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Critical literacy and digital technology with a novel unit

Brandon Harrison

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Abstract

This paper contains an instructional unit designed for teaching a novel unit utilizing critical literacy and digital technology at the upper-elementary level. The design of the unit is composed around relevant research-based literature which is cited and referenced in the paper. Methods for instructional delivery are provided as well as a chapter-by-chapter breakdown of key terms and critical prompts.

Critical Literacy and Digital Technology with a Novel Unit

A Graduate Project

Submitted to the

Division of Literacy Education

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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Master of Arts in Education

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by

Brandon Harrison

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This Graduate Project submitted by Brandon Harrison

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Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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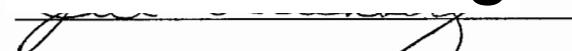
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Abstract

This paper contains an instructional unit designed for teaching a novel unit utilizing critical literacy and digital technology at the upper-elementary level. The design of the unit is composed around relevant research-based literature which is cited and referenced in the paper. Methods for instructional delivery are provided as well as a chapter-by-chapter breakdown of key terms and critical prompts.

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Introduction

Relying on both Janks (2010) for her perspective on critical literacy and Montgomery (2014) as a basis for developing a novel unit based on critical literacy and digital technologies with the intentions of empowering students to understand and in turn, be equipped to advocate on matters of social justice.

Students are not simply vessels to be filled with knowledge by the teacher, but rather, they represent much of our world's hope to correct social inequities and make the world a more just place in the future (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2010). Students will do more than simply inherit the world that past generations have given to them. On the contrary, they will also design and redesign various structures to their own accord (Janks, 2010). It is important that students become stewards of our future and are sensitive to many aspects that can have a profound impact on the way the future could be shaped, such as being attuned to diversity and understanding that many individuals lack basic necessities for a healthy and safe life.

Digital technologies are playing an ever-increasing role in society. From the way texts are composed, to the way audio and video have increased multimodality of literacy, students will need a solid foundation of digital literacy to effectively thrive in the future (Janks, 2014). Since students will have to gain proficiency within digital literacy tools, it is important for teachers to embed digital literacy structures within instruction (Stevens & Brown, 2011; Zawilinski, 2009).

The topic of critical literacy was selected on a personal and professional level. On a personal level, I strongly believe that education goes far beyond teaching academic skills and into the realm of teaching students to be moral and ethical citizens that are

compassionate to the plight of others who suffer from inequities. Furthermore, I am influenced very strongly by my Catholic faith that Christians must advocate for the poor, less fortunate, and those in need within society. On a professional level, the importance of utilizing digital tools within instruction is something that speaks very boldly to the way I teach and the resources that I have within my classroom. Making blogs, podcasts, presentations, among many other tools, are cornerstones within my professional instruction.

Literature Review

What is Critical Literacy?

Critical literacy is an extremely broad field that encompasses many disparate dynamics. The essence of critical literacy is to build the foundation for a just society in a diverse world (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2010). Within critical literacy, educators seek to develop students with high levels of academic attainment, as well as develop student capacities to identify and critique the hidden ideologies of texts (Janks, 2012; Luke 2012). Critical literacy goes beyond the mere teaching of word meaning and how to make sense of these words within the texts (Janks, 2010). "A critical literacy teacher is, in addition, interested in what all kinds of texts (written, visual, and oral) do to readers, viewers and listeners and whose interests are served by what these texts do" (Janks, 2010, p. 19). As Janks (2012) argues, critical literacy is crucial because words are the choice of the author, thus, the reader must be able to comprehend how the specific choices the author made fit within the broad societal structures of power. However, this is simply the tip of the iceberg, as critical literacy extends beyond critical textual analysis. The notion of empowering students, as opposed to filling them with knowledge; promoting social

harmony through social justice, as opposed to holding on to the status quo; making student diversity a pillar within classroom instruction, as opposed to being comfortable with cultural or societal norms, are but a few of the many areas that critical literacy addresses (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2010).

Literacy involves more than merely decoding or composing the written word. "That is why reading a text as pure description of an object (like a syntactical rule) and undertaken to memorize the description, is neither real reading nor does it result in knowledge of the object to which the text refers" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 33). Furthermore, the process of reading, writing, and language are intertwined within their sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts in which they were structured (Freire & Macedo, 1987). These processes are not static, as being literate has varied across history, culture, and political spectrum. Consequently, since reading, writing, and language are connected to their sociopolitical and sociocultural contexts, literacy as a social process, was established by researchers and theorists (Janks, 2010; Luke, 2012).

Freire (1970) is largely considered to be the originator of critical literacy in the modern world with his publication of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and other works in Brazil. Focusing on sociopolitical characteristics of power, Freire characterized education as relying upon the "banking concept," in which "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (p. 72). In this view of education, students are considered as simply empty vessels that must be filled with knowledge. In the banking concept of education, the teacher not only reigns over knowledge, but also discipline, interaction, content, and all other aspects of the learning process. The teacher, whether intentionally or

unintentionally, reaffirms various societal, cultural, and political structures of domination. "The more completely [students] accept the passive role imposed on them, the more they tend simply to adapt to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them" (Freire, 1970, p. 73). Overall, students in this view of education are merely assets that can be altered to better fit or serve the dominant cultural or political structures.

Sociocultural aspects also provide a structure within critical literacy (Janks, 2013). Since students come from a variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, they must participate in opportunities that relate to their diverse interests and backgrounds (Janks, 2013). Critical literacy works to bring out these diverse interests and backgrounds in order to address inequality and promote societal stability by giving students' identities a role within the classroom setting (Janks, 2013). Embracing and fostering student diversity, such as gender, ethnicity, and social class can help promote a world that is not monochromatic. "What we need is a world in which we can learn from our differences, be excited by conflictual perspectives, and all be treated with openness and care" (Janks, 2010, p. 125). Janks (2013) argues that student diversity should be a pillar within the classroom that is utilized and upheld, as opposed to being altered or transformed to fit dominant cultural constructs.

Critical literacy entails not only identifying and analyzing the relationship of dominant cultural and political structures, but also endeavors to generate change and prevail on issues of justice (Freire, 1970; Janks, 2010). Without these aspects, critical literacy would be a concept without force or energy. "To surmount the situation of oppression, people must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming

action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity" (Freire, 1970, p. 47). Thus, critical literacy works as a progressive or advancing force within society. In particular, the model by Janks (2000) takes social justice into account through four interdependent orientations: domination, access, diversity, design, and redesign.

Orientations of Critical Literacy

Frameworks and models for critical literacy have varied widely since its origins. Since there are many views of what critical literacy is or looks like, there is no one correct model, framework, or orientation to critical literacy (Luke, 2012). Understanding the multitude of dynamics within critical literacy is an ongoing endeavor that has continued to be refined by researchers. One particular lens to view critical literacy was developed by Janks (2000) of South Africa in the wake of apartheid. Within much of her career, Janks has spent a significant amount of time further developing our understanding of critical literacy both in schools and through academic research. Her orientations to critical literacy are but one framework to comprehend this broad area of study that has a history which spans across multiple decades.

According to Janks (2000), critical literacy is composed of four orientations that are interdependent, thus, each orientation influences the other with its presence (or lack thereof) within the contexts of the society and education. The interdependent framework by Janks (2000) includes the following: domination, access, diversity, design, and redesign. As Janks (2013) clearly noted, these orientations are not profoundly new; however, their theory of interdependence is something that has recently been captured. Understanding these orientations are crucial in designing equitable structures within a

diverse society (Janks, 2010). As Janks (2012) noted, differences in society and culture can produce fear and even intolerance, which can cause structural disparities with regards to power and unequal access to resources. Utilizing these orientations can help individuals, societies, and nations redesign themselves as the world evolves and adapts (Janks, 2010).

Domination. The orientation of domination, also known as power, emphasizes the analysis of how language, literacy, and classroom dynamics work as instruments of maintaining and reproducing inequitable social relations with less-privileged or marginalized social classes, cultures, and ethnicities (Janks, 2000; Svensson 2013). Although domination and power are often interchanged across various pieces of scholarship, this particular review will operate using domination with regards to terminology. Domination can be observed from both a micro- and macro-perspective, such as observed directly within an individual classroom lesson or the broad response from academic and bureaucratic structures to adapt to an increase in societal and cultural diversity (Svensson, 2013). The orientation of domination is one specific viewpoint that fits within the broader perspective of critical literacy that works to change the way in which we view micro and macro dynamics in the classroom, community, and society as a whole (Janks, 2010).

Access. The orientation of access is very closely linked with that of domination, in that dominate forms of literacy and language tends to be given precedent within political, societal, and academic structures based on a variety of rationales (Janks, 2010). The dominant languages, literacies, and forms of knowledge are generally intended to allow students access in the labor market, political arena, which should, in turn, provide

them with economic and political freedom and prosperity (Hultin & Westman, 2013). Thus, the languages and literacies that tend to empower individuals for greater wealth and prosperity are generally associated as the standard discourses within educational structures.

With regards to current societal, cultural, and political structures, the orientation of access can also be seen as identifying the haves and have nots in terms of languages, literacy, and forms of knowledge (Janks, 2000). As Freire (1987) noted, literacy programs tend to provide students access to previously established and dominate forms of languages and literacies. What languages and literacies provide a more effective gateway to foster prosperity? Should students that are native to dominate forms of language and literacy be instructed on less dominate forms of language and literacy? These are but a few questions that one asks when looking through the lens of access within critical literacy. In short, "how we teach literacy can make a significant difference to the ways in which the cultural and linguistic capital associated with powerful discourses, dominant languages, elite literacies, are distributed" (Janks, 2010, p. 133).

Diversity. In this orientation, diversity entails the different languages, literacies, and forms of knowledge in academic, societal, and political structures. This orientation within critical literacy can serve as the means for "changing consciousness" in which students utilize various forms of languages, literacies, and forms of knowledge (Janks, 2000, p. 177). With regards to this change in consciousness, "as individual human subjects enter into new discourses they acquire alternative and additional ways of being in the world—that is, new social identities" (Janks, 2000, p. 177). In one example to highlight this particular point, the immigrant and non-immigrant student tend to have two

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disparate identities and experiences due to their differences in culture, ethnicity, and language (Enciso, 2011). However, when students come to understand that these differences can often lead to prejudice and discrimination, it is possible that the consciousness of students might be raised enough to lay the foundation for a more equitable present and future (Enciso, 2011). In short, this orientation provides the human element within education, as it looks on individuals not as mere assets to educational structures, but rather individuals with diverse cultures, ethnicities, and languages that should be addressed in the school setting (Janks, 2013). As Hultin and Westman (2013) referenced, "diversity also reminds us to focus on children's differences in preferences, experiences as well as sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds" (p. 281). Thus, academic structures are sensitive to needs and aspects that go well beyond cognitive development, in that student identities take precedent, as well (Luke, 2012).

According to Janks (2013), understanding and being sensitive to differences in society is one focus in the orientation of diversity within critical literacy. Additionally, this orientation also serves to promote harmony among the different cultures and values that students experience on a regular basis throughout their life (Janks, 2000). With a world full of diversity, it is likely that intolerance and xenophobia will continue to exist in the future—more or less within certain societies (Janks, 2012). This distinct orientation accomplishes this end by establishing a perspective that looks at diversity as something that can be of worth and value (Janks, 2010). Accordingly, this orientation recognizes the differences that are present all around. Looking at individuals as "the same" or "like us" risks what Janks (2010) called "dissimulation," in which individuals are left unmoved by inequities with regards to wealth, religion, culture, ethnicity, gender, and political

orientation (p. 107). When acknowledging and valuing diversity, the differences that exist within society can then be viewed as something favorable, thus, opening the door for a harmonious society (Janks, 2010).

Design and Redesign. The orientation of design and redesign, or creating and recreating texts, literacies, and forms of knowledge, establishes students as a creative and productive catalysts that promotes change and social justice (Hultin & Westman, 2013; Janks, 2000). Unlike the previous orientations, design and redesign are process that continually endeavor to construct and reconstruct the world (Janks, 2010). "It is important that this process is conceptualized as cyclical because every new design serves a different set of interests" (Janks, 2010, p. 183). As Janks (2010) asserted, each design and redesign serves particular interests because they are the results of human choice. Choices in how academic structures are designed and redesigned will not benefit all students equally, and even in some cases, can work to repress certain languages, literacies, and forms of knowledge. In short, the paramount characteristic of design and redesign is in the focus of how we make and remake the world, keeping in mind that our actions will serve certain cultures, ethnicities, and social classes for better or worse (Janks, 2010).

Final Thoughts on Critical Literacy

Critical literacy is a very dynamic field of study, in which there are many models, frameworks, and viewpoints (Luke, 2012). With its stances on empowering students, diversity, and being able to generate change in the name of social justice, critical literacy might be able to play a substantial role with regards to promoting equity among students and fostering harmony between diverse cultures, ethnic groups, and social classes.

Critical literacy is a concept that goes beyond learning and teaching strategies. Critical literacy is a perspective that serves to refine our entire belief system. "As a practice, critical literacy is a way of being and doing in the world, underpinned by values that direct us regarding how to achieve a better life for all" (Janks, 2013, P. 239). Critical literacy empowers learners at both the social and cognitive level to make a more just, equitable, and harmonious for themselves and others.

The interdependent orientations by Janks (2000), which include domination, access, diversity, and design/redesign, serve to provide educators with the necessary perspective to implement components of critical literacy within academic structures. Though the concept of critical literacy is not profoundly new, its emphasis on empowering students within a cultural diverse world, addressing societal inequities, promoting social harmony, and designing a better future, make critical literacy pertinent within literacy instruction (Janks, 2010).

Digital Technology and Critical Literacy

Digital technology has a substantial impact within the literacy classroom, especially when taking into account critical literacy aspects within literacy instruction. For instance, podcasts and blogs can be used to digitally broadcast topics central to critical literacy, such as inequities and issues related to social justice and harmony. Montgomery (2014) demonstrated how 3rd grade students utilized blogs and podcasts to digitally communicate and voice matters with regards to slavery, forced cultural assimilation, and discrimination. Digital technologies have provided a space for students to voice themselves on matters that can make the world a more just place that have previously not existed (Janks, 2014). With the advent of digital mediums, students can be

immersed in an every-changing sea of knowledge and information that takes on many forms, such as written or audio forms.

These digital technologies can indeed impact the way in which literacy instruction is implemented and structured. As Stevens and Brown (2011) indicated, well trained teachers are needed to effectively teach components of critical literacy through digital mediums. Thus, teachers should be aware of the ways in which digital technology and critical literacy can be intertwined within the literacy classroom. For instance, simply deciding upon how a blogs can be used in the classroom can be a crucial decision. Will it be a classroom blog run by the teacher, a literature response blog, or a classroom news blog? Zawilinski (2009) demonstrates that blogs can be an effective tool for students to engage in higher order thinking skills within the literature they read, as they are able to read and comment on other students' topics, experiences, and perspectives. As an example, one student who posts about the mistreatment of Jewish people during World Word II might ignite a spark in conversation with someone who posts about the unfairness and mistreatment of certain individuals today.

For me personally, this has happened in my own classroom, with students igniting sparks with other students based upon their classroom blog posts. One student posting about the mistreatment of Jewish people within her reading book got another student engaged within a conversation about how people with disabilities can be mistreated today, as well. The other student was reading about the history of Louis Braille and made a connection of how she has seen people made fun of due to certain disabilities, very much like being mistreated as a result of a cultural difference.

In conclusion, integral principals regarding critical literacy and digital technologies were highlighted in the review of pertinent research-based literature. Critical literacy, as defined by Janks (2000), includes domination, accesses, diversity, design, and redesign. Digital technologies, such as blogs and podcasts, can be utilized in the intentions of empowering students to advocate on matters of social justice. The world we live in will never be perfect; however, tailoring literacy instruction to promote students to advocate on matters of social justice is a pivotal step in trying to make the world a more equitable place.

Methods

This section of the paper describes the overall plans for an instructional unit covering the novel *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park (2011) as part of a small group reading at the upper elementary level. The unit utilizes digital technologies as part of the vehicle for students to respond to the literature and discover information and learn about the countries that are present within the novel. There are also a handful of activities that branch off of the unit which have critical literacy aspects embedded within the lessons and are directly related to the literature itself. In short, the unit utilizes both critical literacy and digital technology to provide students with a rich learning experience that will expose them to diversity, social equities, and the endeavor to make the world a more just place in the future.

Unit Design

The design of the unit is grounded in research-based literature. The cornerstone and inspiration to the unit plan comes primarily from the work of Montgomery (2014) in which she implemented novel units within an elementary classroom that hit on many critical literacy aspects, such as exposure to race and ethnicity in the elementary classroom, as well as confronting students with the notion of societal inequities and injustice. Her work also touches on the utilization digital technology as a medium for students to have a voice about the themes of the literature. Park's (2011) novel was selected for its connection to many of the aspects of critical literacy according to Janks (2010). The novel exposes elementary students to the four main aspects of critical literacy according to Janks: power, access, diversity, and remaking the world into a more just and equitable place.

The unit is specifically designed around four activities that branch off from the novel. Similar to Montgomery (2014) and her utilization of blogs and podcasts, the unit requires students to maintain a digital blog and write a script that will be used to compose a podcast. As a contrast to Montgomery, each individual student will maintain a blog and compose his or her own unique podcast based on the critical literacy themes of the literature.

The unit includes five extended activities associated with chapters two, eleven, seventeen, and eighteen. As Janks (2014) asserts, there are many activities that can be utilized within the classroom to foster aspects of critical literacy. Some activities are related to diversity and identity, while others are related to using digital mediums as a tool to made the world a more just and equitable place.

Setting

The optimum setting for the unit to be implemented is within the upper elementary classroom. The location of the unit should take place in the classroom with a group of no more than five elementary students. The unit should take place within the middle to end of the year so that students have time to acclimate themselves to school routines and structures, especially with school protocols in regards to the use of digital technology. Classroom equipment should include a computer for each student, an EduBlogs account for each student, one recording device, and six copies of the book *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park (2011). Only one teacher is needed for the completion of the unit. The teacher should have a strong background with digital technologies and have comfort when navigating through blogs and podcast, as well as

composing posts for blogs and digital recordings for podcasts. Lastly, the teacher should also have a background with reading to and with small groups of elementary students.

Procedures

Within the unit, students will take part within a small group reading of *A Long Walk to Water* by Park (2011). Students will read each chapter as a small group with the facilitation of the teacher. At the end of each chapter, students will compose a blog post where they will respond to discussion questions about the literature as well as write down the meaning of selected vocabulary words. As a vocabulary strategy, students will select one word from the selected vocabulary words and complete a word square that was created for the specific use of this novel unit.

Once students have finished their blog posts and word square for each chapter, they will take part within a short discussion facilitated by the teacher about their responses to the questions and literature, as well as the meaning of their selected vocabulary words. After the discussion, students may edit their blog posts to refine their responses to the questions in regards to the literature.

Before moving to the next chapter, students will utilize the internet in order to learn more about the countries within the novel through the website www.OurAfrica.org. At this site, students will gain background knowledge and understand the context of the characters that are in the story by learning about a country's economy, education system, cuisine, among other aspects. While students are reading about a country from the novel, they must write down one piece of information they feel is important to know about the country and explain why it is important.

There are also four activities that are related to the literature, as well as have critical literacy components within the activities. The activities are to be completed

within about the same time frame of a chapter reading, blog post composition, and discussion should be done. The first activity confronts power and perception through the use of map projections. The second activity is about understanding diversity through the various identities and roles people have within their lives. The third activity is about understanding how new digital technologies play a role in providing people access to information. The final activity is the writing of a script about the novel and how to make the world a better place and advocating for social justice based on the content within the novel, which will be used for recording a podcast that can be embedded within each student's blog.

The unit provides a chapter-by-chapter breakdown of comprehension questions that prompt the reader to think about critical literacy aspects in relationship to diversity, inequities, and social justice. The vocabulary or "key terms" as referred to in the unit plan provide the student with a foundation to grasp basic levels of comprehension and critical literacy themes. For instance, the word "honeycomb" in chapter five may seem like a simple word to understand, but as used in the text, it is the food in which the young boys eat while wandering through the desert because they do not have access to a steady supply of food.

Daily Routine and Structure. This novel, *A Long Walk to Water* by Park (2011), was used to create discussion and comprehension questions that hit on various levels of critical literacy, such as exposing students to diversity and social inequities within the world. The comprehension questions are used to both foster student understanding of the text as well as provide a basis for group discussion (see Appendix A for literature discussion plan). There is also an informational reading component, in which students

search for information about the countries in which this novel takes place in within Africa. Students will read this book within a small group under the supervision of a teacher. Each chapter of the book consists of both a section for Nya and Salva. The teacher will always read Nya's section and the students will always take turns reading Salva's section aloud to the teacher.

It is recommended to read this book within small groups of about five students with the support of the teacher at the elementary level. Each chapter is relatively short with two stories that make up each chapter: Nya and Salva's story. Nya's section is always a different color from Salva's story and always comes first. The teacher should read that section and model effective reading fluency and comprehension. For instance, the teacher might try to make a prediction as to what might come next in Nya's story or make an inference as to how the problem of not having clean water might be solved. The teacher primarily gets the students warmed up for reading by reading aloud Nya's section first, as her section is generally only a page long.

Once the teacher is finished with Nya's section, the teacher should either post the comprehension questions and vocabulary or have students write down the vocabulary and comprehension questions within their reading journals or blogs. The online blogging platform Edu Blogs works great since student work is saved and edited continuously by the students and there are no concerns about having text crammed against each other as it sometimes can within handwritten journals. Furthermore, within a blog system, the teacher and even parents (if they are granted access) can look at student work on demand so long as there is an internet connection. Edu Blogs is a free online blog system where the teacher can create a blog for students to access or give each student his or her own

individual blog under an entire class blog system (see Appendix B for more information about using Edu Blogs). Students have access to read and comment on other students' work while the teacher has complete authority over all other blogs. Handwritten journals can be implemented within the unit, but it is recommended from personal experience that blogging works most efficiently.

After the teacher has read Nya's section to the small group of students, students should then proceed to reading Salva's section. It is recommended that each student read either half or the whole page before switching to another student. The chapters are relatively short, so each student will read only once or twice within each chapter on a daily basis. While the students are reading, the teacher facilitates by helping students pronounce words or answer questions from students as they read. At the end of each chapter, the teacher will pose the following question for discussion to the small group of students: "How has this story helped you understand the way in which some people live?" Each student will provide a verbal response. The purpose for this discussion question is to tap into the critical literacy aspect of diversity by getting students to understand that many people live very differently depending on certain contexts. In this case, due to poverty and war, the characters in the novel will probably live completely different lives from that of students that live in developed nations. This question is only meant to be discussed, as opposed to written down, since the comprehension questions and vocabulary provided will help develop understanding of the text.

Because this book takes place on another continent and during the 1980's conflict in Southern Sudan within Salva's story, students typically will have questions with regards to geographical features and the context of the historical period. For instance,

many students at the start of the book ask the following question, "Why are people all of a sudden starting to shoot by a school?" Since students have little prior knowledge of previous conflicts in the 1980's, the teacher has to help build background knowledge that a civil war is starting during this time period in Southern Sudan. The vocabulary portion of this project includes words such as "rebel" and "independence" and the questions deal with the life that Salva lives as a result of the war.

Once students have finished reading within small groups with the teacher, they are to determine meaning of vocabulary and answer the comprehension questions on their blogs or reading journals. It is recommended that the students write the meaning of the vocabulary words on their blogs, write out the questions, and then write out the answers below each question, as well. After their blog posts are completed, students are then to select one of the vocabulary words and complete a word square (see Appendix C). The words square are to be used within the literature discussion.

After word meanings and comprehension questions have been addressed, students should visit the website www.ourafrica.org to build background knowledge, as basic information from culture and traditions are addressed on that website. It is recommended that students stick to learning about countries within the novel (Sudan, Kenya, and Ethiopia) for a significant time before being able to choose other countries to learn about on that particular site. Students should write down at least one piece of information that they learned and found interesting from using the site www.ourafrica.org on their building background knowledge sheet (see Appendix D). One major purpose of visiting this website is that it ties informational reading to literature reading, as well as researching to better comprehend what is read.

What has been described is a recommended structure for teaching with *A Long Walk to Water* by Park (2011) at the upper-elementary (grades 4-5) level. However, as this is only a recommended structure, the teacher may need to modify instruction to meet the needs of certain individuals or groups. For instance, a reader that struggles at times might need to rely on the audiobook version as opposed to always reading from the text directly. Furthermore, if a student struggles with spelling and word processing, an adult might have to make an accommodation by having the student verbalize his or her answers to the comprehension questions with the teacher first so that the teacher can help facilitate how the students could write their response efficiently.

Results

The unit includes a chapter-by-chapter breakdown with key terms and critical response prompts that connect to critical literacy aspects: power, inequities, diversity, and advocating for social justice. Within certain chapters there are activities that branch out from the novel and also have critical literacy aspects embedded within the lessons. There are a total of four activities that branch out from the novel.

Chapter 1

Key Terms:

- rebels

- independence

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- Why does Linda Sue Park write with 2 different styles of print?

- Describe Salva's life

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Chapter 2

Key Terms:

- relief

- mortars

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- Describe Nya's life

- Why is Salva left in the barn and abandoned by the others?

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Novel Unit Activity 1: Maps are Texts

Critical Literacy Activities for *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park

Activities adapted from *Doing Critical Literacy* by Janks

Critical Literacy Objective: Texts Affect the Way People View the World

Relation to Literature: Africa, despite its sheer size and wide variety of countries, of often underrepresented within the classroom curriculum. This is illustrated in the comparison of map projections that often portray Africa as substantially smaller area of land within the world.

Sequence of Instruction

Anticipatory Set (5 minutes)

- Ask students the following question: How can maps be considered texts?

Lesson Outline (10-15 minutes)

- Post the Mercator (*this map is generally used within the United States. It maintains the shape of continents, but distorts their size.*) and Peters (*This first appeared in 1974. The map maintains the size of continents, but distorts their shape.*) projection for students to observe.

- Have students observe the differences and similarities between the two maps. After about 1 or 2 minutes of observation, have students share with the group some of the things they observed that were different and similar.

- Once students have shared with the group, post the following discussion question(s) on the board:

- ○ The Peters projection created a great deal of controversy when it was first published. Why do you think it caused so much controversy?

- Students should then write out their own personal thoughts on their Activity Sheet.

- Have students share their thoughts about the controversy between the two map projections, as well as write down some of the things their classmates share within the group.

- Students should share and notice that the Mercator projection allows the United States and North America to appear more prominent when compared to other countries, especially Africa, which appears the same size as Greenland, which is a misconception since Africa is one of the larger continents. The teacher should connect this to the novel, as it is important to learn Africa since it is one of the larger continents within our world.

Closure (5 minutes)

- Students should then write out what they learned within their Activity Sheet. Students should understand that their view of the world could be affected by which map projection they read, such as in the size of the countries. As a final note, the teacher should connect this to literature, in that their beliefs could be affected by what they choose to expose themselves to within their lives.

Maps Activity Sheet

Name:_____   Date:_____

These are my own personal thoughts about the discussion question...

These are the thoughts we talked about as a group on the discussion question....

This is what I learned today...

Chapter 3

Key Terms:

- artillery

- tribe

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- Why is Salva left to wander the desert by himself?

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Chapter 4

Key Terms:

- feast

- daze

- doubt

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- Why is the group that Salva is walking with walking to nowhere?

- Why do you think nobody is coming to help them?

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Chapter 5

Key Terms:

- honeycomb

- inhabited

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- Describe the relationship between Salva and Marial.

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Chapter 6

Key Terms:

- makeshift

- solemn

- wailing

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- Why does Nya and her mother have a different opinion on the relief camp?

- Why does the new member of the group impact Salva and the entire group?

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Chapter 7

Key Terms:

- papyrus

- prow

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- Describe Akeer's sickness.

- Why was Marial unable to survive the journey through the desert?

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Chapter 8

Key Terms:

- monotonous

- desperate

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- Why is Akeer sick?

- Without having any money, how do they get food?

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Chapter 9

Key Terms:

- arid

- tamarind

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- How are the newcomers welcomed to the village?

- Why does Salva not give up in his journey through the desert?

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Chapter 10

Key Terms:

- revived

- refugee camp

- corpses

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- What is it that the two strangers to the village want from the chief?

- Why is Salva unable to find his family?

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Chapter 11

Key Terms:

- mourn

- emaciated

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- What will happen if there is no water found in between the two trees?

- Describe life in a refugee camp.

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Novel Unit Activity 2: Many Different Identities and Life Positions

Critical Literacy Activities for *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park

Activities adapted from *Doing Critical Literacy* by Janks

Critical Literacy Objective: We All Have Many Different Identities or Positions in Life.

Relation to Literature: Salva and Nya have very different identities and positions of life when compared to many students within the developed world.

Sequence of Instruction

Anticipatory Set (5 minutes)

- Ask students the following question: Who are you in life?

Lesson Outline (10-15 minutes)

- Post <u>Salva's Identities and Life Positions</u>

- Have students observe the various identities and life positions that Salva has within his own life.

- Once students have observed what is on the diagram, see if they can brainstorm to see if there is anything else that could be put on the diagram.

- The teacher should then read the bottom section of the diagram about how our various identities and life positions can cause tension within our own lives and with others.

- Students should then work to complete their own diagrams on themselves about their own identities and life positions. The teacher should hand out the <u>Student Identities and Life Positions</u> sheet for students to complete.

- Once students have completed their own personal identity and life positions diagram, they should share their sheet with at least 1 other student in the group.

- After students have shared, they should complete the bottom of their sheet and write out how their identities and life positions can cause tension within themselves and with others.

Closure (5 minutes)

- As a final whole group discussion, the teacher should then ask the following question: Since all of you are different in your own unique identities and positions, how do we manage this as a group so that we can get along with each other to the best of our ability?

- Students should work out that since each student has his or her own unique life position and identity, other students will have to be sensitive to this fact. For instance, if a student from another country is learning English, he or she should not be made fun of for having a different level of understanding when compared with others who may only know how to speak English.

Salva's Identities and Life Positions
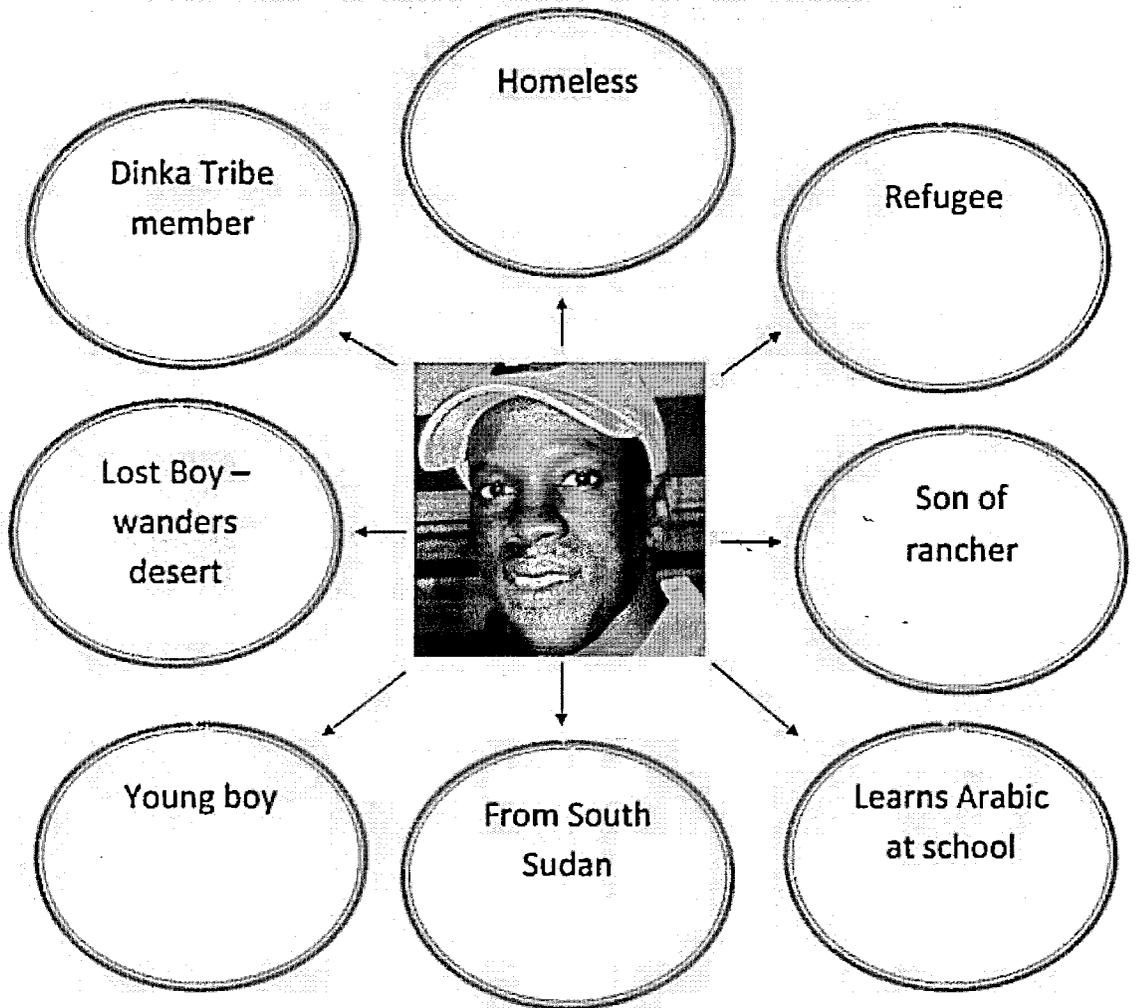
Sometimes, Salva's identities and life positions clash or cause tension within himself and others. For instance, since he is the son of a rancher, he may feel compelled to do that and follow his father's footsteps when he gets older as opposed to something else. Also, since he is a refugee from South Sudan and without a home, he may cause tension with others in different countries that may or may not want to welcome him into their country.

Student Identities and Life Positions
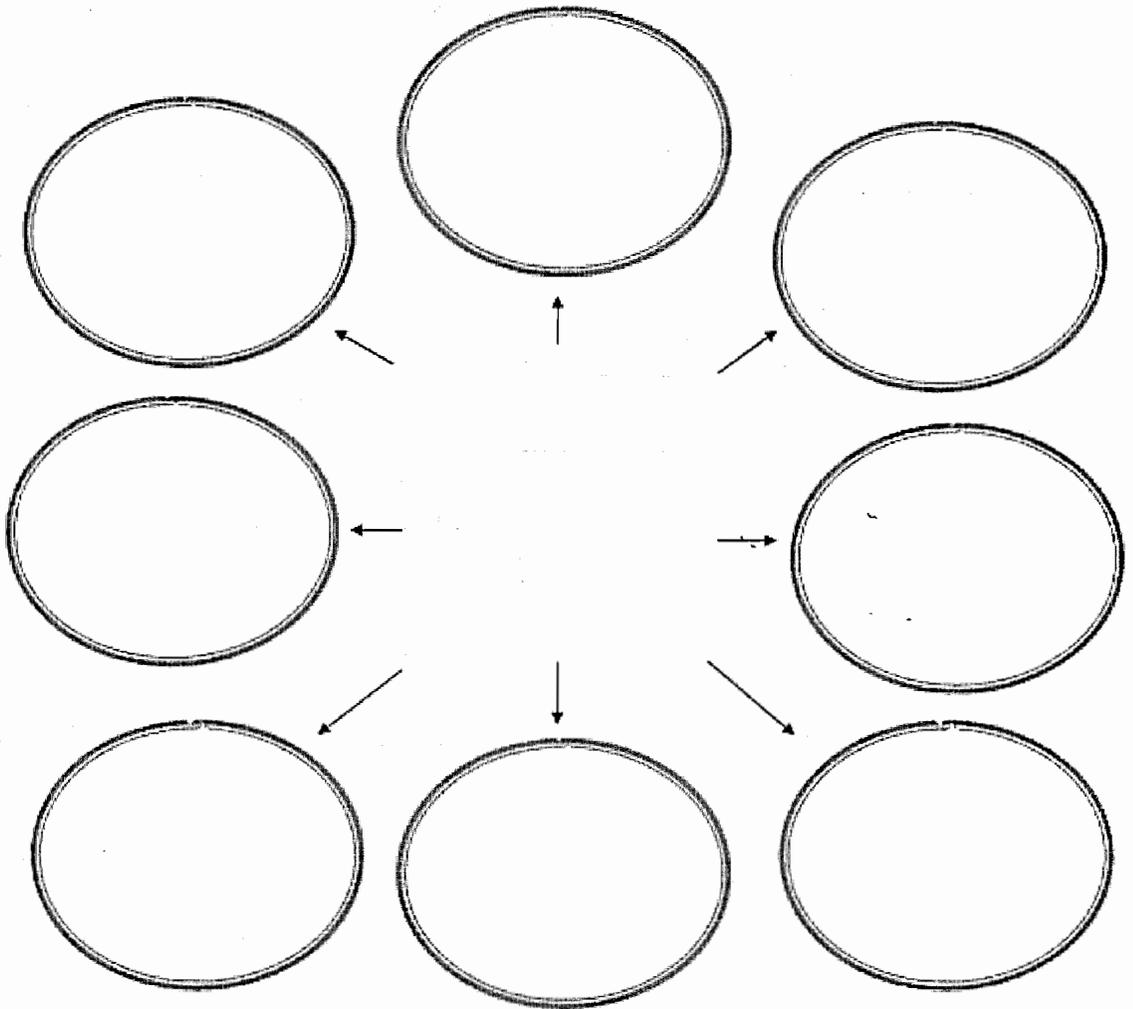
Can you give examples of identities that could cause tension within yourself or with others?

Chapter 12

Key Terms:

- despair

- chaos

- merciless

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- Why do the people describe the machine as the "iron giraffe?"

- How has life changed after six years for Salva in the camp?

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Chapter 13

Key Terms:

- earnestly

- peril

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- How are the workers trying to help out the people with their "iron giraffe?"

- Why is the government and military forcing people into the water and onto the other side of the river?

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Chapter 14

Key Terms:

- misery

- ration

- administration

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- Why does Nya's village celebrate?

- How are the conditions at the Ifo refugee camp different from the previous camp?

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Chapter 15

Key Terms:

- frigid

- terminal

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- Why is the water not safe to drink yet from the hole?

- Describe how Salva is handling his new living conditions.

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Chapter 16

Key Terms: aquifer

- relief agency

- clinic

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- Why were the people unable to get water from underground?

- Why is it difficult for Salva to see his father again?

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Chapter 17

Key Terms:

- guinea worms

- digestive

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- Why does having clean water change the lives of the people in Nya's village?

- Why is Salva wanting to help people back in his home country?

Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Novel Unit Activity 3: What Digital Technologies Can Do

Critical Literacy Activities for *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park

Activities adapted from *Doing Critical Literacy* by Janks

Critical Literacy Objective: Digital Technologies Have a Wide Range of Purposes

Relation to Literature: Salva uses a wide range of digital literacies to make the world a better place. His website entitled *Water for Sudan* helps promote the development for the building of infrastructure within his home country.

Sequence of Instruction

Anticipatory Set (5 minutes)

- Ask students the following question: How do you use digital technology?

Lesson Outline (10-15 minutes)

- Have students select one piece of digital technology, such as a video game platform, cell phone, usb device, camera, among others.

- Once students select their pieces of technology, hand each student the Technology Activity Sheet for him or her to complete.

- If students are stuck at any particular aspect, the teacher may assist if needed. For instance, with regards to connecting to other technologies, a teacher might need to explain that a cell phone can be connected to other technologies, such as a computer or even a Fitbit, which can keep track of heart rate, steps taken, among others.

- Once students complete their technology sheets, have them share with at least one other student in the group.

- Within the group, ask students if they think there is one piece of technology that can do the most, and if so, why?

Closure (5 minutes)

- As a final discussion, share with students the following piece of information: Although we have so much access to digital technologies that can share and produce information, how is it that we still have millions of people around the world who struggle to read and write at a basic level?

- Students should work out that many people around the world do not have access to digital technologies, let alone a strong opportunity to learn to read and write. In short, not everyone in the world has the same access and opportunities as others.

Technology Activity Sheet

Name:_____   Date:_____

This is the piece of technology I selected:

Now, keeping in mind the piece of technology that you selected, analyze what it can or cannot do based on the following aspects:

- store different kinds of information

- retrieve information

- design or produce information

- communicate information

- connect with other technologies

- move with you

Chapter 18

Key Terms:

- celebration

Critical Response Prompt(s):

- Describe how the relationship between the Nuer and Dinka tribes in the future.

    Directions: Have students complete a word square for one of the vocabulary words

    and answer their critical response prompt(s) on their blog.

Novel Unit Activity 4: Podcast for Social Justice

Critical Literacy Activities for *A Long Walk to Water* by Linda Sue Park

Activities adapted from *Doing Critical Literacy* by Janks

Critical Literacy Objective: Using Digital Technologies to Make the World a Better Place

Relation to Literature: Salva uses a wide range of digital literacies to make the world a

better place. His website entitled Water for Sudan helps promote the development for the

building of infrastructure within his home country. Students will now take part in trying

to make the world a better place through digital technologies, emulating what Salva did

within the literature.

Sequence of Instruction

Anticipatory Set (5 minutes)

- Share with students the following podcast done by elementary students that

    quickly summarizes the book so students know what a podcast is on the internet:

    A Long Walk to Water Podcast.

- Tell students they will compose a script for a podcast to share not only what the

    book is about, but what they learned about how to make the world a better place.

Lesson Outline (10-15 minutes)

- Give students the podcast script outline to be completed as a team.

- Once the podcast script outline is completed, they are to write out on paper exactly what they are going to say.

- Once they are ready, record students using a digital sound recorder. Note: if a digital sound recorder is not available, any computer with an internal microphone will record audio.

- Once the audio is recorded, upload audio to the website Sound Cloud which requires a valid email address. After audio is uploaded, provide students with the link so they can include a link to their podcasts on their blogs.

Closure (5 minutes)

- Share the podcast with the students so they can hear their voices.

Podcast Outline Sheet

Names:_____ Date:_____

Introduction (who are all the group members and what topic do they plan to talk about?):

Body (quickly summarize the novel, then each person must share what they learned about how to make the world a better place):

Conclusion (wrap up by each person telling the audience why they should read the novel)

Discussion

I have learned much about developing a unit that embeds critical literacy and digital technology in literacy instruction. Janks (2010) provided very useful activities that could easily be adapted to fit the overall structures and themes of the unit. Using Montgomery's (2014) prior research on digital technology and critical literacy within a third-grade classroom proved very helpful for the inspiration of the unit design. The view of critical literacy by Janks and the research conducted by Montgomery seemed to blend very well within the unit.

The selection of the literature was pivotal in connecting the unit plan to many critical literacy aspects. The novel by Park (2011) provided some very moving and insightful moments and lessons for students to work through in literature discussion, as well as a firsthand account of life as a young refugee. In my opinion, I feel the book selection was the most monumental accomplishment of the unit. The main character, Salva, was simply attending elementary school when conflict broke and became separated from his family for many years. Since the target group for the unit plan is upper-elementary students, I believe the upper-elementary student will make a significant emotional connection within Salva's journey.

Providing ample information on blogging was the most difficult piece of the unit. There are so many blogging platforms that both the general public, as well as the teacher, can select from to run a blog. The selected blog platform of Edu Blogs by WordPress (2016) was chosen because there are so many ways to get help when needed, something that is not always as smooth when compared to other blogging platforms. Since I have used Edu Blogs in the past and have successfully completed their teacher challenge and

participated in online forums to help other teachers, I felt this system would be more teacher-friendly if a question did arise within the unit. Although Edu Blogs is not the largest or most popular blogging platform, I feel selecting this as the blogging platform for the unit made the most sense considering the level of support available for those using Edu Blogs as their blogging platform.

In conclusion, the podcast within the unit plays an integral role in fostering students' awareness of social and political powers. What frequently happens in typical novel units is that elementary students complete a culminating book report which merely summarizes the information covered in the book; however, in the novel unit presented in this paper, students are challenged to think beyond literal levels of understanding as they create a culminating podcast. The book by Park (2011) inspires students to feel compelled to go out and make a difference in the world in order to help alleviate the burdens of inequities. I feel this book promotes students to think about how to make the world a better place and take responsibility for being a steward of the future at its conclusion. In short, I feel the conclusion of the novel brings the reader outside his or her own ego and fosters the development of compassion.

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Appendix A

Literature Discussion Plan

Before Literature Discussion

The teacher should make sure students have done the following: Written down their comprehension questions and vocabulary meanings on their blogs and have one vocabulary square completed.

The teacher should then ask the following questions before the discussion

- Self Assess: Did you prepare for discussion? Explain.

- Self Interest: Besides the comprehension questions, what else would you like to talk about from the text?

During Literature Discussion

The teacher should then prompt students to share the answers to their comprehension questions and vocabulary meanings with a partner. After students have shared, the teacher should then ask the following questions:

- Comprehension of Text: How did you answer and respond to the comprehension questions on your blog post?

- Comprehension of Vocabulary: What do your words mean on your word square?

After Literature Discussion

Once the discussion has ended, the teacher should ask the following question to the students:

- What was something that you learned or will take away from the discussion? Please have students consider the ideas of others or from the text.

A Long Walk to Water Context Vocabulary Squares

Student Name:_____ **Date:**_____

Vocabulary Word	Meaning as it is used in A Long Walk to Water

Picture as it is used in A Long Walk to Water

Building Background from Our Africa Website

Student Name:_____ **Date:**_____

Name of Country in Africa	Piece of Information that You Found Interesting or Important
Draw of Picture of Flag	Why Did You Choose this Piece of Information?

Appendix D

Using Edu Blogs (www.edublogs.org)

1. Sign up for free and create unique username and password

2. Understanding the Dashboard

   a. Manage blog settings, comments, and appearance and student pages. The dashboard is the main menu to make changes and manage the blog. The dashboard is a set of these options located on the left hand side of the screen.

3. Understanding the Blog (or "site" as Edu Blogs refers)

   a. The "site" option is located at the very top of the page. When one selects this option, they are taken to what their blog site actually looks like to others who view their blog.

4. Publishing a Post

   a. Within the dashboard, select "New Post" to start up a word processing screen to type the blog post.

   b. Text can be resized, positioned, and other facets that are present in most word processors. Images can also be added by selecting "Add Media."

   c. Hit "Publish" to save to blog site or "Save Draft" to continue working at a later date.

5. Setting Up Student Blogs

   a. Select "Add New Users" and create a username for each student. Fill in the student email box so they can be sent an email to join Edu Blogs as a

        student. Make sure the "Student" option is selected before selecting "Add

        New User" and sending students the invite to join.

    b. Once students have joined and made their own unique password, they

        need to select the "Join a Class" option and search using the teacher's

        name. Once they find the correct blog and select "Ask to Join," the teacher

        is notified and can accept that particular student-blog to be nested under

        the teacher blog.

    c. The teacher then has complete access and control over the student blog.

For a more detailed version and overview of setting up a blog, please visit the following

website: http://help.edublogs.org/getting-started-with-edublogs/

Example Post for A Long Walk to Water

Posted on November 6, 2015 by brandonoh58

Brandon Harrison   Edit

Chapter 1

Vocabulary Words

- Rebels: A group of people fighting against the government that is in power
- Independence: Freedom from control of others
- Droned: Speaking in a boring manner

Comprehension Questions

- Why does Linda Sue Park write with 2 different style of print?

  She writes with 2 different styles of print because there are 2 completely different stories within the same book. They are different characters and the time period is separated by many years.

- Describe Salva's life

  Salva's life can be described as a typical boy within the village that he lives. His father works as a farmer and Salva enjoys the little pleasures in life that most students in the United States take for granted, such as getting a soda pop from the market. Salva lives in a rather primitive manner when compared with kids in developed nations. For instance, when he gets fruit from the market, he puts them within the spokes of a bicycle to be transported back home.

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