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Reclaiming the Lost Art of Storytelling Using Textile

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At the junction of Highway 160 and Highway 163 on the Navajo Reservation is a small town of Tódínéeshzhee' (Kayenta.) What does Tódínéeshzhee'mean? Tódínéeshzhee'has different interpretation depending on who you ask. First, because the Diné language is very tonal and very descriptive, and second, the Navajo has regional differences. One interpretation of Tódínéeshzhee' means water flowing in different directions. The description comes from a summer monsoon storm when the streams, creeks, and washes overflow causing the water to flood. Others will argue that Tódínéeshzhee' refers to a stream of water seeping from an underground aquifer from the side of a sandstone[1] alcove.

The town of Tódínéeshzhee' was established around 1910's when Clyde Corville and the Wetherills, John and Louisa and their children Ben and Ida, moved to a new place called Tódínéeshzhee' to set up a Trading Post. In the early 1900's, transportation was scarce, meaning that if you wanted to go places, you either had to walk, ride a horse, or drive a team of horses pulling a wagon. The most you could travel in a day was about 30 miles. When the Wetherills moved to Tódínéeshzhee' from Oljeto, Utah, their former trading post, it put them one day closer to Gallup, New Mexico which was 180 miles away. This was important because it meant that they could get their supplies for the trading post more quickly. Furthermore, Clyde Corville and the Wetherills oversaw the improvement of the wagon trail over Tsegi (Marsh Pass) which opened an alternative route for getting supplies. Due to the proximity to Flagstaff, Arizona (150 miles), accessibility to supplies became more convenient.

The Wetherills were also able to establish one of the first post offices in the area, and they were entrusted to give it a location name. Unfortunately, many other places on the Navajo Reservation were also named Tódínéeshzhee', so the Wetherills decided to name the town post office Teeh-in-Deeh, which was the name of a sinkhole located three miles away. Teeh-in-Deeh eventually became known as Kay-en-ta[2] , an unintended mispronounciation. Another establishment in the area was the opening of the first hotel, Wetherill Inn.

Another reason that the Wetherills moved to Tódínéeshzhee' was because John Wetherill was appointed as a custodian of Navajo National Monument. Navajo National Monument was established to preserve three cliff dwellings in Tseyi Canyon, west of the current town of Kayenta, Arizona. His job, as a custodian, included guiding tourists and archaeological expeditions. Tourists sometimes included famous writers, artists, movie stars, and the president of the United States. Furthermore, Mr. Wetherill led Teddy Roosevelt on a trip to Rainbow Bridge.

Unfortunately, the Trading Post that helped the town of Kayenta get established is no longer in business. But then, Kayenta is one of the few towns thriving on the Navajo Reservation. Currently, Kayenta has several gas stations and restaurants. The community also has one of few shopping centers in operations. Former Navajo Nation Chairman Peter McDonald was credited with establishing Navajo Nation Shopping Center Enterprise, which was able to bring businesses to the reservation, including Bashas Grocery store. Bashas is a family owned and operated grocery store that was established by brothers, Ike and Eddie Basha, Sr. The community also has two types of government: the Chapter House and the Township. Kayenta Chapter House is the local form of the greater Navajo Nation government. The Navajo Nation government is divided in 5 agencies, and each agency is divided into local chapter houses. Each community has a chapter house. The Navajo reservation has 110 chapters, but only represented by 24 delegates. The delegates, are synonymous to U. S. Senators, make up the Legislative Branch of the Navajo Nation government. The Kayenta Township on the other hand is a municipal-style government. Kayenta is also served by two schools: Kayenta Boarding School and Kayenta Unified School District.[3] Kayenta Boarding school is a K-8 school run by the Bureau of Indian Education, a division of the United States Department of the Interior, under the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs.

Kayenta Unified School District is a Title 1 public school that serves Kayenta and the surrounding communities including Shonto, Black Mesa, Chilchinbeto, Dennehotso, and others. Each school year, the KUSD educates over 2,000 students. It has four schools under it: Kayenta Early Childhood Education (ABC Preschool-K), Kayenta Elementary School (1st Grade – 4th Grade), Kayenta Middle School (5th Grade – 8th Grade), and Monument Valley High School. Kayenta Elementary School serves students from First Grade through Fourth Grade. The past school year, each grade level had between 5-7 classes. Currently, the school has 6 second grade classes with about 16-20 students in each class. This year, I will be looping with my previous first grade class to second grade.

Rationale

Sharing stories is an important part of the Navajo culture. Navajos relied on oral narratives to pass down traditions, philosophy, and religion because they did not have a written language. The Navajo creation stories were told during the winter for entertainment, teaching lessons and morals, but especially for cultural preservation. Storytelling, especially Native American traditional stories including myths, legends, and folktales rooted in oral storytelling are important. Indigenous Nations pass their religious beliefs, customs, history, lifestyle, language, values, and the place they hold sacred from one generation to the next. Navajos pass time during the long winters to play string games and tell creation stories. Creation stories taught lessons about respect including people, animals, and environments. Storytellers often included theatrics and or embellishments to get the point across, especially stories that taught lessons. There were also stories about kinship or K'é to teach us how to treat each other, including families, with love, kindness, and generosity.

Despite our strong cultural history of storytelling, who maintained years of oral history, we struggle to recall or retell a story that were told to us. We as a whole tribe lost the ability to tell stories, and ability to teach storytelling effectively. For this unit, I want to use art as a form storytelling. Students will be taught to include questions that answer such as who, what where, when, why, and how when retelling a story. When students are asked to tell a story or retell a story, they just mention one part of the story like, "Oh he got a

bike!" As a teacher, I wait, but no other details come. I often ask for details: for example, I would often ask students, *what did you do over the weekend?* The common response is nothing. Then I must ask follow-up questions: Nothing? Did you watch TV? Did you play outside? Student: Yeah! Teacher: what did you watch? What did you play? Storytelling, whether it's retelling a story, or creating a storing is a challenge, even for students in fourth grade. To prevent students from struggling in higher grades, I want to teach my second graders about the art of storytelling. Their story will focus on describing in detail a personal historical event that happened using a picture. The plan is to create a curriculum using ELA standards to retell stories, including fables and folktales from Navajo and Black cultures, and determine central message, lesson, or moral. We will also read stories from both cultures to determine the similarities, especially the part where both quilting and rug weaving are both legacies that grandparents pass on to their children and grandchildren. One way is to share stories from picture books that are grade appropriate and read poems and listen to songs. These are different types of ways stories can be told.

To introduce the art of storytelling is to invite an elder or a local historian to class. I want the elder to tell stories about their experiences as a child, or even some historical context of what life was like when they were growing up. The other idea is to share historical photos of Kayenta so they can use their imagination to write or create a story.

This will be a three-week unit that will cover both Navajo weavers and African American quilt makers. I chose to pair Navajo weavers and African American quilt makers because both cultures have similar history, in terms of storytelling and textile traditions. The tradition of weaving and quilt-making are passed down from one generation to another, some going back as far as 7 generations. Each generation transform their crafts, but one constant is the storytelling. Storytelling is an important aspect for quiltmakers and weavers because stories relate to the history of the families or historical event that impacted the people. One textile can remind the weavers and quilters the good times or bad times. The cultural experience for my students is limited to life on the Navajo reservation. They do not know a lot about other cultures other than what they see in movies or on TV. The limitation of information about other cultures prevents the students from realizing that other cultures do exist and have similar historical experiences as their ancestors. This unit will help students see the similarities of the two cultures especially through the art of weaving and quilt making.

We will start the unit talking about Navajo art, specifically Navajo rug weaving. First, we will get to know some expert weavers by reading about them. We will discuss some of the struggles that weavers faced from different generations. For example, what are some struggles that weavers confronted before the Long Walk, after the Long Walk, and in modern times. Then we will talk about the struggles and perseverance of quiltmakers of Gees Bend, and finally about Faith Ringgold. In the third week, we will compare the and contrast the Navajo textile with African American Quilts and Ringgold's art pieces.

Content

Navajo Weavers

> One day when I came home from school, I heard my mother's soft voice floating down the hallway from the living room. When I entered the room, she motioned me to sit by her in front of the loom. She did not stop weaving and she did not stop singing. After a few minutes, I asked

> why she was weaving. She told me that as long as she had her loom, she was home-in Diné Bikéyah (Navajoland).
>
> "This is who we are," she said. "The loom connects me with the sacred mountains, and song connects me with my mother." She spent the next few hours telling me the story of how we, the Diné-the People- learned to weave.[4]

Weaving is an art where each rug is unique, and the design is distinct to an individual weaver. Navajo rugs, represent the enduring Navajo spirit in the face of historical changes. In the 19th century, the weavers herded their sheep, but also kept watch for coyotes, as well as soldiers. Most weavers endured the arduous Long Walk to Bosque Redondo where Navajos were held captive in 1864 in an attempted effort to ethnically cleanse the people by the United States government.

Upon their return from Bosque Redondo after the Treaty of 1868 was signed, the Navajos adapted their weaving by using new materials, new compositions, and the aesthetic designs.

Na'ashjé'ii Asdzáá and Na'ashjé'ii Hastiin

Na'ashjé'ii Asdzáá (Spider Woman) was entrusted by Diyin Dine'é (Holy People) to weave a pattern of the universe. At first, she did not know how to go about creating a universe with her weaving, so she observed her surroundings, especially the patterns of a spider web, for inspiration. Once she was ready with a plan, she presented it to her husband and the Holy People. The Holy People decided to enhance the weaving of the universe with prayers, songs, and ceremonial duties.

To continue her mission, Na'ashjé'ii Asdzáá was sent on a journey to visit the four Sacred Mountains to retrieve the tools she will need to weave. From the eastern mountain, Sisnaajiní (Blanca Peak in Colorado), she retrieved some wood to make a loom. From the southern mountain, Tsoodził (Mount Taylor in New Mexico), she harvested plants to use as dyes for the wool. From the Western Mountain, Dook'o'osłiid (San Francisco Peaks in Arizona), she asked the Thunder gods for patterns. Finally, from the last mountain, Dibé Nitsaa (Hesperus Peak in Colorado) she was given songs and prayers associated with all stages of weaving.[5]

When Na'ashjé'ii Asdzáá returned from her journey, she presented the wood for the loom to her husband, Na'ashjé'ii Hastiin (Spider Man). The Holy People instructed Na'ashjé'ii Hastiin how to construct a weaving loom and the weaving tools. The upper support beams and the lower support beam represent sky and Earth. The tension rods that hold the warps are made from sun rays. The shed rock and the heddle represent rock crystal and lightening. The wooden batten was made from the sun halo and the wooden comb was made from white shell. Finally, Na'ashjé'ii Hastiin created four spindles: one spindle represented the zigzag of a lightening, the second spindle represented a flash of lightening, the third spindle represented sheer lightening, and the fourth spindle represented a rain streamer.[6]

Na'ashjé'ii Asdzáá was instructed by the Diyin Dine'é or deities to teach the Navajos how to weave. In the glittering world, Changing Woman, Asdzáá Nádleeh, had twins, Monster Slayer and Born-of-Water, for Jóhonaa'éí. When the twins grew up, they decided to go on a journey to find their father. On this journey, the twins found a hole in the ground, so they climbed into the whole. They found Na'ashjé'ii Asdzáá weaving. By this time, Na'ashjé'ii Asdzáá had become a master weave who was fully immersed in the art. She was ready to teach the Navajos to weave to bring harmony and beauty into their lives. She gifted the Navajo Twin Warriors the knowledge of weaving to take back into the world. The gift of weaving was meant to prevent

starvation, maintain comfort, and keep families together. Navajos regard their ancestors, including maternal and paternal grandparents, as Spider Woman.[7]

In many families, weaving is a legacy. Weaving, including the songs and prayers, are passed down between grandparents, mothers, aunts, and sisters, and sometimes passed down to men. Each family weave a little differently. Weaving differs depending on the regional style or historical period style. Current weavers incorporate contemporary pop culture and abstract style. Regardless of the style of rug, it is a family's life's work because it represents a connection with the universe. It represents stories, prayers, and songs embedded and preserved in the weaving motions. All weavers have stories to tell about weaving, and every weaving has stories to tell about the weaver.[8]

History According to Western Culture

According to Western Historians, the aesthetics of Navajo rug designs reflected the cultural changes of the American Southwest. The artistic influences of the Pueblo Indians, Hispanics, and White American Trader impacted Navajo weavers.

Around the sixteenth century, when the Spaniards explorers first met the Navajos, they were nomadic hunters and gatherers. Weaving tapestries or textiles were not part of the culture. Two events, the Pueblo Revolt of 1860 and intermarriage of Pueblos and Navajos, led the Navajos to adopt and develop the art of weaving. Basic weaving techniques and looms were given to the Navajos by the Pueblos. They also inspired early Navajo weavers to use Pueblo-stripe designs, characteristic of early Navajo weaving. Early designs were characterized by simple stripes that were well proportioned. Navajo Chief Blankets were an example of these early designs. Once the Navajos mastered the stripe designs, they began to experiment with the striped designs by grouping the stripes into zones and included other design elements.

The new designs were inspired from Mexican blankets (serapes). Navajos have been exposed to Hispanic cultures since their arrival in the southwest. The weavers incorporated diamonds and bright colors into a new design called the eye-dazzler.

The greatest changes in Navajo weaving came with the arrival of American traders in the southwest. The American government issued out licenses for trading posts in 1870 after the newly resettled Navajo reservation. When the white Americans began establishing trading posts on the Navajo Reservation, their influence on Navajo art including textiles became more profound. The completion of the Santa Fe Railroad in 1880s provided a connection between the Navajo reservation and the American Marketplace. With the railroad system in place, trading posts were able to stock new weaving materials which included machine spun and chemically dyed yarn, and introduction to Pendelton blankets. The Navajo textiles were in jeopardy when the Pendelton blankets began to replace the Navajo made blankets.

With the near extinction of Navajo blanket weaving, reservation traders had to step in. Traders were aware that Oriental Rugs were popular on the east coast, so they advised the Navajos to weave floor rugs instead of blankets. Thanks to traders Lorenzo Hubbell of Ganado, Arizona, and J. B. Moore of Crystal, New Mexico, Navajo rugs became popular. The newly designed rugs included some Navajo designs and adaptation of some oriental designs. These types of rugs continue to be woven today.

Naiomi Glasses

When Naiomi Glasses first became a TikTocs star, it wasn't because she was recognized as a Navajo textile

artist, it was because she used social media to advocate for more skate parks on the Navajo Reservation. Her brother taught her to skate to deal with bullies who made fun of her bilateral cleft lip and palate. Her hobby inadvertently led to success on social media and success in her business.

What made her standout on social media was that she featured traditional Navajo fashion in her skateboarding. Her most memorable posts that went viral was of Naiomi skating on sandstone in her hometown of Rock Point, Arizona in her Navajo traditional attire. It logged more than 1.8 million views.[9] She got the attention of famous people like Tony Hawke and Jewel, who have pledge to build a transformative space for Diné Youth.[10] In addition, Naiomi was able to bring awareness to indigenous cultures. She uses her platform to shed light on the positive aspects of Diné life by modeling, skateboarding, or just being herself.

Turns out that Naiomi was a seventh-generation weaver who was taught by her grandmother, Nellie Glasses, and her brother, Tyler. When Naiomi was young, she would often watch her grandmother weave. To her, there was something magical and mesmerizing about the art. Her grandmother encouraged her to weave because weaving could be a way of life. She learned to weave by completing her grandmother's design. Once she established her abilities to weave, she started experimenting with her own designs. She allows herself the freedom to experiment with different designs.

At the age of 18, she started weaving as a career. She often sold her handwoven rugs to local trading posts. She used her money to pay for essentials like groceries and bills. As she became more experienced, she started exhibiting her rugs at Indian Markets like the Heard Museum or Santa Fe Indian Market. Her unique style included using vibrant colors. In addition, she started using social media to share her art, share techniques, and ideas. She often included snapshots of life on the reservation, which were informative and educational. The stunning pictures also provided Naiomi's personality. On her website, she describes that her vision is to bring the beauty of her culture and fashion sense to the world so everyone can understand her love for her Diné way of life. Her love for her culture is evident in all her designs, which have expanded to bags, floor rugs, blankets, and purses. The love for her Diné culture is at the core of every product she creates.[11]

Her TikTok post which featured her skateboarding on sandstone elevated her presences on social media. IN addition, it gravitated towards her rug weaving. She wanted her rugs to be in every household, but it was not feasible because it took almost a whole month to complete one rug.

Once she became a social media viral sensation, she was able to collaborate with companies like Sackcloth and Ashes, to make her rug designs more affordable and accessible. Her rug designs were the foundation for the machine-made blankets. She used 100% of her proceeds to support Chizh for Cheii, which was a nonprofit organization that provided free firewood to elders on the Navajo Reservation.

Naiomi has also collaborated with other companies who use her designs for other products like carpets, shoes, and clothing. Despite all the successes, she stays true to the techniques and designs she learned from her grandmother Nellie. Some designs include Saltillo diamonds, wedge weaves, and crosses. Her unique style uses vibrant colors.

An example of her work was a rug she wove in 2020 called "Dreaming of Turquoise." Her original woven piece was transformed into a factory-made floor rug. The rug incorporated turquoise color, the same color as Naiomi's favorite accessory. The rug was an interpretation of her turquoise jewelry.

Elder Master Weaver Martha Gorman Schultz

Elder Master Weaver Martha Gorman Schultz from Leupp, Arizona recalls living though the United States' Great Depression, Navajo Nation's Livestock Reduction, and the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the subsequent World War II. These events impacted her family tremendously. She recalls the rations of food, especially flour, coffee, sugar, salt, and raisins, which were basic essentials for a Navajo family. They had to supplement their food source by grounding dried corn to make their own flour, and substituted candy for sugar.

As a child, Martha grew up herding sheep, but she looked forward to attending school at Leupp Boarding School. However, her education was interrupted when the school closed to accommodate President Roosevelt's proclamation. It relocated and detained Japanese American in 1942. Martha's hometown was selected as one of the camps, especially for "problem inmates." Eighty men were detained in Leupp for offenses such as demonstrating or protesting. According to Martha, the United States government still owes her an education as promised in the Treaty of 1868.[12]

Martha learned how to weave at the age of 8 from her mother, Mary Gorman Clay, instead of going to school. Her first project was a 30" by 30" saddle blanket. She sold her first rug for two dollars to Leupp Trading Post. As years went by, Martha mastered traditional styles such as Crystal, Wide Ruins, Two Grey Hills, and her specialty – Storm Pattern.

The Storm Pattern is one of the older designs that tell a story. The Center of the design has four rectangles in each corner, and a central rectangle. The corner rectangles are connected to the central rectangle by a Zig Zag line. The design represents the storms of the growing season. The symbolisms in the pattern include the Four Sacred Mountains, lightning bolts, snowflakes, and water bugs. The rectangle in the four corners represent the Navajo Sacred Mountains: Sisnaajiní, Tsoodził, Dook'o'osłiid, and Dibé Nitsaa. The mountains lead to the center of the universe or home. There are often electrical charges above and below the Hogan (home for Navajos), and representation of lightning rods on left and right side. Water beetles are often represented above and below the Hogan. Sheep was an important animal for Navajo people and to the culture because it is a source of food, a source of income, and most importantly a sheep provided wool. [13]

Spider Woman's Son Gilbert Nez Begay

Balance is an important concept in the Navajo Universe. That balance extends to family and kinship roles, and the roles emulate the forces of nature that exhibit female energy or male energy. We need a balance of both energies to create harmony and beauty. When it comes to creating Navajo textiles, it is assumed that Navajo women are the only weavers. However, male weavers have always been part of our culture.

Today, there are fewer male weavers, but they achieve the same quality of rugs as their female counterparts. Gilbert Nez Begay from Crownpoint, New Mexico is one of the few male expert weavers on the reservation. He carried on the legacy of rug weaving that was passed down to him from both his maternal grandmother and paternal grandmother.

His paternal grandmother was a weaver who specialized in Teec Nos Pos Style, Two Grey Hills style, and Yei rugs. When Gilbert was a boy, he herded sheep with his grandmother near Shiprock. While they were herding sheep, she would tell Gilbert stories, while she spindled wool as the sheep grazed. One story she loved to tell was about the pound rug. Around 1900-1930, traders would trade rugs by the pound. The Rug weavers outsmarted the traders by adding fine dirt into the rug so they would weigh more. Unfortunately, traders caught on and told the weavers to bring in clean rugs.[14]

Gilbert's maternal grandmother, Julia C. Thompson, from Mariano Lake, New Mexico was another mentor who taught him how to weave when he was eleven years old. She specialized in Gallup throw rugs, and Crystal style rugs. She taught him everything she knew and often corrected him when he made mistakes.

Today he is a part-time weaver who continues to spend his spare time weaving. He can weave about two inches per day. Each project can take anywhere from two weeks to three months, depending on the size and quality of the rug. In between projects he prepares yarn using wool from the Navajo Sheep Project.

His unique style is the two-face weaving, a weft faced double weave. Two-face style have completely different patterns on each side. This type of weaving is very rare and weavers who know this style are very protective of the technique. In fact, when Gilbert learned this technique from his grandmother's neighbor, it was on the condition that he would not teach another person. The other condition was that he had to learn it in one lesson, all verbal instructions. Gilbert had to figure out the technique by doing fancy math to get the two patterns of twill to come out even.

His other specialty includes multiple twill, and diamonds. When he starts weaving, he usually does not plan them out in advance. He makes up the design as he goes using an array of patterns and pattern combinations that he learned from both grandmothers. His mastery in weaving has also allowed him to branch out to other areas of weaving. He uses his weaving skills to design rug dresses, rug vests, horse cinches, handbags, sash belts, and other functioning apparel.[15]

Quilt Makers

> *We was taught there's so many different ways to build a quilt. You can start with a bedroom over there, or a den over here, and just add on until you get what you want. Ought not two quilts can be the same. You might use exactly the same material, but you would do if different. A lot of people make quilts just for your bed for to keep you warm. But a quilt is more. It represents safekeeping, it represents beauty, and you could say it represents family history.*
>
> Mensie Lee Pettyway, qtd. In Arnet

Quilt making tradition by African American can be traced back to colonial days. Some scholars suggest that the quilts do share certain qualities like they are colorful, casually assembled, symmetrically pieced together. The unique characteristics of African American quilts is that there is no uniform look; they are diverse in styles and techniques.[16] Some are refined and subtle, and others rugged and rough. Some use vivid colors, and still some use mute colors. Some use patterns and blocks, while others had unusual patterns that they did not look like quilts. The important thing to understand about quilts is that it focuses on that particularly well-established tradition in black culture: storytelling. Black quilters tend to gravitate to the narrative form which tell of homes and families. Some document the history of the communities and political events. [17]

Quilt Makers of Gee's Bend

The quilts serve different purposes including keeping the family warm, or representing safekeeping, beauty, and family history. The quilts came into the national and international spotlight recent (2000) as works of art thanks to William Arnet. The quilts were considered a work of art and began being exhibited in museums. The art was interpreted as "modernist, abstract, painterly use of color and brilliant designing of left-over

materials." The quilts themselves use symbols to tell stories and pass down philosophical knowledge which some believe equate to demonstrate the power of a needle to a pen. In other words, the quiltmakers embed stories using the design of the quilts just like writing a story in a book using a pen. The tradition of Gee's Bend date back to the 19th century. The quilts were influenced by Native American textiles (possibly Cherokees) and African textiles. Originally, the quilts were made for necessity; sewing together pieces of any scrap of materials and cloths to keep warm in unheated shacks. Eventually, they developed a distinct style where it did not follow a prescribed pattern, but rather figured out how to piece together sacks, pieces of old clothes, and other cloths into a quilt into simple geometric shapes.

Many quilters in Gee's Bend area have passed down quilting to their children and grandchildren. Little girls would listen to stories as they watch their grandmothers piecing the quilts together. Some quilters easily recall the time and events of when a quilt was made. For example, a Annie Mae Young recalled doing a quilt during the Civil Rights Movement of 1965 just by looking at a photograph of a quilt she made from strips torn from a well-worn shirt and polyester pants. She even recalled the heavy rain they experienced on a winter night in 1965. She took a break from her quilting to attend a speech and march by Martin Luther King in front of a jailhouse. While waiting for King's arrival they were slapping and singing in anticipation. However, they were placed in jail before anything happened.

Faith Ringgold

Faith Ringgold was born in Harlem, a section of New York City in 1930. Her family included her mother, Willie Edell Jones and Andrew Louis Jones, Sr. She was also had two siblings: a brother, Andrew Jr. and a sister, Barbara. When Faith was growing up, other family members would often live with them in the four-room apartment. Her mother often stood guard over the kids to make sure that the visitors did not kiss them by the mouth. Tuberculosis epidemic was running rampant in the United States in 1930s. Despite the epidemic, visitors were always welcome to dinner. The highlight of dinner was often the conversations. Her father was an effective speaker and actor. It was unforgettable about how daddy delivered his stories effectively.[18] Even after mother put the children to bed, the children would often have their own conversations. Andrew often told outlandish stories which often included a boogie man story to scare the sisters. He was a talented storyteller.[19]

Ringgold and her siblings grew up in a time when there weren't any televisions or computers. Reading books and listening to the radio were used as a form of entertainment. Storytelling and listening to the radio were Ringgold's favorite form of entertainment. Listening to her favorite shows would allow her to sharpen her imagination. Sunday nights drew the family together to listen to their favorite radio shows - The Shadow, Amos and Andy, Jack Benny, and Rochester. Faith and her sibling would sit in front of the radio with their ears press to the speakers to listen to the show and let their imagination run wild. In her imagination, Faith believed that the characters in the radio shows were little, tiny people who lived in the radio.

Around the age of two, Ringgold had her first asthma attack. Asthma made it hard to breath. Gasping for breath was the most frightening experience for her. She believed her mother when she told her that no one had ever died from asthma. However, her mother was more careful with her. She understood that a certain diet had to be followed which included steaming the vegetables, broiling, baking, or boiling the meat. Her entire family had to change their diets as well to accommodate her special diet.

Because Ringgold had asthma, she spent a lot of time at home from kindergarten and first grade. She was taught by her mother at home. On the days that she was recovering from asthma attacks, her mom would

prop her up in bed while she did housework. Ringgold would read, write, draw, or color in bed. She couldn't remember a time when she was not making art. Having asthma was perfect for making art.[20]

While her siblings are in school, Ringgold and her mom would visit museums and parks to see paintings and prints. Sometimes they went shopping. Other days they went to see stage shows at the Paramount Theater, Roxy Theater, or Apollo Theater. Stages performances included big named starts, like Louis Armstrong or Duke Armstrong, bands, comics, dance acts, or singers.

Ringgold has always loved art, so much so that she declared to major in Art in the School of Liberal Arts at City College. Unfortunately, she found out that she could not declare a major in liberal arts because she was a woman. Because she was determined to get an art degree, she found an alternative way to get a degree in art. Instead of fighting the school, she registered in School of Education, majoring in art and minoring in education.[21] This was the only way to get the degree she wanted. Although competition was intense at City College, she adapted by loving to compete. She began to learn art techniques and try out new materials in her spare time. She also took drawing and oil painting. Her most memorable moment was when she was encouraged by a male professor with a southern drawl encouraged her to give him a change to teach her. Her only experience with male with a southern drawl were the people who did not believe in equal rights for Blacks. Despite this encouraging incident, many more teachers discouraged her from being an artist. One particular teacher thought she couldn't draw so she told her to label her art so people would know what she was drawing. Thankfully, she never gave up.[22]

Ringgold finally decided to take her art seriously in 1960 so she took her collections of paintings that featured trees and flowers in "French" colors. However, her artwork was rejected because she did not have a style or inspiration. She decided to try again in 1963 with a series called "Super Realism." This time her art would center on the Civil Rights Movement and the events related to Blacks at that time. The first set of paintings was the American People Series. She wanted her painting to reflect the Civil Rights Movements from a woman's point of view. She spent a lot of time trying to find her voice, talking to herself through art, to communicate with others. However, art critics and galleries felt that her artwork was too extreme. Her exhibition was described as limiting itself to the study of black values.[23]

Ringgold's art was influenced by studying the styles of old master artists like Leonardo De Vinci and Vincent Van Gogh. In addition, she was drawn into African Art so she learned about it, specifically the patterns and colors and rhythms. Eventually she started experimenting with other art medium including prints, masks, soft sculptures, mosaic, and author. She always wanted to create art based on her life and experiences as an African American woman living in New York.

Bisa Butler

Bisa Butler was born in Orange, New Jersey. She grew up as the youngest daughter of a French teacher and College President. She developed her interest in art at a young age. In fact, she won her first art competition when she was just four years old. She graduated from Columbia High School in 1991. Butler majored in fine arts at Howard University. Her chosen art medium in college was painting, but she felt that it was not for her. Eventually, she started working with fabric and making collages. She was inspired to use quilting as an art medium when she worked for her master's degree in Montclair State University. When she was a child, she watched her mother and grandmother sew quilts. They taught her how to sew, and she had been quilting since. For her final project she replicated a photo using quilting format, a new form of quilting.[24] She is using a quilting method to create powerful portraits of African men and women. Instead of a paint brush and canvas,

she is using needle and vibrant colored fabrics to create her portraits. Her subject matter is chosen from historical or vintage photographs that are transformed so much in her artistry that the original photo transformed through cloth and colors. Butler remains keenly aware of her inextricable connection to the rich cultural heritage of quilt production that has informed American identity more broadly and African American identity in particular.[25]

When Butler started off as an artist, quilt making was not considered as fine art, but rather a craft. According to Bisa Butler, she believed that historically, quilt making was often marginalized because it was work of women and work of people of color. Furthermore, it was considered as domestic labor[26] .

However, her portrait quilts have changed how quilts are viewed as craft to art. Her objective is for quilts to tell a story using Kente, which is a special hand-woven cloth using strips of silk and cotton. Her subjects are often decorated with cloth of African American ancestors. She incorporates African textiles, but also expands on quilting traditions.

Butler's portrait quilt captures the stories of who people are and who they want to be[27] . Her subjects are real life figures of African American people she finds online and in databases. She tries to give them back their identity by capturing their stories and transforming them into quilts. In the process of making the quilt, she makes sure she takes care of her subjects. Her artwork creates an intimacy because the subjects appear to be looking at you. This intimacy begins a conversation between the subject and the observer. When people look at her artwork, she wants them to see the humanities in it. The message to everyone is that we are all human beings who have the same wants, desires, love, and fears. When black people see her art, she wants them to see themselves, and realize that she recognizes who they are. They are the same.[28]

Strategies

Notice and Wonder

Notice and Wonder is a tool to formatively assess students' prior knowledge, understanding, and experiences about a topic that is being introduced. The strategy is designed to elicit student thinking and encourage them to ask relevant questions. A teacher often uses a short clip, a picture, or a short text to introduce the topic. The first step is to ask students what they notice about the first, then they fill in the "I Notice" column, located on the left column. They can write down as many details as they can in the first column. The students write relevant questions about the item or topic in the "I Wonder" column in question format. The next part is to consolidate the ideas from the Notice and Wonder chart. The teachers and students revisit the chart at the end of the lesson to summarize learning.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Students come to the classroom with diverse backgrounds and learning styles and can be challenging. The objective of culturally responsive teaching is to link content with students' traditional and ancestral background. According to Marcus Guido, learning is more meaningful and more stimulating for a child if the child has some knowledge or has lived through the experience. Furthermore, elements of culturally relevant teaching significantly increase academic outcomes and increases confidence in cultural identity. Some

questions to ask include: Where do you come from? What do your parents/ guardians do? What's your favorite afterschool activity? Whatever information is collected on the students can be utilized in lessons that include the student's culture. Other options to consider include involving parents and especially promote positive media or art portrayals.[29]

Growth Mindset

Marcus Guido states that the value of effort, persistence, and risk taking in a child's learning environment are the focus of growth mindset for students in the classroom. It's also important to try new things and new concepts. Some best practices include giving positive feedback, promote a diverse classroom, and encourage goal-based journaling. When giving positive feedback, it's important to praise students' effort like when they try new methods or make new plans. Diversity in the classroom means allowing students to share and respect the perspectives of all learners. Setting goals is a good way for students to reflect on progress.[30]

Tell Picture Stories

Another strategy suggested by Ginger Abbot is adding visual components into classroom learning is a great strategy to incorporate into the art classroom. In addition, teachers can incorporate pantomime across subject areas to keep students interested in interpreting art. Students can be given a visual art and asked to tell a story about it. This would be a useful strategy to use for art portraits, quilts, and pictorial rugs.[31]

Activities

Strip and Tease – Observing Details

In this activity, the cover of the book *Katie Henio Navajo Sheepherder* with small strips of paper. Ask the students: What do you notice about the book? Do you know what the book is about? Are there any details that is observable? The taped pieces of paper will be removed one at a time revealing more details. Each time a piece of paper is removed, students will be asked to talk about the details. Once all the pieces are removed it will reveal a Navajo grandmother standing in the middle of the corral with her sheep. Why is sheep important to the Navajos? In Navajo culture, sheep is used for several things, including food, using the skin for bedding, and using wool for weaving.

Compare and Contrast

I will read Faith Ringgold's *Tar Beach* to the students. The story in the book takes place in New York in 1939. Tar Beach refers to the roof of Cassie's Harlem apartment building where her family spend time relaxing on hot summer nights. In the story, the character dream to be free and go wherever she wants. One day it comes true when the stars help her to fly across the city. The children will explore the theme of 'freedom' and do so by creating their own story. What does freedom mean to them? What does freedom mean to the character? How are the students like the character?

Paper Quilt Art

Since Faith Ringgold has a painting with the same title as the book, students will study the painting to see if

they notice any designs. The painting itself combines painting, quilt-making, fictional narrative, and autobiography in a single art form. Students will be encouraged children to create an art piece about a dream where they master their own world by flying over it, to soar high and follow their dreams. They will also be encouraged to add people who encourage them to fly, and cultural ideas and pieces that add meaning to their journey.

Resources

Youtube video, *Getting to know Faith Ringgold,* Is an autobiography about the life of Faith Ringgold in kid friendly format. This video would be great to show to students to show the author of *Tar Beach*. Furthermore, it also shows the obstacles Faith overcame to become a famous art. It ties in the theme of dreams and freedom. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSkk4fdw3Z8)

Spider Woman's Children Navajo Weavers Today by Lydia Teller Pete and Barbara Teller Ornelas is an anthology of expert Diné textile weavers whose artwork have been passed down through numerous generations. The eclectic weavers share stories of families, oral history, and weaving methods. This book is great resource for teachers who want to learn more about Navajo weavers from the experts themselves.

How to Weave A Navajo Rug and Other Lessons from Spider Woman by Lydia Teller Pete and Barbara Teller Ornelas is a great resource for teachers who want to learn how to weaver from master Navajo weavers. The stories and lessons in the book resonate in Navajo culture.

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

The unit will cover the following Academic Standards recommended for 2nd Grade by Arizona Department of Education. 2.RL.5 Describe the overall structure of a story, including how the beginning introduces the story and the ending concludes the action. This standard goes well with storytelling. Students will need to be able to retell stories about themselves.

In addition, the following Academic Standards will be covered: 2.RL.6 Acknowledge differences in the points of view of characters, including by speaking in a different voice for each character when reading dialogue aloud. This standard will especially be used when students recall information in Faith Ringgold's *Tar Beach,* and *Katie Henio Navajo Sheepherder* by Peggy Thomson.

Finally, Navajo Nation Department of Dine Education has their own standards that schools on the Navajo Reservation must implement. PO 3. States that students will recognize cultural items and jewelry. Navajo textile is considered a cultural item. This standard describes how the students will develop an understanding of the Diné way of life. Navajo textiles are important cultural items that some families still depend on for their income.

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