

Future Self and Community

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Unit Description

In this unit students will discover the connection of how their future self will affect their community. Learners will begin to think of who they will be in the future and begin to develop their thoughts with peer discussion. Once decided they will begin to examine how self and community are interconnected and develop the reasons behind their theories. Students will predict and determine their future job, build a slab-built ceramic structure of their workplace, and tell the story of how it happen and how to positively improved their community. They will tell the story using a pop-up book page or a large comic book page. This unit will help students develop empathy towards others while building their knowledge of community and allow the learners to express themselves visually.

Introduction

This unit is the result of my experience in David Teague’s “A Short History of Story” seminar offered in 2016 by University of Delaware in conjunction with Delaware Teaching Institute (DTI.) Our seminar included like-minded peers and provided the opportunity to learn from a university professor on the above topic. We discussed in depth where stories began and the reasons why the ingredients of a story have not changed much since the origin of storytelling. In weekly seminar we discussed our units, resources, and bounced ideas around with tools from various grade levels. Teachers in each seminar teach various subjects and grade levels from five northern Delaware public school systems.

I am one of two Visual Arts teachers but I am the only who teaches 3 – Dimensional Design at Glasgow High School (GHS) in the Christina School District. It is a great experience teaching students a hands-on subject that I really love. This will be my sixth year teaching and I am looking forward to new adventures this school year. GHS is my not the first school that I have worked in and I have now experienced many different school cultures. I have noticed that most of our sports teams have trouble finding players. Once the season starts the team has a hard time keeping players the entire season. Some of my students are not proud they play sports, march in the band, or are in school clubs. Many of my learners do not have the skills to work together in a team of two for extended periods of time or just to read a one-page article for class discussion. Even with practice and structure, they just do not want to talk to people they do not know. Many have no empathy for neighbors or peers. My belief is that once they learn other people’s stories of life and the struggles it entails their beliefs will change.

Additionally, I have found that my students have no sense of community. I graduated from the same high school where my teaching career started. Everyone who went to that school went through school together, elementary all the way through secondary. The idea of community was strongly instilled in me especially during middle school and I helped continue those ideals later. I thought everyone went to school like we did. I did not know any differently and that was something I took for granted until I started teaching.

Background

Glasgow High School (GHS) is a school in the Christina School District. Christina School District is the second largest school district in Delaware. GHS is a Title 1 school with enrollment around 900 students in grades 9 – 12. Our students come from many, many different cultures and heritages and various economic levels. Our student body in the 2015-2016 school year was comprised of 50% African American, 22% Hispanic/Latino, and 24% White. The rest of the school is mixed with as many different cultures as you can imagine. GHS is a great example of the melting pot of Newark and Wilmington, DE. We are 38% low income, almost 6% English Language Learner and 20% Special Education. Additionally, our graduation rate is around 77% and one of the lowest in New Castle County.

In the past, these classes might include a student who reads on a third-grade level and will exhibit questionable behaviors to mask the problem. Many aspects of the classroom have to work well to maintain a balance. At GHS successful instruction is aided through proper classroom management. My class that will be working on this unit will be comprised of around 20 students and in my opinion this is the highest-level Art class in the school. Some of my students will be taking AP classes and about 25% will be reading below grade level with Individual Education Plans (IEPs). The variety of student levels makes reading individually questionable. Most of my classes include students in ninth through twelfth grades. The unit will be taught in 90-minute block classes over the span of two and a half to three weeks in a class with fifteen to twenty students. Students will be enrolled in 3 – Dimensional Design II. This will include students in grades 11 – 12, who have completed beginning level Art Fundamentals and 3 – D I in previous years. This will be my 2nd year at GHS and most of the students enrolled in the class have signed up for the challenge as opposed to being placed in the class as seat filler.

My motivation for this unit is to help our students understand that each person has their own story. I want my classroom to be a safe place, for all students and particularly for my students that may not fit in somewhere else. I want their empathy to lead to a better sense of community. Once learning about empathy they should be able to use it personally and apply it in real life situations. Thus taking that lesson and being able to apply it to life, work, and play for the rest of their lives.

“As students share their concerns, desires, fears, accomplishments, and dreams through their stories, they become members of a ‘culture creating

community.’ ...It is not just that the child must make his knowledge his own, but that he must make it his own in a community of those who share his sense of belonging to the culture.” (1)

Rationale

Community is defined as a noun, often attributed to a group of people who live in the same area (such as a city, town, or neighborhood) and as a group of people who have the same interests, religion, or race. (2)

One major challenge may be that some of these children live as close as across the street and many are bused in from Wilmington on 40-minute bus rides down I-95. I started to ask myself questions like, “When all students in a city are bused to schools outside of their community, what effect does it have on the student?” or “When all students in a town are bused to schools outside of their community, how does it affect the home community?” One of the original reasons students were bused outside of Wilmington was to desegregate the schools in Wilmington. “Would the learners have more of a sense of community if they lived near their school and attended with neighbors?” Parents will be able to walk to school functions if they do not have personal transportation instead of paying to use the bus. Families will know that their children are close and should have a better interest in school board meetings and referendum votes. Then I started to think, how will I teach the students how to improve their community? They have to start to understand how they impact their community, what they can do. But why would they care to improve their community? Home is essential and safety is essential. Most kids I have care about their family and want the best for them. The connection has to be made between empathy for others and empathy for the future. My job will be to teach them how they can do that themselves.

Asking these questions have led me to the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission (WEIC) and their current plan for educational districting change in Wilmington. The group wants to redistrict schools in Wilmington with hope to strengthen the community but finding funding has been one of the biggest problems so far. In July 2016, the State Senate put the plan on hold at the end of legislative session for one year. The cost estimate has recently been upped from \$6 million to \$9 million. With a new governor in office this year, there is no guarantee if WEIC will even be considered in the Joint Finance Committee’s final decision on the 2017 state budget. Legislators from Kent and Sussex Counties want guarantees that if the state has the money to fund the redistricting upstate then downstate schools are expecting similar funding to aid districts with English Language Learners and Special Needs students. (3) As an educator, my political decisions are often based on what will be the best for our schools and local communities.

“As of 2015, there are 23 governing units that serve 11,595 Wilmington

students in the public school system. On virtually every indicator (academic performance, drop-out rates, and graduation rates), Wilmington students perform at a lower level than non-Wilmington students, including low-income students.” (4)

We still do not know if WEIC funding is passed in the upcoming budget, if it will actually work as planned or if the redistricting will push back time. It is possible that some of the schools will be completely filled with black and brown children. GHS will be affected because our students from Wilmington will be pulled from our district and moved into Red Clay Consolidated School District. Rumor is that one of the high schools in the Christina District will be closed due to lower enrollment. It makes sense; GHS will lose students and we are already down around 1,000 students from 15 years ago before charter schools in the area became serious competition with full academic and extra-curricular activities.

Teaching Strategies

New Views of Story

As a teacher we tend to add a lot of stories into our daily instruction. We try to build a connection with our students to our lessons in any way possible. Often adding personal stories can be that extra catch to help them focus. Notes are kept with my resources about stories to tell that connect to our lessons. Sometimes I talk about my dad’s job at a family run butcher shop where he is the only person who is not part of the farming family. It connects to an article that we read during the self-portrait unit where we learn about the artist Kehinde Wiley and how he finds normal, everyday people as models wandering the streets of New York City. We discuss the shoes the man in the painting is wearing and we guess what his job would be according to type of boots he wears. Wiley paints models of color in their street clothes as the modern versions of famous white men as a juxtaposition to the historical paintings.

Students will view a video from ESPN, Sports Center Featured: Running is more than a sport on Hopi reservation – Hopi Run. It is a short documentary of how the Hopi High cross-country team has won the Arizona state championships for 25 years and their preparation to win the 26th year in 2015. The documentary follows the student athletes back to the reservation that is on top of a desert mesa where families live in poverty. Some houses still do not have running water or a physical address when the documentary was filmed. Athletes were interviewed and the boys shared personal issues. They talked about how common backgrounds helped the team build their relationships and joint goals. We have to look at the reality of the participants and the realm of possibility. Anything is truly possibly to achieve with the correct amount of effort.

Who I am currently compared to who I was as a child is part of my reflection on daily teaching. Teachers can easily switch roles with students as we learn their experiences. It helps me understand why students react as they do in the classroom. As educators we

make adjustments to the lesson, as we look back each day or even each block. At the end of each project, the students complete a written critique. My idea is for this small class to be near the goal of verbal class critiques. Each student is their own person, making their own decisions and inevitably those decisions aid in the development of who they will be in adulthood. I try to get learners to understand that middle school expectations prepare them for high school and high school prepares them to be an adult with a promising future. Students should begin to think differently by the end of this section of the lesson. To be able to understand a story as inspiration, history, and to imagine what could be means that they will have started to make a natural connection.

Story as Inspiration

To continue this retrospection, the class will watch the full documentary “Which Way Home,” a story of children who are trying to travel from Central America to the United States. They must first cross the border between Guatemala and Mexico illegally atop freight trains. About five percent of the thousands that cross are children who are traveling alone. Part of this documentary also includes the story of two teenagers whose bodies were found in the desert. The cameras follow these children and the perilous problems they encounter along the way. This film is as heartbreaking as it is true. Reality is that it is possible that some of the students in our school or someone in their family has taken this same journey. Daily I talk about how each day is a new day and mistakes can be rectified later. Taking everything into consideration, learners should be able to interpret visual arts from personal, cultural, and historical contexts. These stories will continue to form the students’ minds

An artist whom I met at a spoken word presentation at the Delaware Art Museum during the *Our America: The Latino Presence in American Art* exhibit will be perfect for a presenter. He crossed the border from Mexico to the United States on foot twice after being deported from Wilmington after the first trip. Living with family he was able to successfully obtain a green card. Students will be able to speak and ask questions in Spanish and I may be able to get another student to translate for those that do not speak the language.

Story as History

I recently learned that one of my students immigrated with her family from Pakistan when she was young. In Pakistan, they lived in a big house, had maids, and were thought of as rich. Once her family immigrated, they had nothing. Her Dad rode his bike to 3 different jobs in those early years. He now owns his own taxi company that is troubled by Uber and Lyft becoming legal in Delaware.

As Common Core is the new standard in US education, units have pushed “book culture” while ignoring many families that share and transmit wisdom through storytelling, music, or visual arts. As educators, we need to continue using these methods in the classroom so students can make connections at home.

“...the stories of the families focused on here are examples of ways that layers of sociological and demographical information, when viewed as narrative reflections of actual people and lives, may be powerful influences in policy and practices...in government and education. The quantitative data of income levels, rates of poverty, and assessments used in schools illustrate segmented facts. Stories tie the facts together and address the past, present, and future of learners’ lives. (5)

My students realize that if there is a problem, I always want to know so that I can understand the situation. I cannot assume or take anything for granted with our population at GHS. Some of our students have many, many difficulties at home and school is their safe haven. To help me understand, they have to tell me a story. The story answers all the questions I may have had.

Story to Imagine what could be

As students write and draw about their lives, they will be describing and defining their racial or ethnic identity. Who we are as people began with our culture at an early age and help to define who we will be in the future. Ultimately the story my students will produce will be one of where they see themselves in their future profession. Stories can solve problems and prove to be an inspiration or reflection. We have to remember that we as teachers are building the future by helping students conquer their lives, despite all odds and be able to come to school everyday with the goal to graduate high school.

“Marion Rose urged the public not to judge kids in the communities that are asylum seekers. She said that ‘our kids are not intellectually less able than kids anywhere else in the country; it’s just their circumstances. They’re already disadvantaged when they come in.’ (6)

On February 23, 2017 the Christina school board will hold a vote to allow GHS to become a “sanctuary school.” This will provide students who are in the United States illegally a safe house. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) will not be able to walk into the school and arrest “illegal” students as soon as they turn 18. President Trump is sending agents to detain citizens for deportation from work, their houses, and even schools. I have heard stories of this happening in the past at our school. It is reported that ICE’s website clarifies, “Enforcement actions may occur at sensitive locations in limited circumstances, but will generally be avoided.” (7) In Denver, CO school districts have been trying to make sure that all students have updated emergency contact information just in case a raid happens during the day.

We have long acknowledged that “self-fulfilling prophecies” are real. Teachers and adults can no longer say horrific things to students about how we think they will never amount to anything. I have watched documentary after documentary where kids are interviewed and remember exactly when a teacher told them they could only continue to

be failures. At GHS we use “positive framing” to help students understand our expectations. Of course, these are still children we are talking about and they will make mistakes just like we will as adults. Using positive language when dealing with students works well because it may be the only positive comment they hear all day. Everything we do in the classroom affects learners, whether it is a normal conversation stating personal opinion or when we are frustrated with behaviors.

Classroom Activities

Lesson Plan 1: Future Self and Community

Empathy

I’ve learned that empathy is not a concept that all students understand. Most that do, show empathy towards family only and few also give it to friends and acquaintances or teachers, bus drivers, other school peers they see everyday. Students define what empathy is on a piece of paper and I will read them anonymously to the class. We will start by having a class discussion with questions to lead the direction of instruction. We will discuss how similar or different one is from another. Empathy starts around the age of 2 years old. The class will watch one short YouTube video on empathy and 1 trailer for the movie District 9 where the film depicts a fictional world where extraterrestrials have become refugees in South Africa. The comments people say about the aliens in the trailer are what we hear on certain news channels or read on people’s Facebook pages about immigrants in the United States currently.

I’ve learned that students that live in certain areas base a lot of who or what the community is based on boundaries. They are more likely to beat up someone new to the neighborhood than to wave hello. There is some idea of community empathy but I have to make the connection to school as a community too, where safety is the utmost importance. The question, “How will we build this community together?” will lead group discussion.

Community

After class discussion, students will be able to describe how classroom community leads to a larger community within our school. Each larger community is built on small communities. My classroom is a community in the Visual Arts department community in the GHS community in the Christina School District community in a northern Delaware community. As a class, students will look at images of community to find the commonality. We will discuss how some images might not have similarities. Why do some have similarities or why do others not? Some of our students have not left the Tri-State area or even been to beaches in the southern part of Delaware. I want them to see different communities and respond to their observations. This will lead to discussion of current communities and issues. Currently in 2017, the United States is in political turmoil. Is this an issue in their community? How will the community adjust to political

changes that are happening? Specifically, with immigrants, people with green cards, and people classified as “illegal residents” living in the community or families being torn apart. We will possibly compare student to student if children are comfortable discussing personal lives in this setting. We discuss the difference between immigrants and emigration, refugees and migrants.

At this point, we will focus on the future job with information on the reality of life. These questions and more will be asked in a specific order to stream their thoughts. We will start with, “Where do you want to be in 10 or 15 years?” The number can be adjusted based on responses. This will lead to further discussion of what jobs do they want in the future and what jobs are likely to be in demand at that time. They will have to be realistic for clarity. Can you have a gigantic house with student loans, car payments, electric, phone, Internet, insurance, etc.? I will question students on their current strengths and/or weaknesses and how it will affect their job choices. Lastly, I will lead the discussion into how one gets a job and succeeds. Will they need to go to college or should they find an internship now? The steps to becoming who you want to be in the future are just as important as making money.

Heavy emphasis will be placed on needing to be aware of “real life” while tying in economics. Students will fill out a graphic organizer with information gathered so that it will lead the students down the right path of research. Students will present their findings using sticky notes inside a manila folder. Making a list is one of the basic principles of story history.

The graphic organizers will lead learners to the final project that includes learning to build small structures with clay and the telling of their story using either a fully functional pop-up book page or an extra-large comic book page with panels of various sizes. During this process the information text will focus on community building. Specifically, self-involvement and promoting a positive impact can vastly improve your community and thus your life. I will give students many options of future jobs to choose from. The first part of project will be to develop the story of their future self and how it applies to their community.

Lesson Plan 2: Tell Your Story – Comic Panels or Pop-Up Book Page

At this point, learners will have chosen their job choice, decided on the place of business, and are ready to write the story from their graphic organizer. They will have the choice to explain the story of their future selves using a two-page full color comic-book layout or a pop-up book two-page layout. I will bind both options into a book at the end of the unit.

Class demonstration will clarify the differences between the two choices and students will decide which option is most relevant for their story. We will discuss the rubrics for each choice and the timeline. Students who choose the comic panels will first start working out their rough draft on a graphic organizer that will define how many panels are

needed, word expectations, drawing tips, and coloring materials. Once the rough draft is approved, either by a peer or teacher, they will start on the final copy.

Students who choose the pop-up book option will already have their future story idea skeleton. They will decide which pop-up options will work best for their story and space constraint. Some are very simple and others are very intricate with hidden strings, paper pulleys, or spinning wheels. The children will choose which quality of paper best suits the needs of the story and build examples. Once approved by teacher or peer they may move on to the final copy.

Differentiation in my classroom comes in many varieties. These two options will help students decide which is best for them depending on the effort being put forth. Additional adjustments will be made student to student as needed.

Lesson Plan 3: Build Your Story – Ceramic Slab-built Structure

The second part of the 3-Dimensional project is to decide what building they want to build with clay slabs. They have the option to either build their future house or the future building that will house their job. Emphasis will be placed on the choice of the 2nd structure but many people work from their homes. For instance, a hair stylist may have converted a shed or a spare room into their salon space. I will take a picture or paint a background of the class' choice. Part of the assignment based on community will show the learners how being a good citizen in your community improves life for everyone. The setting of their future lives is important so this will be an interesting debate. At the end of the project the class will present to their peers and their final work will be put on display at a location either within the school or a public space to be determined like the Newark Free Library in Newark, DE.

Students will be starting this process at different times depending upon the completion of the above lesson. Demonstration will be completed with the group to provide proper project instruction and rubric discussion. The individuals will review the basic ceramic vocabulary, steps to building structures with clay, kiln safety, and classroom cleaning procedures. They will be introduced to using the slab roller; a tool used to save time when rolling out clay slabs and to control the thickness of the clay pieces. We will review slip and score to make sure that the structures are built correctly. Before the walls are put together a rough draft will be sketched out. The class will use images of houses, apartment buildings, hospitals, strip malls, duplexes, sheds, etc. for resources. The draft will show four images – top, front, left side and right side of the house. Students sometimes have a hard time thinking three dimensionally and this step allows them to draw out all aspects of the structure. Once complete, students will meet with the teacher individually to discuss details like windows, roof pitch, doors, glaze color, siding, front steps. Differentiation will mean some students may choose to leave one wall off so that the viewer can see inside the structure like a dollhouse. Those students will build smaller objects to place inside the building for realistic details.

The next step will be to wedge the clay and roll out the walls. The amount of clay each student receives depends on the size of their structure and intricacy of details. This will take concentration and patience, as do many of our projects. Students will need to know how to store the clay at night to preserve it for use the next day. They will need to be present in school each day to keep their clay from drying out and to complete the project on time. Once the structure is built, it will go into the kiln to be fired and then the bisque ware will be ready for glazing. With such details needed, this will be no time to be sloppy. I often talk about how you can have a poorly built clay structure and glaze applied correctly will improve the look of it greatly. Glaze will not save these structures if built sloppily but will add interest and extra detail. When the project is properly glazed it will go in the kiln for its final firing.

It is very likely I will choose to use this project for the final exam, which is worth twenty percent of their final grade in the class. I like to do projects for my final exam since 3-D is a project-based class. It takes time and effort to complete these projects with all the knowledge of vocabulary that would be on an exam. Additionally, they will be completing a written critique for reflection at the end of the assignment that will be averaged together for the final grade.

Notes

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Implementing the National Core Arts Standards

In 2016, Delaware adopted the new National Core Art Standards. Most lesson plans do not to address each one of the anchor standards but they are all used in the unit above. The new standards are broken into four sections: Creating, Presenting, Responding, and Connecting.

In Creating students will begin to conceive and develop new artistic ideas and work. They will generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work with rough drafts. Student will organize and develop artistic ideas and work. Then they will refine and complete artistic work towards the end of the both projects.

The anchor standards are reflected throughout the Future Self and Community unit. The various Creating standards are covered throughout each lesson, as is with many Visual Arts lessons. Beginning with students conceptualizing where they will be in ten to fifteen years. Learners will individually generate a job of their future, organize and develop a rough draft of their future place of business and will refine the story behind everything. Most of the unit will focus on these particular standards, as it is a project-based lesson. Part of my goal is for students to be able to create using their minds and hands.

In Presenting students will begin to interpret and share artistic work. Learners will analyze, interpret, and select artistic work for presentation. This step will step out of their comfort zone to learn where and how to show their projects. They will develop and refine artistic work for presentation then convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

Students will begin Presenting by selecting, analyzing and interpreting the why and how of presentation. These lessons will reinstate the need for an art show held at GHS or close location. This has not happened in many years. It will help build our program and promote our students. They will need to decide if the projects are above standard, at or below standard. The learners will need to come together as a team to decide on where and when to have the show. Do we have enough materials for the show? How much time will the show take for set up and take down? This learning experience will give the students an understanding of a different part of being an artist that we do not normally do in the art room.

In Responding children will start to understand and evaluate how the arts convey meaning by perceiving and analyzing artistic work. They will interpret intent and meaning in personal artistic work. As usual, students will apply criteria to evaluate artistic work through self-reflection at the end of the each project lesson with a written critique.

Responding has always been an important aspect of my lessons. I always emphasize the need to reflect and learn improvements for the future. In my classroom, I try to help students understand that we are not perfect but always strive to be perfect. Being able to reflect with mini class critiques throughout the lessons and at the end with individual written critiques promotes positive self-analysis. My ultimate goal for instruction is to have students accurately, positively, and confidently verbally critique peers. We are not there yet and it may be due to the lack of empathy addressed above. Each step a learner takes as a group is a leap for each individually.

In connecting children will relate artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context. They will synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. Finally, my students will relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

The *Connecting* standards will be addressed while students are deciphering the importance of future self and its connection to history. They will continue addressing the past, present, and future through interviews, podcasts, video clips, and articles. The connection of stories between time, cultures, and society will be throughout this unit. Connecting the history of story to current selves may be the most challenging lesson within this unit. As a Visual Arts teacher this works perfectly into my curriculum and will be a great way to help GHS start thinking about the future now.

