that is open-ended yet focuses on the heart of the compelling project, for instance “How can we share our personal peace builder stories and dreams with the community?” The fourth element is “Student Voice and Choice” which allows students to express what they have learned incorporating their own style. The fifth element is ‘21st Century Competencies” ensuring collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity/innovation. The sixth element is “In-Depth Inquiry” which drives students’ authentic search and discovery in answering their own questions. The seventh element is “Critique and Revision” which involves planning for drafts, peer feedback, and revision along the way to a high quality end product. The eighth element is “Public Audience” which means to invite parents, peers, and representatives of the community for the exhibition or presentation, including a question and answer time at the end. A link to more PBL information is included in the “Internet Resources” section.

Daily 5™ Reading Strategy and the CAFÉ Menu

The Daily 5™ strategy is a way to structure literacy time with reading, writing, and independent work. Students have five different reading and writing choices to help them reach their independent goals. The teacher helps students develop skills to meet their goals through whole-group and small-group instruction, as well as one-on-one conferring. The five different choices for students are: Read to Self, Work on Writing, Read to Someone, Listen to Reading, and Word Work. In these groups, students will have a chance to share, read, write, and revise their peace builder stories in literary categories of folktales, poems, and autobiographies/self portraits of peace builders as the unit progresses.

The CAFE menu consists of four categories corresponding to the letters of CAFE. Comprehension (C) is the category for skills to help students understand what they read. The kid friendly statement is “I understand what I read.” Accuracy (A) is the category for skills to help students read the words. The kid friendly statement is “I can read the words.” Fluency (F) is the category for skills to help students read with accuracy, expression and understanding. The kid friendly statement is “I can read accurately, with expression, and understand what I read.” Expanded Vocabulary (E) is the category for skills to help students understand, find, and use interesting words. The kid friendly statement is “I know, find, and use interesting words.” The menu is referred to when the teacher has one-on-one conferences. (Please see Internet Resources)

I will be using strategies of Daily 5™ (what students do) and CAFE (how students use specific skills) in conjunction with my Guided Reading groups. The class is divided into small flexible groups that receive differentiated instruction and support to meet their individual goals. This is done during our daily Universal Access time where I meet with a different group each day, allowing me to meet with each group and each student at least once each week.

Guided Reading

Guided reading is a teaching strategy to use with all readers for all levels, differentiating instructions for all students to strengthen their reading skills, comprehension and fluency skills, and problem solving skills to figure out words, concepts, or ideas not previously encountered. Teachers use leveled groups to meet students’ individual needs, specifically building up students’ reading strategies in order for them to become independent readers. “Guided Reading supports good reading habits such as problem solving, comprehension, and decoding.”²¹

I will be using Guided Reading during my daily Universal Access time, which means that students will be

divided into five leveled groups. I will combine Daily 5™ with my Guided Reading time to give student groups choices for reading, writing, and independent work. The group that meets with me for that day has Guided Reading support and assessment as well as differentiated reading and writing to meet their Daily 5™ goals and targeted CAFE component. This all takes place as students progress through the days and weeks of this unit, working on literature elements and writing skills.

Gradual Release of Responsibility: “I Do, We Do, You Do”

The Gradual Release strategy used in our primary grades begins with direct instruction usually to the whole group while modeling expectations, following with opportunities to practice the skills and expectations together as much as needed, until finally students are released to do the work independently. This is a great way to teach identifying literary genres activities, using specific reading strategies, and identifying elements necessary in writing in various literary modes. “It is clear from previous research that modeling is a major feature of direct instruction. It is equally clear that after modeling is completed, students need opportunities to work with new learning in a supportive learning environment and gradually have opportunities for increasing levels of independence.”²²

Visual Thinking Strategy

This unit implements the Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) in a modified manner. VTS is based on Philip Yenawine’s book, *Visual Thinking Strategies: Using Art to Deepen Learning Across School Disciplines*. Use the techniques to draw out prior knowledge, vocabulary, and critical thinking. This strategy allows several entry points for all students to feel comfortable and confident in sharing their ideas beginning with what they see in the illustration in a read aloud book or a photograph projected large enough for whole class engagement. Students verbalize with minimal teacher interruption what they see in the illustrations. They may notice and mention lines, colors, characters, actions, etc. and all answers will clue me in on their prior knowledge and understandings. For example, picture book covers can be projected to help the class study and pull out information to help make predictions about the books. They can also practice their observational skills with the background of gender roles, multicultural role models, and hero characteristics as the unit progresses. The VTS activities are helpful to also build in young student skills in listening, taking turns, sharing, and collaboration.

Using a modified VTS for my unit involves prefacing some lessons with our specific concepts of gender roles, cultural representations, and heroes. When gathering students closely around the projected image, ask these three open ended questions: “What’s going on in this picture?”, “What do you see that makes you say that?”, and “What more can we find?” Paraphrase the students’ comments neutrally, points at the area being discussed, and link and frame each response. Students need to look carefully at the artwork, describe what they observe, back up their observation with evidence, listen respectfully to others’ input, and discuss multiple possible interpretations. This strategy also helps students practice Common Core standard RI6: Distinguish between information provided by pictures or other illustrations and information provided by the words in a text. I look forward to the rich discussions sparked by observations, disseminating meaning and purpose set forth by the illustrator and author together.

Classroom Activities

Portraits of Disney Peace Builders

A fun and familiar way to start discussions about peace builders and analysis of their values and character may be to have students come into the classroom to find pictures of Disney characters posted around the room. Their enthusiasm will build as they begin to recognize each one and blurt out to one another immediate thoughts evoked from seeing these familiar figures and which ones they like. This for me is also an exciting assessment of prior knowledge and a great hook into this activity. Students will need to look around the room and select a Disney character that is a peace builder, and then explain what makes that character a peace builder. The essential question is: What makes a peace builder and why? It uses the Speaking and Listening standard of SL1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups. It also uses the Writing standard of W2: Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic and provide some sense of closure.

Once students are gathered together for the introduction and instructions of this activity, begin explaining the reason for the surprise of different Disney character portraits around the room. Give as much or as little background information on the characters as you like, but do give explicit instructions and expectations of how to do the activity. Also, explain that after the activity, they get to draw and write about the character too! I would model choosing a character (one not posted as young students tend to mimic the teacher), and verbalize my thinking process of how I come up with my two reasons why the character qualifies as a peace builder. This is the “I do” part of the Gradual Release (GR) teaching strategy. Then we could practice doing a different one together as the “We do” part of the strategy. This part can be disregarded if you prefer students to give spontaneous responses. The final “You do” part of the GR strategy is to release students to try it on their own. Students decide independently and stand next to the character that is a peace builder. Each person needs to come up with two reasons that qualify their character as a peace builder. If there are others standing at the same character, they are encouraged to collaborate and think out loud together. Many other activities and tasks can derive from this point for further discussions and references to qualities of peace builders.

Students will have a chance to gather again whole group to share out their thinking, creating a shared writing list for each Disney character that was chosen as a peace builder (notice another GR “We do” step). I would also model writing complete and correct sentences on each list, using their shared words. Next, students have an opportunity to write on their own with the scaffolding of the shared writing lists available in plain view. Students now get to draw and write about their Disney character, using complete sentences to ultimately answer the essential question of “What makes a peace builder and why?” I would have them write in simple paragraph form, if possible, starting with a topic sentence and ending with a conclusion sentence. I would post up their work as Portraits of PeaceBuilders to keep that in mind throughout the length of this unit.

For extended work, a second set of the pictures can be used in flash card fashion to prompt sharing out. The pictures can also be used as sorting cards for different tasks in Daily 5™ small groups. I encourage various writing opportunities along with extended activities.

A Wax Museum of Peace Builders

Another engaging activity to help students to embrace biographies of influential peace builders is for them to

embody these leaders in a “wax museum” presentation. This activity comes after an accumulation of learning and information about various peace builders and their qualities. Students will emulate these influential people and invite the audience members to leisurely explore our classroom of “wax figures” who will come to life when a button (or sticker) is pressed, sharing important biographic facts to educate the inquiring guest. We will invite families, other classes, and district administrators to experience our fun expression of knowledge about selected peace builders. The essential question for students regarding this highly participatory activity is: What are the key biographic facts to bring to life about my specific peace builder? This activity will help students practice the Reading Literature standard RL2: Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson. Students also practice the Writing standards of W2: Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic and provide some sense of closure. And finally, they also engage in the Speaking and Listening standard of SL1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

When we are studying the literary genre of biography, students will have a chance to research more information in the library and in the computer lab of selected peace builders to help them prepare for their presentations. They will also have time to collect and create images and text for a tri-fold presentation board as a scaffolding prop and backdrop for their presentations. Students will select a peace builder to research and portray in groups of four or five. They will all research and share information about their figure, and collaboratively decide on the most important information to use for the presentation such as where they lived, their peace builder characteristics, and accomplishments or contributions to society. Each student will have opportunities to practice sharing out information with the teacher in small groups, and with the whole class to aid in revisions of their notes and presentation. Groups will also collaborate on a trifold presentation board about their peace builder, which will also aid students and audience members at the time of the presentations. The most alluring aspect of this activity is that everyone gets to be involved in the learning process while having fun together in our classroom community of peace builders.

Storyboard into Digital Portraits of Peace Builders

One more exciting activity involves the use of technology in collaboration with older buddies towards the end of this unit. After studying biographies, students will reflect on connections they have made with content and character and then tell their own story in storyboard format as a peace builder. They will transform their storyboard self-portraits as peace builders into digital stories with the help of our third and fourth grade buddies. Both the hard copies of student storyboards and their digital stories will be shared with other classes, families, district administrators, and our community online through social media and at our local library. The essential question is: What key elements do I need to create my autobiography as a self-portrait of a peace builder? Students will practice the Reading Literature standard of RL2: Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson. They will also use the Writing standard of W3: Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.

We will use drawings in sketchbooks and journals to help formulate stories. Students will share ideas and stories in various partner groupings. We will have done similar activities to produce writing with each genre of folktales, and poems. Students will this time have opportunities to draw out their story as a storyboard to edit and revise through the week with a focus on the skill of recognizing literary elements (genre, plot, character, setting, problem/resolution, theme) from the Comprehension column of the CAFE menu, using the Daily 5™ teaching strategy. Once students have storyboards completed, they will work with their older buddies to

transfer their self-portrait into a creative digital story to share. They will further embellish their digital storytelling to include their dreams of how they as peace builders will contribute to our community, our world. I hope to give students validation and affirmation of the importance of who they are and the wealth they bring to our community. Even though they are young, they should have a voice to share their story beyond immediate family and friends.

Annotated Bibliography

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laquinta, Anita. "Guided Reading: A Research-Based Response to the Challenges of Early Reading Instruction." *Early Childhood Education Journal* 33, no. 6 (2006): 413-418. Teachers use Guided Reading, yet may not know of any research such as this behind the wonderful teaching strategy.

Maynes, Nancy, Lynn Julien-Schultz, and Cilla Dunn. "Modeling and the Gradual Release of Responsibility: What does it Look Like in the Classroom?" *Brock Education Journal* 19, no. 2 (2010). This is another strategy teachers use, yet may want to know the solid

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National Association Websites for Cultural Books

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Higgins (2002) offers an annotated list. Updated access 2015. <http://education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/strategies/topics/multicultural-education/>.

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Appendix A: Implementing District Standards

This unit will target ELA Reading Literature, Reading Information, Writing, and Speaking and Listening standards. We will cover the First Grade Common Core standards in English Language Arts Reading Literature with RL2: Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson. RL4: Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses. RL5: Explain major differences between books that tell stories and books that give information, drawing on a wide reading of a range of text types. RL10: With prompting and support, read prose and poetry of appropriate complexity for grade 1. We will also cover the standards for Reading Information with RI2: Identify the main topic and retell key details of a text. RI4: Ask and answer questions to help determine or clarify the meaning of words and phrases in a text. RI6: Distinguish between information provided by pictures or other illustrations and information provided by the words in a text. All of our writing activities will cover the Writing standards of W2: Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic and provide some sense of closure. W3: Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure. And finally, through discussions and sharing in whole group, small groups, partners, older grade buddies, and presentations we will cover the Speaking and Listening standards of SL1: Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 1 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups. This unit also crosses over to achieve California State Standards for History

and Social Science CSS/HSS 1.1.2: Understand the elements of fair play and good sportsmanship, respect for the rights and opinions of others, and respect for rules by which we live, including the meaning of the “Golden Rule.” Learning about specific peace builders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Cesar Chavez, students will also reach the standard CSS/HSS 1.3.2: Understand the significance of our national holidays and the heroism and achievements of the people associated with them. And finally, standards are spiraled to reinforce Kindergarten standards for CSS/HSS K.1.1, K.1.2, and K.1.3 under Students understand that being a good citizen involves acting in certain ways. This includes characteristics and qualities inherent in the peace builders we will study and emulate.

Notes

1. PeacePartners, “PeaceBuilders”, 2015
2. Yosso, Tara J., Whose Culture Has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth”, 2005
3. *Ibid*
4. Hourihan, Margery. *Deconstructing the hero: Literary theory and children's literature.*
5. *Ibid*
6. Hamilton, Mykol C., David Anderson, Michelle Broaddus, and Kate Young, 2006
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9. Morgan, Hani. "Picture book biographies for young children: A way to teach multiple perspectives."
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11. Mendoza, Jean, and Debbie Reese. "Examining Multicultural Picture Books for the Early Childhood Classroom: Possibilities and Pitfalls."
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18. Rosenblatt, Louise M. "What facts does this poem teach you?."
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20. Mendoza, Jean, and Debbie Reese. "Examining Multicultural Picture Books for the Early Childhood Classroom: Possibilities and Pitfalls."
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22. Maynes, Nancy, Lynn Julien-Schultz, and Cilla Dunn. "Modeling and the Gradual Release of Responsibility: What Does It Look Like in the Classroom?."

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