

Inquiry and Assessment: A Journey of Dissent

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Our strategy should be not only to confront Empire, but to lay siege to it.
To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music,
our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer
relentlessness-and our ability to tell our own stories.

– Arundhati Roy, *War Talk*

INTRODUCTION

Dissent is described in the *Oxford Dictionary* as the expression of differences in opinion or a show of nonconformity. If we were to describe our students as individuals who disagree, oppose, rebel, dispute, differ or balk, we would find it difficult to get any teacher rushing to educate our class. As an educator, I have spent a great deal of time and effort instilling order and efficiency in the management of my class. In my initial perception of teachers, I was under the misguided assumption that my primary role was to bring order to the chaos inherent in a classroom full of children. In my early years as a teacher, I considered the role of disciplinarian as the only role available to instruct children and provide the information they were required to learn. I assessed their ability to grasp the information and sought confirmation on how well they had learned the lesson. Any act of dissent by students was considered equivalent to questioning my authority, something that diminished my stature as the teacher. With experience and the help of my students and wiser colleagues, I have come to understand that part of my own nature, much like those of the children I work with, is to question, disagree, dispute, differ, and balk. It is my natural response to events or people when I'm confused, contradicted, or when I want to hold own firmly to the way I see the world. It happens when my comfort level is threatened or even at times when I simply want to "rock the boat." But most important to me, it also happens under authentic learning circumstances. In fact, it is when I'm engaged in thoughtful exchange of divergent views that I stretch my mental horizons, allowing myself to see things I was not capable of seeing on my own. If violent conflict arose (such as found in power struggles), I found that conflict was not the result of dissent but rather the result of my response to the process of inquiry. It was my emotional reaction to questioning that determined the tone of the exchange. If I attacked the thought or the individual, there was rarely any exchange of ideas. Instead, I would be engaged in unpleasant attack and defensive modes of communication, where the intent was not to learn from a different perspective but rather to defeat the opposing view.

Disagreements happen all the time, but if we create a safe frame around them, we can use it as an opportunity to gain a different perspective. This is not to say we will

understand the new point of view but maybe we will “agree to disagree,” and proceed to listen to a different perspective.

In the present, as well as the past, unresolved disagreement or conflict has a tendency to lead to violence. From the playground to international armed conflict, the results can include great loss to human dignity and human life. When I speak to my students of history, the changes in civil attitudes and laws have not always resulted from “polite” discourse. Ideas on slavery, civil rights, and wars have not been issues where individuals have been found to agree readily. In looking at the way societies change (if they seem to do so), questions arise. What possibility does a society have for growth if dissent is encouraged, and to what degree is dissent possible before disruption caused by dissent begins to harm society? I’m not convinced I know the answer but discourse on the topic may help clarify the issue and the discourse would be richer if varying points of view are presented. This could sound like dissent.

Dissidence might be healthy response to some situations. Certainly, when we question, or doubt the validity of what we are told, we are engaged in a form of learning. Dissidence, however, can lead to conflict, and if not resolved, it can lead to violence and struggle. When differences of opinion arise, I find that it is most useful to search for commonality instead of trying to focus on the differences. The honest need to coexist is what in the end turns these disagreements into true learning, eye-opening moments where I can go “AH!” These moments can be found in many classrooms, but with a population of teenagers, it has its own special “AH!”

Walk into a middle school class, and you will likely feel the energy that accompanies young adolescents in their journey to adulthood. Middle school reflects that special time in one’s life where we question and wonder about the ideas, thoughts and norms we have taken for granted. It is a time where we no longer accept the adult world as all knowing. Growing up, there are many events in our personal lives where adults make mistakes. As adults, they remind us of human frailty. According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), there is a great variance in the rate of individual development in this period of child development. This variance is reflected in their intellectual, emotional, social and physical development. According to NASSP (1) we could possibly see the following characteristics in our adolescents:

- Impulsive in actions and impatient with restrictions.
 - Preoccupied with popularity and self-conscious about appearance.
 - Deeply influenced by mass media and responsive to fads.
 - Plagued by mood swings and subject to forgetfulness and boredom.
 - Assertive in independence and moved by competitive situations.
 - Charged with energy, confused by self-doubt, and fearful of failure.
 - Embarrassed by social customs and veneered with “wisecracks.”
- (NASSP)

It would be with this wonderful *mélange* of ingredients that I hope to set a healthy environment for dissent. In reading Maxwell and Meiser's book "Teaching English in Middle and Secondary Schools", my personal goal in the classroom is eloquently described by the following words:

...we must provide both a model of personal integrity and opportunities for students to explore their beliefs and values. Through literature, classroom drama, and writing, for example, students can safely explore themselves and their world, find people to admire, and see beyond the limits of their present situation. Students also need a classroom environment that encourages and respects the range of human emotions. (Maxwell and Meiser 4)

I would like to create an environment that promotes reflection while at the same time honors the needs of students to better understand the world around them. During adolescence, youngsters need to construct a sense of personal identity, and they do so by trying on selves, for self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-definition (Calkins 158). One way to provide the space and time for students to exercise their need for self-discovery is to use writing as a method to analyze their thoughts and those of others. As Steven Zemelman and Harvey Daniels say in *A Community of Writers*,

After all, in learning to write students are invited – compelled, really – to make sense of the world to weigh ideas, to explore values, to find their own conventions, to invent voice, styles, personae on a page – and then to test everything out by communicating with others, sharing writing, and exchanging responses. (3)

In her book, *In the Middle*, Nancie Atwell has my full agreement when she states:

Middle school students look for in school what matters in life; they don't look at school as a place to *get ready for* what matters in life. Social relationships matter in life and in spite of our view of adolescents' social needs as a distraction from our agendas as teachers, adolescents nonetheless figure out how to work out their need in school. In large part they come to school in order to *work out* their social needs. (6)

All the students I work with bring their own stories and experiences. In my eyes, they constitute an array of wealthy treasure coves waiting to be explored. Although most come from immigrant parents, their own view of the world seems to come from a perspective shaped by their age and cultural background. They struggle to take into account a larger reality, one that is not apparent from their own immediate surroundings. As I listen to their relaxed conversations and perspectives, I find myself asking how their views help shape my own experiences. I find it intriguing to step out of myself and observe the relationships that begin to form with this type of conversations. We begin to forge new ways to shape our relationships with others, trying out ideas and exploring each other's

point of view. I welcome their disagreements with my ideas but I don't always find it comfortable. Yet, it is this very discomfort that challenges my own values and requires some form of shift in my way of thinking. I am constantly reminded of my good fortune. As a traveler of human societies, I have been privileged to interact with people of diverse cultures and perspectives. I have always felt these experiences to be instrumental teachers in my capacity to see the world through many eyes. Different perspectives have not always brought about understanding, but it has facilitated my journey through the realm of empathy. I wish to share this sort of journey with my students. Although I cannot physically remove them from Houston, we can share a journey of the mind to help us explore the world around us, and the some of the underlying notions that support our way of life. It is in this spirit that I would like to begin the quest for understanding. "Why bother?" This sort of question demands our attention in as much as it asks us to place value in the effort, worth and consequence of our quest. Although it is only the beginning of the many crossroads in our path, I feel most students will pursue such quests in their endeavor to recognize the nature of human curiosity.

In this unit, I hope to give students the experiences necessary to ask themselves questions, assess the value of the question as well as the myriad of answers they might find in order to formulate their final opinion. I hope to facilitate in the construction of a rubric by which they can judge for themselves the value of the work they do. In an age where your cross section of students in the classroom at an urban school in Houston will more than likely contain a variety of cultures and backgrounds, I feel it is important to allow the development of voice in order that silence should not be taken as the only response available to middle school students. Fortier speaks of the importance of oral language as the neglected language Arts. For most of our students speech is a form of communication we don't much allow students to practice. Knowing not all students have the same level of oral language competency (in part due to the developmental nature of oral language acquisition) (Fortier 2-6), students need a variety of varied and purposeful experiences in oral language communication.

"This means shifts from familiar audiences and contexts to more distant ones, as well as the opportunities to share feelings, entertain, give information, and persuade. Each of these purposes has its own problem relative to audience and setting; therefore, students would learn to solve diverse communication problems. Our responsibility is to create these contexts, everything from role playing to group activities, from conferencing to public speaking before an entire class." (Fortier 5)

We will follow "The Shared Inquiry Method of Learning," the educational philosophy of The Great Books Foundation. The Great Books Foundation web site states the following about their method:

Shared inquiry is a distinctive method of learning in which participants search for answers to fundamental questions raised by a text. This search is inherently

active; it involves taking what the author has given us and trying to grasp its full meaning, to interpret or reach an understanding of the text in light of our experience using sound reason.

The success of the shared inquiry method depends on a special relationship between the leader and the group. As a shared inquiry leader, you do not impart information or present your own opinions, but guide participants in reaching their own interpretations.

In considering the present and past state of world conflict, in watching the violence that is portrayed in films, news casts, history and in our daily living through life, I marvel at our human capacity to both live and die so passionately. In thinking of lives lost in the pursuit of ideals or gain, I wonder what legacy future generations will contend with to make their own present and future more favorable to the planet. Although I believe in history's cycles, and what at times seem like the inevitable show of human tragedies, I'm inspired by human frailties and strengths to accept as true the amazing possibility of growth at a personal level. I no longer hope for the world to change, as much as I hope for myself to change, and in that I mean to grow wiser so that my own personal perspective gives me more peace. With this frame of mind, I believe my to better my contribution to the state of world. I hope to make our children more responsible world citizens than previous generations were, and with them lay the foundation of inquiry. My parting thoughts on the issue of dissent, inquiry, assessment and value are reflected in Thich Nhat Hanh words on the issue of peace:

True peace is always possible. Yet it requires strength and practice, particularly in times of great difficulty. To some, peace and nonviolence are synonymous with passivity and weakness. In truth, practicing peace and nonviolence is far from passive. To practice peace, to make peace alive in us, is to actively cultivate understanding, love, and compassion even in the face of misperception and conflict. Practicing peace, especially in times of war, requires courage. (1)

UNIT BACKGROUND

This unit will be taught as an ancillary class. It will be offered to seventh and eighth graders. At this point of their academic careers they would have had enough exposure to history and information to start to understand that view points differ, sometimes dramatically so. This leads to conflict of sorts and the methods use to resolve conflict inherently reflect the values of those involved in the conflict.

The United States has a history that is rich in moments and events that exemplify dissent. In some ways, it seems that the possibility of dissent is in part responsible for the capacity for change and possibly for progress. The American history student textbook by Glencoe/McGraw Hill introduces us to American history by presenting the first Americans and their discovery by Christopher Columbus. It discusses the many reasons

Europeans had to travel to the Americas and the impact they had on the natives already living there. Our interpretation of such events and the outcome of such actions provide room for dissent and disagreement in our interpretation of the information. After a description of Colonial America, we study the way the colonies grow and how new ideas of governance begin to take root in people's minds. We begin to hear the familiar names of our forefathers and the paving of the road towards American Independence. Considering all the events that led to the American Revolution, one can still say that they reflect the actions of individuals who followed their ideals at the cost of possible death. Certainly for the British Empire, losing control over the colonies must have dealt a fierce blow to their sense of identity and their capacity to hold on to their territories. Even though I would like to think that with time, history does a better job of showing us a bigger truth, this itself may not always be true when we remind ourselves of who is writing the history. This time frame is very interesting because if children can place themselves within this time, and in different camps of the conflict, it would be easy to see how each side could be in disagreement as to the resolution of such conflict. My intent is to explore how time, place and perspective limit our understanding of the larger truth. In order to promote discussion, two films will be used following the format laid out by Charles Sauter in HTI's curriculum units.

After this review of past event, we will discuss the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights. The Constitution will be studied using the guided discussion set up by Cathy Travis' book *Constitution Translated for Kids*. Here discussion and oral presentations will play a crucial role. The students should become acquainted with a few of the amendments and the reasons behind them. I will emphasize the nature of change and the influence that current events hold in the perception of the people. It will also be important to emphasize that even when decisions are made that affect the whole nation, it is not always representative of its entire population. This would lead to the discussion of how a society works with or allows dissent to occur if it allows it at all; what perils would a nation face if it tried to eradicate all expressions of dissent; while also considering the possibility of full dissent and some of its darker consequences.

In this first part of the course, it will be important to give students the opportunity to voice opinion and to begin the process of evaluating their own statements. The intent is to deviate from the more traditional method of assessment (quizzes, exams and evaluation of the teacher) resulting in a grade average. If students are held accountable for their learning, it is important to give them a say in how they will be evaluated. It makes sense for them to be active participants in this process and that the final evaluation should be a collaboration between the facilitator (teacher), and the participations (both peers and self).

Collaboration will be strongly stressed and assessed by all participants. The intention is to provide a forum where diversity of opinions is welcomed but within a framework of common ground established by those that participate. I hope to engage the students in writing exercises that allow them to explore their thinking and also document the process.

It will serve as a starting point of discussion. They will need to understand that language is a tool both for communicating with an audience and for self-exploration. The effort will be made to foster meaningful and wide ranging conversations by recruiting diverse representatives of the student body. Diversity of experiences will be welcome, both reflecting a wide range of histories of academic success and challenges. Because classes follow a 90-minute block period, we should be able to allow enough time for reflective writing to take place before and after discussion of topics.

OVERVIEW

The activities outlined below will follow a six-week cycle. We will begin the unit by discussing the American Revolution. At this stage in their academic career, most students that have been in this country have been exposed to the 4th of July and should have had some exposure to the notion of Independence Day and the Revolutionary war. My hope at this point is to offer some historical background to the Declaration of Independence and the writing of the Constitution. This should provide the opportunity to discuss and experience the ideas that anything revolutionary requires dissent or inability to conform to previous status. That mostly there is a recognized need by sufficient individuals who share a common goal and are willing to fight to obtain it. That dissent is generally justified by cultural/ethical framework that allows those that participate in activities of dissent to justify their actions for a greater and common good. The fact that they are in confrontation with a more powerful entity (one that helps maintain the unacceptable circumstance) seems to indicate that there are at least two opposing views on the same issue.

From change in status quo comes about a need to try to create a new way to do things to safeguard from going back to the old ways and to guarantee that those ideas that were fought for have a space in the new regime. The success of the new may at least in the circumstances of the USA depends on the writing of the Constitution to safeguard the very rights that were fought for. We will follow the method of Inquiry based on open questions. The intent is not to come up with the right answer but rather to provide a space or opportunity to safely discuss points of view in particular to give voice to those we might find different from our own. Although each individual will be required to assess and evaluate their thought process, it is not with the intent to convince others but rather provide a scope of diverging view points that can be examined without feeling threatened.

After discussing the Declarations of Rights, we will move to an activity where we can discuss our own classroom constitution, and declaration of rights and responsibilities. At this point we will work together to form our own Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities. They will have the opportunity to decide whether it should be “written in stone” or if the spirit of our own declaration needs to reflect what our class believes in and their commitment to protect what they value. My role as the adult will be to ensure that although they are given freedom to express, I am accountable for their safety and

must abide by the laws of the land. This will be the larger framework from which we will construct our classroom laws. I believe it is important for them to understand that adults are also constrained by laws to ensure safety and co-existence with other members of society.

The third part of this unit will contain my own personal bias, and I will present it as such. What I hope to model is my need to hear different opinions on the matter so that I may better understand what I value. I will warn them that I'm not trying to convince them of my own thoughts but would hope the dialogue would be taken as an opportunity to voice theirs and begin to formulate their own ideas on the topic. There will be no one right answer.

I believe that the American Revolution was a violent form of dissent. Whether justified or not, that is for each one of us to answer. I do believe there are other forms of dissent that do not promote violence and have proven to be effective in their own right. I would like to expose peaceful forms. We will compare war as the ultimate form of protest and peace as a way of seeing the world. My own biases will be exposed. Again, I will let the children understand that this is my personal viewpoint and as such does not reflect the school or any other group. However, they are welcomed to express their point of view along with the questions and answers. I hope the discussion and framework will allow them to think about their own opinions.

We will study Nobel Peace prize winners that include Martin Luther King and the Dalai Lama. There will be writings from Mahatma Gandhi and Thich Nhat Hanh.

The reading strategies that I will share with my students reflect the seven key strategies described in *Teaching Reading in Middle School* written by Laura Robb. In describing how readers activate prior knowledge, she uses Rosenblatt to explain how a reader uses prior knowledge, information and experiences stored in the mind to comprehend a text:

According to Rosenblatt, during reading a reader integrates this personal knowledge with the author's words, creating an original text. To every text, a reader brings his/her personality, present mood, and memories, making each person's experience of a text as unique as a fingerprint...

Doing the "prep work" before students read a book or study a topic also enables the teacher to discover and reflect on what the students know about the topic. If students' background knowledge is limited, building additional knowledge prior to reading will improve comprehension and engagement. (Robb 3)

The second strategy is that of deciding what is important in a text. Using prior knowledge and determining the purpose helps students develop this strategy. The third strategy Robb discusses is the ability to synthesize information. This ability is reflected in

their capacity to determine the main idea and choose the points that relate to that idea. I particularly find this useful when discussing a text or issue because helps keep the discussion to points being made circumventing the risk of straying to far from the topic at hand. The fourth and fifth strategy involves drawing inferences during and after reading, and self-monitoring, respectively. These help determine possible motivation and personality of characters and/or author. In self-monitoring of comprehension, students are alert to the fact that their interpretation may not be shared by everyone who reads the text. They themselves may run into difficulty in understanding what the author is trying to say. This leads to the sixth strategy, that of repairing faulty comprehension. The seventh, requires asking the questions before, during and after the reading (3-9).

All these strategies also support a way of learning. I hope the students to use them not only when reading but also when discussing points of view and ideas.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

A Pair of Revolutionary War Movies

There will be at least two movies shown. One is *Revolution* (1985), directed by Hugh Hudson, and the other will be *The Patriot* (2000), directed by Roland Emmerich, both employ big name stars. In particular, we will spend time initially with *The Patriot* to discuss the merits of films as historical documents. Sauter explains:

The Patriot takes place in South Carolina in 1776. Benjamin Martin, the hero, and I do not use the term lightly, owns a rather idyllic plantation. A widower with a veritable litter of children, he beneficently lords it over his small realm. When the Colonial Assembly convenes in Charles Town, he attends with his family. While there, his eldest son joins the Continental Army against his father's wishes, after which Martin returns to his home only to find that the war has followed. One particularly dastardly British officer shoots and kills Martin's second eldest son. From there, Martin is implacably drawn into the violence he wishes to avoid. In one unbelievable scene he wipes out an entire column of Redcoats with only the help of his two youngest, pre-adolescent sons. He quickly becomes the leader of a band of guerilla style militiamen who harass Lord Cornwallis' Redcoats more efficiently than Bugs Bunny ever tortured Elmer Fudd. Indeed, Martins exploits border on the cartoonish. At one point he tricks Cornwallis into believing he holds as prisoners captured British officers that none of the British seem to know about. Fair enough, these things can happen in war. The problem is he has them standing within sight of the British encampment, and, of course, the officers turn out to be nothing more than scarecrows dressed in uniform. Cornwallis, the epitome of gullibility, conveniently looks at them only through a spyglass and promptly swallows all this without blinking. Truly, how could the colonists lose a war against such simpletons? Consequently, the British resort to evermore ruthless actions to bring to heel the evermore successful Martin. This, in

conjunction with Martin's (and by proxy, the filmmakers') supposed distaste for the horrors of war, conveniently justifies the violence in the movie. At one and the same time, the movie declaims the evil of war and then goes on to graphically depict the violence, effectively glorifying it. Does it sound like I do not like the movie? Well, the truth is I have a love/hate relationship with it. (Sauter)

In typical Mel Gibson fashion, he stars in a movie that is a study of stark contrasts. The time frame is a good one to have students analyze and discuss. Although the movie is not always historically accurate, discovering these points will be useful for students. Hopefully, they will also understand that Hollywood films are rarely the best source of truth. As Sauter says, "Ultimately, it benefits me more, as a teacher, to approach a movie like this as an opportunity to discuss something already in the students' eyes, something that does have historical value. Any historical inaccuracies can be manipulated to serve good purposes or at the very least as take off points for discussion."

We will also use the Inquiry-based method as described by the Great Books Foundation as well as the supplemental resources on setting up literature circles, and use of internet information for oral presentations.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan One

This lesson will apply to the discussion of early history of the United States. Students will work in small groups as well as a whole class. It will multi-sensory and fun. It is designed to help students see life from another person's perspective both in time and place.

Pre-Reading and Viewing

Objectives

The student will develop a reason for reading, write with a purpose, and share written work with other class members. The student will also experience a variety of resources and discuss the value of each one.

Materials needed

Textbooks, films and VCR, paper, pen/pencil

Lesson

In groups, students set up the strategy for note-taking. Discussion on fact and opinion will help them begin to distinguish the events that they see, and read.

During Viewing and Reading

Objective

The student will practice questioning and summarization skills.

Materials needed

Paper, pen/pencil

Lesson

Class will take notes but also discuss how they decide what to write down.

After Viewing and Reading

Objective

The student will use critical thinking skills to determine similarities and differences between the different sources. They will also begin to document their reaction to the experience, and given the opportunity to volunteer to share their writing.

Material needed

Summarizations and questions from during reading activity, paper, pen/pencil, chalk board

Lesson

Class will use notes from the story as well as the story itself to compile a list elements in the story. The lists will be compared to determine similarities between student's choices. After similarities have been noted, students will be asked to make conclusive statements based on the information gathered as a class. They will begin to write in their journal (1) how the discussions make them feel, (2) how it felt to pretend to be someone other than themselves, (3) how it felt to watch others in a similar situation, (4) how do they think the main character in the play felt and (5) why do they have the feelings they do. Before students are asked to write their essays, we will compile a list on the board of words to describe different feelings. This can serve to assist with vocabulary and provide the students with a list if they are at a loss for words.

The class will briefly re-examine the various events from the various works we have experienced throughout this exercise. We will consider how we define these events. What measuring stick do we use? This will be explicitly agreed upon.

Assessment

A rubric will be used to assess the students' work. See end of Lesson Plan Four.

Lesson Plan Two

This lesson applies to the Declaration of Independence. This lesson is an excerpt from the mini-units outlined for the beginning program of *The Great Books Foundation* called “The Declaration of Independence,” recommended for grades 7-12.

Pre-Reading Question: Why do all people have a right to be free?

Objective

The student will develop a reason for reading, explore their current thinking about rights and freedom, and compare their understanding of these concepts with those of the authors of the text and their classmates.

Materials needed

Copies of the text of Declaration of Independence

Lesson

Class will do its first reading for about 10 minutes. The next 10 minutes will allow students to share their reactions, questions about the text, and clear up unfamiliar vocabulary. At this time students can raise questions of interpretation. This will be a way to help students understand the benefit of reading the selection twice, and making an easier transition to the second reading

During Second Reading

Objective

The student will practice comprehension skill of re-reading and finding text that supports their interpretation.

Materials needed

Journals, paper, pen/pencil and highlighters.

On the board, the following should be written: “Mark places where you think the authors of the Declaration of Independence give an especially strong reason why they should revolt.”

Lesson

During the next 10 to 15 minutes, the class will read the text for a second time and take notes. They should also share their responses and their reasons after they have completed their reading

After Reading

Objective

The student will draw conclusions and make judgments based on multiple readings, listening to others, and documenting their conclusions in their journal. The student will use critical thinking skills to synthesize and evaluate information to reach conclusions

Lesson

The students will conduct a shared-inquiry discussion using interpretive questions such as “Why do the signers of the Declaration of Independence state that it is not only their right but their duty to change their government?; Why do the colonists feel a need to proclaim to the world their reasons for declaring independence?; Are signers of the Declaration motivated by a sense of outrage, or by their own self-interest?; and Why are the inhabitants of the thirteen colonies able to think of themselves as one people?”

A the end of the discussion, students will be asked to write a one-page essay in their journal on (1) how the discussions make them feel, (2) how their thinking changed or stayed the same, (3) do they see any value to hearing others discuss their points of view.

Assessment

A rubric will be used to assess the students’ work. See end of Lesson Plan Four.

Lesson Plan Three

This lesson will introduce the Constitution as the basis for democracy in the United States of America. It is the foundation of all our laws in this country. It will help them understand (I hope) how their government works and their rights and protections under the Constitution. We will follow the outline as set in the workbook written by Cathy Travis called *Constitution for Kids*. As a final activity for this lesson, I will construct a Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for our classroom. All who stay in the class will need to abide by this document with the understanding that the document must also abide by the larger framework of rules established by the school, which is under the jurisdiction of the Houston Independent School District. We will discuss the possibility of “civil dissent” and what impact that might have on our learning.

Objective

The student will use critical thinking skills to synthesize and evaluate information to reach conclusions.

Materials needed

A copy of *Constitution Translated for Kids* and the workbook that accompanies the text, paper, pen/pencil, poster board, markers/colored pencils

Lesson

Class will briefly re-examine the various characters from the various works we have experienced throughout the unit. We will consider how we define the various characters. What measuring stick do we use? We will look at internal vs. external forces. External forces would be society, culture, economics, and geography, while internal forces would be biology, age, gender, dreams, hopes, perspective. The students will compile a list of the ways in which they express themselves including food, music, how they like to spend their time, what is valuable to them. From all of this students will be asked to create a poster, poem, short story, song, videotape or letter to express who defines them and or how they are defined.

Assessment

A rubric will be used to assess the students' work. See end of Lesson Plan Four.

Lesson Plan Four

This lesson will introduce my personal list of peacemakers. I will explain my choices and offer the opportunity to hear theirs. Some of the characters I will introduce them to are Mahatma Gandhi and Thich Nhat Hanh. I will include Noble Peace Prize winners such as Martin Luther King Jr., Jimmy Carter, Desmond Tutu, and the Dalai Lama. This will expose the students to a diversity of cultures and historical perspectives while also giving them an opportunity to find the commonalities inherent in the ideals extolled. Students will be given an opportunity to choose two such personalities and do research on them. They will use the Internet and library to gather information to bring back to the classroom. They will be required to present orally their finding, using whatever aids they have learned to share the information. We will then follow a cycle of shared inquiry in small group and whole group discussions (using the methodology of the Great Books Foundation). Following the discussions each student will again write in their journal to document learning.

Objective

The student will use critical thinking skills to synthesize and evaluate information to reach conclusions. The student will become the teacher of the material and facilitate the discussion

Materials needed

Computers, Internet access, library time, paper and/or projectors for computerized presentations.

Lesson

The students will be introduced briefly to the different peace-makers. They will be given a brief synopsis of the lives and achievements. They can choose to work in groups of three or less to decide on two of the individuals presents to do research on them. The purpose of the research is to gather information to help us understand the historical and

cultural environment at the time of their lives. Each group will be responsible for leading the whole class in a shared-inquiry based discussion to hear our points of view on the value of what they did or said. At the end of each session, each student will be asked to write an essay in their journals that answers (1) were they drawn to a particular individual and explain their answer (2) how did they feel about leading the class in discussions, (3) how their thinking changed or stayed the same, and (4) do they see any value to hearing others discuss their points of view.

Assessment

There will be two types of assessments. The first involves how well each lesson plan was performed (i.e. how well the group conducted their presentation and the second how well have they followed through on all four lesson plans). A rubric will be constructed by the whole class before each lesson plan, to guide them in their evaluation of the lesson. We all will be involved at some level in used to assessing the students' work. Attention will be paid to how much thought and consideration went into their collaboration and journal entries. Their work will have to show where they reflected back on all that we covered and considered all the various aspects of values stated in our classroom declaration of rights and responsibilities.

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Fortier, John. "What To Do Until the Doctor Comes: Speech in the English Language Arts Classroom." *Wisconsin English Journal*, Oct. 1987: 2-6.

Great Books Foundation. Feb. 2003. <<http://www.greatbooks.org/programs/junior/philosophy/sharing.html>>.

This site contains information on their philosophy and outline of their program.

Hanh, Thich Nhat. *Creating True Peace*. New York: Free Press, 2003.

As a Buddhist monk who has lived through two wars in his native Vietnam, Thich Nhat Hanh provides a peaceful perspective for the turmoil of today's world and a view point from the East that is both different in culture and tradition to those that the majority of students are exposed to.

Maxwell, Rhoda J., and Mary Jordan Meiser. *Teaching English in Middle and Secondary Schools*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1993.

A wonderful book on the theory and practice of English instruction. It advocates interactive and student-centered classrooms. It encompasses a full range of topics including multicultural coverage that deal with oral language and literature selection.

NASSP. "On the Threshold of Adolescence." Reston: National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1983.

This is an article that contains characteristics found in adolescents that might help educators set up practices that improve the learning environment.

Robb, Laura. *Teaching Reading in Middle School*. New York: Scholastic Professional Books, 2000.

A compelling guide that provides an instructional model that is workable and research-based. She provides a strategic approach to reading which is particularly geared towards adolescents.

Roy, Arundhati. *War Talk*. Cambridge, MS: South End Press, 2003.

An eloquent, passionate and politically insightful look at the global rise of militarism, and religious and racial violence. It is done against the backdrop of nuclear brinkmanship between India and Pakistan.

Sauter, Charles. *History through Movies: The United States. Vol. 2: Film and American Values Over the Decade*. 2001. Houston Teachers Institute. March 2003.

<<http://www.uh.edu/hti/cu/2001/v02.php>>.

A useful unit on how to present and critique historical films for a better understanding of historical perspectives through films.

Travis, Cathy. *Constitution Translated For Kids*. Dayton: Oakwood Publishing, 2001.

It is an attempt to make the articles in the Constitution easier to understand so that students can better understand the laws that govern us. The workbook for students that accompanies this text provides a useful guide in the discussion of the articles.

Supplemental Resources

Teacher Resources

Calkins, Lucy McCormick. *The Art of Teaching Writing*. Portsmouth, NH. Heineman, 1994.

A student-centered approach to teaching writing. One of its main tenets is for the teachers to model what she teaches by actively participating as a writer and exposing her work and thinking to the community of writers in the classroom.

Eisenberg, Michael and Robert Berkowitz. *The Big6 Collection: The Best of the Big6 Newsletter*. New York: Linworth, 2000.

This is a collection of articles on researching techniques using the Big6 method. Also includes a variety of lesson plan models using the method. Both teachers and students will find this a useful publication.

Eisenberg, Michael, et al. *Information Literacy: Essential Skills for the Information Age*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 2004.

In this second edition of the title, the authors discuss information literacy from its past up to the present including current research. Mr. Eisenberg is one of the founders of the Big6 method and the book touches on this method. Many library media specialists in HISD use this book (at least the first edition).

Keene, Ann. *Peacemakers*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998.

A collection of biographical articles on winners (individuals and organizations) of the Nobel Peace Prize from 1901 to 1997. Also includes an introductory essay on Alfred Nobel. This is a useful, very basic introduction to a broad range of peacemakers. For teachers and students.

Meltzer, Milton. *Ain't Gonna Study War No More: The Story of America's Peace Seekers*. New York: Random House, 2002.

History of the peace movement and nonviolent resistance in America from Colonial days to the present. Includes information on September 11th and its aftermath. Although young adults are the intended audience, this book is also useful for teachers.

Spangenburg, Ray et al. *Savvy Surfing on the Internet: Searching and Evaluating Web Sites*. Hillside, NJ: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 2001.

This title defines jargon and gives examples of good and bad web sites. Also alerts students to propaganda, hoaxes, and other pitfalls. This is aimed at students but it is also valuable for teachers also.

Thomas, Nancy Pickering. *Information Literacy and Information Skills Instruction: Applying Research to Practice in the School Library Media Center*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited, 1999.

This book examines a variety of methods in information skills instruction and discusses research in the field. It also includes information on individual learning styles, which makes this an especially important reference for teachers.

McLaughlin, Maureen, and Mary Beth Allen. *Guided Comprehension*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2002.

A comprehensive resource that provides the necessary tools that encourages students to become active and strategic readers by providing direct strategy

instruction, numerous opportunities for engagement, and a variety of texts and instructional settings.

Sibberson, Franki, and Karen Szymusiak. *Still Learning to Read*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2003.

A useful book that provides guidance on how to devote more time to reading instruction without neglecting the content demands of the curriculum. It presents sample lessons, descriptions of classroom routines to help make reading purposeful, thoughtful and effective.

Zemelman, Steven, and Harvey Daniels. *Community of Writers: Teaching Writing in the Junior and Senior High School*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1988.

This is a marvelous resource both as a practical and theoretical approach to using writing with students.

Student Resources

The American Republic to 1877. Columbus: Glencoe/McGraw 2003.

The History textbook recommended by Houston Independent School District for its eight grade curriculum.

Nobel Book of Answers. Edited by Bettina Stiekel. New York: Simon and Schuster Children's Publishing Division, 2003.

A collection of questions and the responses given by different Nobel Prize winners around the world.

Travis, Cathy. *Constitution Translated For Kids Workbook*. Dayton: Oakwood Publishing, 2001.

This workbook for students accompanies the text on the Constitution and provides a useful framework for the discussion of the articles. It provides thoughtful questions that children might find relevant to their own circumstances. In this way they are better able to see the connection between the Constitution and their own rights.

Filmography

The American Revolution. Dir. Lisa Bourgojian. Greystone Communications, Inc. in association with A&E Network. 1994.

Six videocassettes (300 minutes) include: the conflict ignites, 1776, Washington and Arnold, World at war, England's last chance, Birth of the Republic. This will be used in conjunction with helping students to take notes from a movie.

The Patriot. Edited by Roland Emmerich. Columbia/Tristar Studios, DVD 2001.

This film is set in South Carolina in the late 1770s and concerns the role of the militia during the American Revolution.

Revolution. (1985) Edited by Hugh Hudson. Warner Studios, VHS 1999.

This film gives a portrait of the American Revolution from the point of view of the “little people” caught up in the fight.