

Our Town: Children's Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow in the American Family

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INTRODUCTION

“*El que persevera alcanza*” is an old Spanish saying that translates into “Persevere and you will reach your goals.” My parents used to say it. They endured several hardships and made numerous sacrifices so that my siblings and I could go to school. The summer after I had finished junior high school, my family moved to the United States. The education that I would receive in my new adopted country would be one of great contrast to that of my parents. My parents were educated up to 3rd grade in Mexico, but they had *ganas* (willingness) to succeed. They worked hard all their lives, even today. Soon after arriving to the United States, I came to the realization that learning a second language in combination with a good education was imminent to achieve the “American Dream.” Today, I am a first grade bilingual teacher. I want to instill *ganas* in my first graders like my parents did for me so that they can become successful people in the future. As for many of their families, they look much like my own. Their parents are not educated and does not read or write English. But they hope that their children can have a better education and better lives than they had by sending them to school. Even though young, my students know they have a big responsibility to do their best in school. This can be hard for many at this young age and in a different culture and language. However, with appropriate guidance, once their interest is captured even the most reluctant student becomes engaged in learning.

Moving to the United States from another country is a very dramatic experience for a five-year-old child. The biggest change is learning another language. This is definitely the case with my first graders. They arrive knowing just a few words of English, but I have committed myself to making sure that they will leave my classroom speaking and writing complete sentences. Their youth coupled with the appropriate guidance will guarantee that they will learn English in a short period of time. They might not be as fluent as a native speaker but my hope is that they will be confident and able to express themselves in English.

The focus of this unit is gaining the interest of my students through meaningful activities. I have big expectations for them. By sharing a similar personal experience as a new comer to this country I hold an advantage point of view of their weaknesses and strengths, which will allow me to guide them. Being aware of students' backgrounds will allow me to modify my lessons to meet my students' needs through listening and working with the students until they become comfortable speaking and writing short passages in English. The Spanish-speaking students need time to develop their reading and writing skills in Spanish before they can express their academic and social knowledge into a different language. Therefore this unit will be implemented later in the academic year

during the month of April. By this time, the children will not be under the pressures of the standardized test “APRENDA,” and they will have more time to focus on expressing their academic and social knowledge to a second language. My primary intention is to integrate the English as a Second Language and Social Studies so that the students will not only learn to speak another language but also learn it in a meaningful way.

UNIT BACKGROUND

“*Our Town: Children’s Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow in the Family*” is the title of this thematic unit. This is appropriate because we will look at how families have change from the past to the present and toward the future and how culture can play a big role in people’s lives. This unit was also selected due to young students’ thirst for knowledge about their identities and their own culture. What are some American traditions? What American traditions have become part of our daily lives? How are families portrayed on T.V.? How do they compare with other families in real life? These are a few questions that the children will think about in this unit. Also, the children will explore American families and they will have opportunities to learn about songs, customs, feelings, and daily routines that make the American culture unique.

My unit will center on the play *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder. The play opens in the first act with a description of the town, the characters, and the daily lives of two American families living in the small village of Grover’s Corners. The second act is about marriage and how two people fall in love. The third act deals mainly with death and the afterlife. In this play the children will be exposed to a traditional Anglo American families’ way of life. During the course of the unit, the students will role-play different scenes and become familiar with the play. Having learned about the play, the students will participate in discussions about the characters and their way of life as well as their traditions that are similar to or are shared by their families.

Another family that we will look at and describe in more detail later is from the movie *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry. The movie is about a black family and their struggles to deal with racism and financial hardships. In this movie, the students will become familiar with an African American family. The main focus of this unit is to look at the culture of American families; thus, the students will focus on identifying some key aspects of the characters’ daily routines such as their breakfast menu, how they demonstrate affection, their clothing, food, songs, and customs.

This curriculum unit will target first grade elementary bilingual students. The class is composed of 100% Spanish speakers. Thus, the unit will gear towards increasing their English speaking fluency while being engaged in learning how families have changed through time. I will encourage discussions in class about the readings assignments and allow enough time for the students to get comfortable with the characters in the story. The students will also learn to read actively versus reading passively to improve their comprehension skills while gaining interest in what they are reading. Another area for

growth is writing; they will improve their writing skills by keeping a journal about the things that they like or dislike in their readings assignments. They will be writing a detailed biography. It is important to note that 90% of the classes at our school in Houston, TX are from a Mexican heritage. Therefore, from time to time during the development of the curriculum, examples from Mexican traditions will be included. In addition, as bilingual students, these children will use English in the classroom to communicate their thoughts and feelings. In order to get them comfortable and eager to participate, we will sing traditional and popular songs from the American culture. For instance, when the children learn about Christmas, they will also learn songs such as “Santa Claus is Coming to Town.” Also, I will integrate gestures and hands motions while they sing to encourage the students to participate.

The unit will also contribute to the students’ personal growth. Many of my students are the first “American born” generation of immigrants from Mexico and other parts of South America. Some of the students are immigrants themselves. Living in the United States, they see the need to speak a second language. Many of them already act as translators for their families. They are also aware of their own cultures. For example, they still celebrate traditions such as *El dia de los muertos* (Day of the Dead), sing traditional songs, and prepare offerings that include elaborated traditional dishes and pastries. Therefore, they need to become exposed to different cultures and learn about them and at the same time they also need to retain a sense of their own identity. My role as their teacher will be to introduce them to the American culture by incorporating examples and objects familiar to them. They will initially answer simple questions such as: Who are the members of their family? Where do they come from? What are some traditions that their families celebrate? In the process, they will learn about customs and traditions of the American families.

IMPLEMENTATION OF TEACHING STRATEGIES

A Raisin in the Sun

My unit begins by showing a small clip from the movie, *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry. The movie depicts a black family in the 1960s living in the south side of Chicago. The movie is about the desire of a black man named Walter to use a portion of some money left to his mom to open a liquor store. Walter wants to be in business so that he can stop being a chauffeur for a rich family: he wants to have dignity. However, the mother wants to use the money to buy a house that happens to be in a white neighborhood. She compromises with him by using some of the money for a down payment for a house and distributing the rest to Walter, her son, and Beneatha, her daughter. Tragically, he invests his share and his sister’s share in the liquor store venture and his partner runs away with the money. A representative from the white neighborhood offers him a large sum of money not to move into their neighborhood. He is tempted to accept but in the end he refuses the offer.

I will present the students a clip from Act 1 beginning where Ruth is calling Walter to come and eat his breakfast, and stop the tape when Travis leaves for school. At this point, I will give a brief explanation about the next few days and the topic that we will be discussing. First, we will talk briefly about the family that we just saw in the movie clip. I will use the blackboard to help identify the characters. We will discuss about how these characters make up a distinct family. I will lead the students in noticing from this scene that this family is composed of a mom, a dad, a son, a grandmother, and an aunt and I will place each family member into a genealogy tree drawn on the chalkboard. The genealogy tree consists of a simple profile of a tree with two main boxes representing mom and dad on the top that branch out to other boxes on the top for the extended family and underneath those for sons and daughters. In order to reinforce the presented information, I will do my family genealogy tree by placing big pictures in the boxes requiring the students to help as I show them how I am building it. Then, I will use a handout consisting of the same genealogy tree and they will fill the names of their relatives. They will be given the choice of making their own drawings or bringing pictures they can use in class to paste on their tree. I will present my own genealogy tree and I will ask for volunteers to present their genealogy tree to their classmates and tell a little about each member of their family in the same fashion, as I will do.

Our Town

During the course of the unit, the class will read sections from *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder. The play is primarily about the lives of two American families that lived in the small village of Grover's Corners from 1901 to 1913. In Act I, Wilder provides a detailed description of Grover's Corners and the people who live in the village as well as statistical data and precise geographical locations around the town. Two families live in the village: the Gibbs family and the Webb family. The play portrays their daily routines and the main events of the town. Emily Webb and George Gibbs are two teenagers who are getting to know each other and they become the main characters of the story. In Act II, Wilder tells the audience about a marriage: George and Emily's. Wilder details the turning point about how they fall in love, their plans for their future and their wedding. In Act III, Emily bears a child and tragically dies giving birth. In the afterlife, she meets with people who died before her such as her mother-in-law. She goes back in time and re-lives a moment of her youth and at that moment she realized the precious value of the smallest events in her life. The moral of the story is to appreciate life's everyday moments and the people in your life.

Initially, the class will focus in reading small sections of the play, *Our Town*. In order to make the reading fun and interactive, I will have puppets made with socks representing the different characters. We begin by paying close attention to the title: *Our Town*. Some questions that will be addressed are: What you think the title tells about the play? What are some of your favorite stories? What words in the title can be used to make predictions about the plot? Their predictions will be recorded and revisited at a later time to see if their expectations were true. I will read the section in Act 1 (Wilder

12-16), which describes Mrs. Webb calling the children for breakfast to the point where the children get up and rush to school. After reading the play, I will ask the children to identify the characters they heard from this scene. The class will read aloud the same pages (12-16) and when they finished, I will ask for volunteers to act out the first page (12). Having assigned characters, they will act out the first scene (12). I will repeat the same procedure with the next two pages. After they finished, I will form groups of six to act out the same reading. In order to motivate them, the teams will compete and judge by voting for the team who gave the best performance. The winning team will receive stickers for each student!

Thornton Wilder

Having introduced the students to *Our Town*, they will become familiar with the author, his work and his life. Thornton Wilder was born on April 17, 1897, in Madison, Wisconsin. His father, Amos Parker Wilder edited and published a newspaper. He was appointed as consul general to Shanghai and Hong Kong. Due his success, he had the means to educate Thornton Wilder in well-known institutions. He attended mission schools in China, high school in Berkeley, California, and studied at both Oberlin College (where he studied the Greek and Roman classics in translation) and Yale University. He studied archaeology at the American Academy in Rome for two years. He taught French for seven years at a school in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. At the time Wilder was working on a master's degree in French, which he completed in 1925 at Princeton. His first Pulitzer-prize-winning novel was *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*. The success of this novel allowed him to earn enough money and quit his job as a French teacher and become a full-time writer. Living in so many places for short periods of time enabled him to write *Our Town*. *Our Town* was so successful that in 1938 Wilder won his second Pulitzer Prize for it. A complete list of his work can be found at Petri Liukkonen's Web Site <<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/twilder.htm>>.

I will challenge my students into learning about the writer as a playwright, his life, and any facts about *Our Town*. Thornton Wilder's travels to Wisconsin, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Connecticut, Rome, and New Jersey had a strong impact on him. Being away from his hometown for so long made him miss and idealize the town where he was born. Other important plays that seem to have the influence of living in different places is his novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (1927), and his play *The Matchmaker* (1954). Another part of Wilder's life reflected in *Our Town* is his archeological background. His archeological background is noted where Wilder describes historical facts about the town, special memories and the way of life. For instance, George and Emily live a life that reflects on many events of life similar to the lives of many people such as they knew each other from living in the same neighborhood and fell in love while going to school. They were married and had children but she died young. In the afterlife, she came to the realization that she took life for granted and she wished that she could have enjoyed more of those moments of their life. The play gives the reader a feeling of these important moments and way of life. Also, the students will be exposed to recurrent words that are

often used by archeologists such as ‘hundreds,’ ‘thousands,’ and ‘millions.’ Note that these words are commonly used in archeologists’ or archeological jargon. Archeologists are interested in historical facts, traditions, culture and ways of life of different people as part of their job. The students will comprehend the story better with the description of the archeological background of the town as they explore the play. The class will focus on findings words or things and will be asked to make drawings that have to do with archeology during some sections of their readings. Gradually, they will obtain a better understanding of how the background and experiences of Wilder made an impact on him and how in turn he reflected them in his play.

Reading and comprehending the play is a major task for young children. One helpful reading strategy will be utilizing transparencies to teach the students how to pause as they encounter punctuation as the class reads sections from the play. We will read together the section from Act I (Wilder 10-12) where Howie Newsome comes to deliver the milk to the part where he leaves after he delivered the milk. As I read to the children, I will stress and note key words and share my reaction to the story. I will draw simple pictures of the conversation. Afterwards, I will discuss the simple pictures and explain how the key words were relevant to remember what was just read. They will also be encouraged to ask questions and write them down as they read the story. They will post their questions on the classroom board available and the class as a whole will help to answer them. In order to help enforce the reading strategy, the children need to remember the steps to reading and comprehending the play. To help them with this, I will teach them a simple song I wrote:

“The Reading Song”

When reading a story, remember this,
look at the title, surprised you’ll be
that gives clues about what the story is.
Pick up your pencil and write down the words
that help you remember, what you just saw.
Keep asking questions that come to your mind,
It’ll make you remember the story as it is.

I will use the beginning beat of the song, “Fresh Prince of Bel Air” by DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince, Will Smith from their album “Greatest Hits.” This song is an important strategy that helps first graders to read actively and comprehend what they are reading. They will perform the song using gestures with their hands and body to make it fun and interesting.

As part of the children’s writing development, they will be required to keep a journal. They will use their journal during their free time to write about the things that they learned about a given passage. A pocket chart will be designated to post the topic of the day. The journal will be a daily routine with a few words at first so that the journal

becomes a familiar routine for the children. I will help them with this task initially until they become comfortable writing complete sentences on their own. Since children have not learned yet how to put their thoughts in an organized manner, it is important to help them build an organized structure to clarify their way of writing clear statements. In order to help them, their journal will have a specific format that they will follow to help them with the organization and content of their writings. The journal format is as follows:

Monday, July 26, 2004

Dear Journal:

Today on 07/26/2004, I will talk about *Our Town*.

In class, we learned about _____.

What I liked the most was _____.

I did not like when _____.

The story was about _____.

Signing off until next time,

Name and Last name

Going back to *Our Town*, the children will become actors and actresses. They will take part of the lives of the Gibbs and the Webb's families. They will form groups of four students and act out their parts. They will re-create the scene from Act 1 (Wilder 34-36) where George is talking to Emily to the point where Mr. Gibbs ends up talking to George. This will be a good point to watch a piece of the movie, *Our Town*. This clip will be the same as the one that they acted out. Then, we will make a comparison about their own views between the play, and the words from the movie, as they get familiar with *Our Town*. In order to learn about other American families, I will also show the clip from the movie *A Raisin in the Sun*. This is the same clip in Act 1 beginning where Ruth is calling Walter to come and eat his breakfast, and ending when Travis leaves for school. The children will talk about the Gibb, the Webb, and the Lee families. They will discuss questions such as, what do these families have in common? How are they different? What are some beliefs that have passed from generation to generation? How are people portrayed on T.V.? How are they portrayed in the play?

I will introduce at this point some traditions and customs shared in the American community. In *Our Town*, in Act 2, Emily and George get married, one of the most common customs in America and around the world. In American weddings, there are also traditional dances such as the dance of the bride and the groom and the dance of the couple with their parents. In other countries such as Mexico, certain rituals are also performed to wish long lasting luck to the bride and the groom. In a Mexican wedding, the bride and the groom dance several songs such as: "La Vibora de la Mar." In this dance the bride and the groom make a bridge and the bridesmaids dance around it making

a circle and dancing around the room. Another dance involves the mothers of some of the guests. The mothers dance around the room with jars in their hands and full of candy. They go around the room at the rhythm of a song sharing the candy with the children. The class will see the clip from the movie where George wants to see his soon-to-be bride but he is unable to see her because Mrs. Webb reminds him that it is bad luck to see the bride before the wedding. At this point, I will lead a discussion about traditional wedding customs in the United States and Mexico and ask the children to share their experiences of weddings they have attended in the past.

In *Our Town*, in Act III we see another important aspect of life: death. In this chapter Emily dies after giving birth to her child. She moves on to the Afterlife. She is able to see many people whom she met as a child and that are now dead. She talks to Mrs. Gibbs and she expresses her wanting to go back with the living and live again the moments that were important in her life. This clip is important for my unit since it talks about the dead. In Mexico, during the month of November, there is a celebration for the dead. Many of my students from Mexico are familiar with this tradition and I am sure that they will love to learn more about it. The tradition is called, *El Dia de los Muertos*, which means “Day of the Dead.” During the celebration, there are offerings for dear relatives or friends that have passed away. The offerings are a way to help the souls in their journey. There are candles lit during the first week of November to help light up the way to the light. The offerings vary from family to family but most of them involve small sugar skulls with the name of the person who will be remembered; they also have traditional food, pastries and flowers. The children will have an opportunity to learn about the significance and history of their own tradition. After learning about this tradition, in teams of four, they will make small models of clay to resemble food for their offerings. I will also have already made examples of clay to show the children more ideas about some of the things they can add to their offerings. I will present my model and encourage the children to present theirs.

During *Dia de los Muertos* the children go on the street to ask for *calaverita*, better known as “trick or treat,” during Halloween. In Mexico, the children receive money when they ask for “trick or treat” while in the United States the children are given candy. Halloween is one of the most popular traditions in the United States.

Halloween

Halloween is celebrated every year on October 31st. “The word Halloween comes from the Catholic Church. It is called All Hallows Eve. All Saints Day, November 1 is a Catholic holy day in observance of saints” (Seibel). In this tradition, the children dressed up in costumes. A short summary can be found in the *History of Halloween* website: <<http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/halloween/hallowmas.html>>.

The above link is informative and useful for teaching and exposing the children to the topic of American family traditions. I will present it in a PowerPoint presentation with illustrations. The above information will be presented like a story so that the children will gain full understanding of the story of Halloween.

Even though *Our Town* does not cover the history of Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas, these traditions will also be included. These are three of the most popular celebrations around the year for many American families and thus important to include in my unit. Also, my students do not know the history, songs, and how these traditions have become popular through the years. So, after the children become familiar with the history of Halloween, I will lead the class to discuss Christmas and Thanksgiving as important holidays for the American culture. The information below for Thanksgiving and Christmas has been included and will be presented in a PowerPoint presentation as I did with Halloween.

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is a tradition celebrated every 4th Thursday of the month of November. This is a tradition celebrated every year by most American families. Other countries have days in the fall to give thanks and celebrate the fall harvest. Thanksgiving became official in 1863, when President Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November as a national day of Thanksgiving in the United States. A short history comes from Jerry Wilson's Website *The Thanksgiving Story*, at <<http://wilstar.net/holidays/thanksgv.htm>>.

After the children learn about the history of Thanksgiving, they will make a turkey puppet out of a paper bag and a pattern of a turkey head on a piece of paper. They will color their turkey's head, cut it and paste it on the bottom of the bag. Placing their hand inside the paper bag, they will use the puppets to learn the song, Turkey Day.

Christmas

Christmas is a one of the happiest days of the year for many children. This holiday is celebrated the 25th of December throughout the United States. Many families decorate their house with a pine tree, lights, and gifts under the Christmas tree. The night of December 24th, feasts are prepared and many families get together to celebrate and enjoy the company of their loved ones. Traditionally, families exchange gifts the 25th of December. The Christmas tradition originated in the Middle East and it is a day to celebrate and remember the night that Jesus Christ was born.

Christmas is a well-known celebration around the world. In Mexico, the people celebrate for 8 days prior to December 25th. These celebrations are called *posadas*. It begins on December 16th and ends on the night of December 24th. The *posadas* means "lodging" and is derived from the story of Joseph and Mary looking for a place to spend the night, but they are not able to find an establishment with vacancies. In the traditional

posadas, the guests are organized in two groups: the people asking for *posada* and the people answering the door. The guests outside hold candles and sparklers to light the way. They have papers with the verses that will be sung before coming inside the house. They will sing begging for lodging and the people inside will deny entrance to the house. They sing back and forth a few times until finally the people outside let the outsiders come inside the house. Once inside, people enjoy the hospitality of the hostess and eat traditional food such as tamales, fruit punch, pozole, and other elaborate Mexican meals. Outside the children enjoy themselves by breaking *piñatas* and singing Christmas songs.

As they learn more about Christmas, the children will answer questions such as, how do they celebrate it? What songs are essential components of other traditions? What traditional songs are parts of the American culture? What traditional songs do they know about their own heritage? As young immigrants, many of them have not learned yet some of the most popular songs in the U.S. The children will be exposed to some of these songs and they will be given a list a songs to choose to learn from. The songs that they like will be learned in class and given an explanation about how that song relates or has become popular to play in a given tradition. Here are a few of the songs that we will sing in class: “Santa Claus is Coming to Town”, “Jingle Bell Rock”, “Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire”, “Turkey Day”, “Baa-Baa Black Sheep”, “Do your ears hang low”, “Old MacDonald had a Farm”, “Hey Diddle Diddle” and the U. S. National Anthem. As they learn about the songs, small skits will be prepared to show the meaning of the songs sang in class.

As a first grade teacher, I understand the importance of exposing the children to a variety of meaningful experiences. Kids are the future of tomorrow. They have a natural curiosity that enables them to learn any information through meaningful experiences. They are willing to participate and have a natural love for acquiring knowledge.

As their teachers, we have touched their lives and once they leave our classroom, they will never be the same. As teachers we have the power to change their lives forever. If they take with them the knowledge given by their teachers, they will look forward to the future. It is very important that they also have strong role models as well as teachers.

During the course of my unit, the children will receive many opportunities to write about what they have read. The strategies explained earlier in this essay have been carefully thought and planned. These strategies help the child become aware of the new culture they live in and learn a new language while they become fluent readers and writers. *Our Town* needs to be viewed as a tool that, with careful planning and implementation, supports the learning process of the English as a Second Language (ESL) learner and creates positive results in achievement and motivation.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan 1: Thanksgiving

Materials

PowerPoint Presentation about Thanksgiving

Big map of the 7 continents

Construction paper

Glue, scissors, crayons

Stapler and staples

Handout with pictures of the Mayflower, Pilgrims, Indians, Food, England

“Turkey Day” song on Timmy Wells’s CD *First Day of School*

Tape player

Procedure

The lesson begins with reading aloud a PowerPoint Presentation with information found about the history of Thanksgiving at *The Thanksgiving Story* website. This website details a short story about Thanksgiving. Then, we will look at a big map to locate America and New England to illustrate how far they traveled, and discuss why the Pilgrims came to America. We begin by discussing the word “Pilgrims” and who they were before they came to live in America. Another point of discussion will be the clothing that the pilgrims wore in those times. The pilgrims wore tall hats, long aprons, long skirts, long dresses, and the stiff wide collars as compared to the simple buffalo skin wraps the Native Americans wore in Jamestown, Virginia. We would also look at some of the food that the Pilgrims had with them on the boat, which would lead to the questions, what are some things the Pilgrims had to be thankful for? I will write down sentences on the board to keep track of their thoughts.

After the discussion, we will make a book about Thanksgiving. I will lead the class to make the books for themselves since the procedure develops their body coordination and makes them independent students. In order to accomplish this task, I will guide them through the steps to make the book. First, I will distribute construction paper, scissors, and glue to every student in the class. Then I will have the students follow these steps:

1. Students look at how I fold the construction paper in half.
2. Students will follow and fold their papers in half.
3. Students look at how to cut the paper by following the straight line made by the fold to cut in half.
4. Students will cut their own construction paper in half as I did.
5. I will show the class to how to place both pieces directly one top of the other so they match exactly and fold in half again.
6. Students will follow and do the same.
7. I will staple their books

Once the book is made I will guide the students to come up with a nice title page and a cover page. For the title page, I will give them suggestions such as: *Thanksgiving, The*

Pilgrims and Thanksgiving, and *Thanksgiving is*. I will instruct them to work on their own to come up with a nice illustration about what they think about Thanksgiving and put their name at the bottom as authors of their Thanksgiving books. The cover page will be just the repeat of the title. I will distribute the handout with black and white pictures from Thanksgiving. Then, I will explain that the pictures in the handout are to become part of a book. I will show a sample book and I will guide them to begin making their own book about Thanksgiving. They will be instructed to cut and paste one picture per page and write a sentence about what they see. As they finish, we will post their books on the bulletin board to display their work.

Another activity will be to discuss traditional songs that people sing about Thanksgiving. I will ask if they are familiar with Spanish songs about Thanksgiving. Afterwards, I will sing for them “Turkey Day.” Then, they will form teams of four and take turns for singing. We will have a contest based on the most creative way for singing the songs.

Lesson Plan 2: A Portrait of My Family

Materials

Our Town, the movie
Computer with a Word processor
Television
VCR
Paper, color pencils

Procedure

The lesson begins by watching a clip from the movie *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder. The section that we will be discussing is in Act 1 where Howie Newsome is delivering milk and ends where the children go to school. On the chalkboard, I will write down the members from the Gibbs and Webb families who will be identified by the class. Then, we will discuss the things that the Webbs and the Gibbsses are doing during the day. At this point, the class will talk about their family. They will identify the family members and their occupations. They will also talk about things that they did before they came to school and simple events such as things they do to celebrate birthdays. I will write a sample short story about the Gibbs and the Webb families. Then, we will write together another story. At this point, I will ask them to write a simple short story representing their families. This is a challenging assignment for children so I will guide the children to think about the people in their lives and what they do on a regular day. They will write about their parents, sisters, and their occupations and will be asked to make a simple drawing of their family in the same page. The best stories will be typed and displayed on the bulleting board.

I will give the children a list of questions about their infancy and important things about their childhood. I have listed questions to take home and get answers for below:

1. What’s your name?

2. How old are you?
3. What's your mother's name?
4. What's your father's name?
5. Do you have brothers and sisters? How many?
6. Where were you born?
7. Why did your parents pick out your name?
8. At what age did you learn to walk?
9. At what age did you start talking?
10. Is there a party that was special that you remember?
11. What did you and your family do for your last vacation?

They will begin answering the questions in class and will take the remaining questions home. The next day, we will use the information to create short stories about their family. Every story will be based on their daily lives, such as birthdays, holidays and important events. What they write will be typed and saved in their portfolio; eventually they will have enough stories to make a book of their own experiences with their families.

Lesson Plan 3: Genealogy

Materials

Television

VCR

A Raisin in the Sun, the tape

Pictures or magazine illustrations

Handout (genealogy tree)

Colored pencils, glue, and scissors

Procedure

In this lesson, the students will learn how to build a genealogy tree. The children will be required to bring photos from their family or in pictures from magazines representing their family as a part of the lesson.

The lesson begins by watching a small section from the movie *A Raisin in the Sun* in Act 1 where Ruth is calling Walter to come and eat his breakfast to the point where Travis leaves for school. The students will identify family members and I will write their names on one side of the blackboard. Then, I will explain that they will be learning about how to build a genealogy tree. The genealogy tree consists of a simple profile of a tree with two main boxes representing mom and dad on the top that branch out to other boxes on the top for the extended family and underneath those for sons and daughters. At this point I will draw a simple profile of a tree and I will organize Walter's family on the genealogy tree. We will discuss about how these characters make up a distinct family. I will lead the students in noticing from this scene that this family is composed of a mom, a dad, a son, a grandmother, and an aunt and I will place each family member into a genealogy tree drawn on the chalkboard. In order to reinforce the presented information,

I will do my family genealogy tree by placing big pictures in the boxes requiring the students to help as I show them how I am building it. Then, I will use a handout consisting of the same genealogy tree and they will fill the names of their parents, sisters, brothers and some of the members of their extended family. I will guide them to work on their own tree while I work on mine. I will ask for volunteers to show their work and to check if they have the correct order and the pictures in the right places. Then, I will present my genealogy tree and the ones they have created with small comments under the pictures. The children's final product will be displayed on the bulletin board to give the children the opportunity to see and expose other children's work so that they can learn from their peers.

Lesson Plan 4: *Our Town*—Reading strategies

Materials

Our Town, the play and the movie

Overhead

Transparencies

Socks

Yarn, needle, and buttons

Television

VCR

Paper, color pencils

Procedure

In this lesson, the students will learn strategies to read actively. It is necessary to have puppets already pre-made. The puppets will be made with used socks, yarn, and buttons. The students will bring used socks. Parents are of great help throughout the school year and they can assist in the making of the puppets. The procedure to make the puppets is as follows:

1. Sew the buttons to the socks right on the top of where the toes would normally be placed.
2. Cut the several strings of yarn about 20 cm long.
3. Place the yarn directly on top of the eyes leaving about two centimeters from them.
4. Sew the yarn through the middle leaving 10 cm long on each side.
5. Place hand inside the sock and finish puppet by adding facial expressions such as long eyelashes and delicate eyebrows for the females.
6. Leave longer strings of yarn for hair for females and cut shorter lengths for the male puppets.

The lesson will begin by presenting the puppets to the class. I will have a set of puppets made for Gibbs and the Webb families from the play, *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder. Each puppet will be labeled and the hair will be color-coded to make distinctions between each character. After the presentation, I will prompt everyone to turn to page 14, Act I beginning where Rebecca is asking what to wear and ending before the factory whistle sounds. I will start reading this page in the overhead and I will have one student

helper to be Rebecca with one hand and Mrs. Gibbs's with the other. As I read through the page I will draw simple pictures so the children can remember the dialogue. One example is when Rebecca asked her mother for advice on what to wear. In the overhead, I will draw a simple girl pointing at two dresses. The next line the mother asks her to hush up and she mentions the blue dress. In this line, I will draw a sign with the word noise slash with a line through the middle follow by a simple picture of a dress and the word blue under it. I will draw a sad face and a dress by it for when Rebecca expresses her dislike for the dress and another noise sign slash through the middle for the next line. I will keep drawing until the end of the conversation. At this time, I will put the transparency away. With help of the pictures, the key words I wrote on the overhead, and the puppets, I will retell the dialogue following the pictures I drew as I read it the first time around. Then, I will ask for two volunteers to retell the scene with the puppets. We will practice a few times with other students so that they get the idea about how to make it easier for them to understand the play.

Next, I will assign to read page 15 to groups of four. They will read the scene in Act I, page 15, where the stage manager mentions the factory and ends right before Mrs. Gibbs starts talking. Each member of the team will be assigned a character. They will be responsible for coming up with simple drawings for the lines from their picked out characters. As they finished, they will act out with the puppets this scene help only by simple drawings from their assigned characters. Each team will present the scene and rate their presentation.

As the children get comfortable with the readings, another reading strategy will be presented to them. They will learn how to pause for periods, commas, and exclamation marks. I will explain that for reading to come alive, they need to pause and change their voice entonation as they encounter punctuation. In order to accomplish this task, I will assigned a particular sounds to commas, periods, and exclamation marks. The periods will be made with the sound of 'plucking' the tongue. The 'plucking' sound will come from the tongue motion up, presing up and pullin it down quickly with the mouth slightly opened. The commas will be made with a one up to down motion of the index finger, and the exclamation mark will be encounter by changing the sound of their voices to a surprise tone of voice or raising their voice a little bit more than usual as they read.

I will read the same section I read in the begining of the lesson, in Act I, page 14 in *Our Town*. I will use the strategy presented in the previous paragraph to show the students how to pause as they encounter punctuation. We will re-read the section together and use the sounds and gestures so that they become comfortable with the new strategy. They will go back in their teams of four and read with the new strategy in Act I page 15. Then I will have all the 'Emilys' do a choral reading from their section with the sounds that we had learned for commas, periods, and exclamation marks. The other characters will also do their choral reading when they get their turn. I will follow along and if they mess up, I will re-direct the reading by correcting the sound at that moment. We'll practice a few time until they become familiar with the pauses for punctuation.

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Editor's note: Annotations for audio recordings were unavailable at time of publication.