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Extending the literature base of a social studies unit: Pioneers

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Extending the literature base of a social studies unit: Pioneers

Abstract

Children use their prior knowledge of language and background of experiences when they read literature selections. As they progress into the upper elementary grade levels, this knowledge and experience become increasingly important in the content areas. Since the study of history involves knowledge of past events, it is profitable for children to have the ability to generate intellectually the necessary background that is missing and to supplement and expand their knowledge beyond the covers of the textbook.

Extending the Literature Base of a
Social Studies Unit: Pioneers

A Graduate Project
Submitted to the
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Education
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by
Melodie Wagner
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This Research Paper by: Melodie Wagner

Entitled: Extending the Literature Base of a Social Studies

Unit: Pioneers

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for
the Degree of Master of Arts in Education.

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Children use their prior knowledge of language and background of experiences when they read literature selections. As they progress into the upper elementary grade levels, this knowledge and experience become increasingly important in the content areas. Since the study of history involves knowledge of past events, it is profitable for children to have the ability to generate intellectually the necessary background that is missing and to supplement and expand their knowledge beyond the covers of the textbook.

Literature experiences can greatly enhance the basic text material in a social studies program. The specific genres of historical fiction and biography extend a unit of study by allowing students to personalize, internalize, and relate events and people associated with specific periods of history to their own point in time and space.

For this study, the writer will engage in the process of extending the literature base of a social studies unit. The example unit will be Pioneers for fifth grade. After a review of professional literature, the unit extended by experiences with different genres of literature and related expressive language activities will be presented.

VALUE OF EXTENDING THE LITERATURE BASE IN THE
SOCIAL STUDIES AREA

Charlotte Huck (1987) stresses that children are motivated to read and learn from imaginative literature. The genre of historical fiction is often overlooked and needs to be presented to children by teachers and librarians. Huck lists the following values of presenting experiences with historical fiction:

(1) Well-written historical fiction offers children the opportunity to share a life experience from the past. The words of the author fill the child's imagination with the details of conflicts--joys and sorrows--that people who lived in a time past experienced in their daily lives.

(2) Children are encouraged to think as well as to feel when they read. Historical fiction allows children to compare the past with the present in which they live.

(3) An historical point of view helps children to see and understand the mistakes of the past more clearly, and they can learn not to repeat those same mistakes.

(4) Stories of the past will help children see that many changes have taken place. Countries may be different today, but all people have the same basic needs. Everyone needs and wants to be respected, to belong, to love, to have freedom and security,

regardless of whether they lived during the period of Columbus, the early pioneers, or today.

(5) Historical fiction also enables children to see how all people depend on each other and that their conflicts are interconnected and interrelated.

(6) Children's comprehension of chronological events develops slowly and is inaccurate. Historical fiction allows them to link their present place in time to the total historical picture.

Crafton (1983) states that literature experiences go beyond enrichment. As students read a number of literature selections on the same topic, they begin to understand that events can be written from different viewpoints and that by comparing as they read, they can become better informed about the topic thus building their own background information. Experiences with literature offer students the opportunity for comparing and contrasting information and for judging the authenticity of writing and the credibility of the authors. Self-selection of literature works allows for individual differences in reading ability, interests, and motivation and opportunities for independent learning.

Storey (1982) supports extending the nonfiction base of the social studies through fiction. Children may be able to pick out facts but overlook the deeper meaning in the information.

Fiction that is based on fact has the style that children are familiar with from early reading. Experiences with historical fiction can support the development of reading abilities associated with comprehension in the social studies. Fiction works along with textbooks help students understand, remember, and become more actively involved with the content material. As children read stories, they symbolically experience or rehearse the episode that is being described. Storey also states that "fictional presentations of biographies and diaries of real people, told as a first person narrative, bring history to life on a more personal level than nonfiction material such as textbooks" (p. 797).

Holmes and Ammon (1985) believe that quality literature, or trade books, selected to meet the range of reading levels facilitates understandings in the content areas as well as thinking-language abilities. Literature offers opportunities to explore a wide range of topics; whereas, textbooks are usually written from one point of view with few conflicting statements thus restricting opportunities to do critical reading. Different literature works, purchased by the school and borrowed from the library, can more nearly maintain updated study; single textbooks, if purchased by multiple copies, usually have to be kept as the basis of the program for several years eventually presenting outdated ideas. Many trade books have an array of

various types of illustrations and other visual aids and appealing formats while texts are much more limited. The obvious distinction between textbooks and trade books is the style in which they are written: textbooks usually present straightforward facts; good literature tells a story, answers a puzzle, or gives a personal viewpoint or account.

Lehman and Hayes (1985) advocate that experiences with historical fiction, as well as biography, autobiography, and memoirs, can extend the critical reading process by helping students relate to realistic or fictional characters who have the same human qualities, yet differ from them because of the time period in which they lived. Critical reading abilities are a part of the on-going process of problem solving. To be competent readers, students need to anticipate what they are about to read, to understand what they are reading, and to contemplate after they have finished reading in order to create a link between what they know and what they have read.

In reading fictional works as part of the social studies program, students need to check reference books for dates, places, and names, but also they need to be aware of these other aspects:

- (1) Accuracy and authenticity are of major importance even if the book is fictional.

(2) An author's foreword or postscript can give valuable insight into the fictional aspect of the story.

(3) First person narrative accounts make the reader feel that they are "really there" with the character, yet children need to remember that it is fiction.

(4) A limited viewpoint is presented in a first person narration because the narrator cannot be in all places at the same time.

(5) The author's prejudice can influence the interpretation of the characters' behavior in a fictional story. The author's documentation of the historical aspects of the story by letters, diaries, and official documents lend credibility to the author's account. (Storey, 1982)

Smith, Greenlaw, and Scott (1987) stress that when using related literature, or trade books, in the content areas, teachers need to be aware of stereotyping and bias presented through human and animal characters. Literature experiences need to be selected with a balanced view of the sex roles. Because children interact with the story as they read, literature is a socializing agent that helps develop a set of values and attitudes, likes and dislikes, goals and purposes, patterns of responses, and concept of self. Teachers and their students need to be aware of the hidden message a story might be conveying.

A LITERATURE-BASED SOCIAL STUDIES UNIT

The literature base of the social studies unit on Pioneer Life for grade five was extended primarily through historical fiction works with supporting ideas found in picture books with historical settings.

Sustaining Centers

Sustaining centers provided children with opportunities to interact with their learning experiences through different modes. These centers are available all year, but change in content as the study changes.

Author/Illustrator Center

Copies of biographical sketches about Laura Ingalls Wilder, a collection of her books, a book written by Rose Wilder Lane about her mother's life, and a cookbook of recipes from the "Little House" books were presented to the students in this center.

Interesting Objects Center

Objects from different aspects of pioneer life were collected for examination by the students. Examples are a horseshoe, a hand-dipped candle, a corn-husk doll, leather button shoes, a quilt, a butter mold, a hay twist, handmade wooden eating utensils, an old Bible, a fiddle, a wooden whistle, and clay marbles. These objects can be used as props in dramatizations.

Retelling Stories Center

In this reference center, many ways to retell stories--oral, written, dramatization, and art activity--are presented. By recalling and retelling the sequence of events, children can extend the meaning of the story. The retelling of stories also helps children understand the structure of story and gives them opportunities to share ideas and opinions and therefore learn from each other.

Centers Specific to Unit

These centers specific to the study of pioneers provided literature-based experiences and many forms of related expressive activities.

Center: Pioneer Children

Literature Experience

Read one or more of the following books about boys and girls growing up as pioneers.

Little House on the Prairie, by Laura Ingalls

Wilder (New York: Harper & Row, 1935)

Caddie Woodlawn, by Carol Ryrie Brink (New York:

Macmillan, 1936)

The Cabin Faced West, by Jean Fritz (New York:

Coward McCann, 1958)

Caroline and Her Kettle Named Maude, by Miriam E.

Mason (New York: Macmillan, 1951)

Trouble for Lucy, by Carla Stevens (Boston: Clarion, 1979)

Beyond the Divide, by Kathryn Lasky (New York: Macmillan, 1983)

Bargain Bride, by Evelyn Sibley Lampman (New York: Atheneum, 1977)

Expressive Activity

1. After reading a book, chart the events that happened to your main character. Compare your chart to another classmate's chart.
2. For a class chart, list the qualities of your character.
3. Share an event in your life that might compare to something that happened in your book.
4. Write a letter to one of the characters commenting on their story and asking questions about their life.
5. Create a filmstrip showing important events in the main character's life.

Center: Survival Alone

Literature Experience

The characters in these books had to make decisions alone without support from their parents. Read one or more of the following books.

The Courage of Sarah Noble, by Alice Dalgliesh (New York: Scribner, 1954)

Ike and Porker, by Susan E. Kirby (Boston: Houghton
Mifflin, 1983)

The Lone Hunt, by William O. Steele (New York:
Harcourt, 1956)

Save Queen of Sheba, by Louise Moeri (New York:
Dutton, 1981)

Expressive Activity

Compare and contrast the characters' predicaments with
other students.

Center: Laura Ingalls Wilder

Literature Experience

1. Read one or more of the following books by Laura Ingalls
Wilder about her life as a child.

Little House in the Big Woods (New York: Harper & Row,
1953)

Farmer Boy (New York: Harper & Row, 1953)

Little House on the Prairie (New York: Harper & Row,
1953)

On the Banks of Plum Creek (New York: Harper & Row,
1953)

By the Shores of Silver Lake (New York: Harper & Row,
1953)

The Long Winter (New York: Harper & Row, 1953)

Little Town on the Prairie (New York: Harper & Row, 1953)

2. Read the biography about Laura Ingalls Wilder and also read some of the following books about her life as an adult.

These Happy Golden Years (New York: Harper & Row, 1953)

On the Way Home: The Diary of a Trip From South

Dakota to Mansfield, Missouri in 1894 (New York: Harper & Row, 1962)

The First Four Years (New York: Harper & Row, 1971)

Let the Hurricane Roar, by Rose Wilder Lane (New York: Watts, 1933)

3. Read some of the brochures obtained from the different museums throughout the country where Laura Ingalls Wilder lived.

4. Look at some of the recipes in the following book.

The Little House Cookbook, by Barbara M. Walker
(New York: Harper & Row, 1979)

Expressive Activity

1. Write a letter to Laura Ingalls Wilder. Tell her what books you liked best. Tell her what you liked most about her books.

2. Select one of her books and create a time-line of that period of her life.

3. Select one of her books and draw a map showing where the events took place.

4. Create a filmstrip, from one of the books, that depicts the events in her life.

5. Ask some of your classmates to help you read the dialogue from a book to create a reader's theatre performance. The reading can be presented to other classmates or taped for the Listening Center.

6. Make a list comparing and contrasting the information learned about Laura Ingalls Wilder from the biography, autobiography, and the brochures and booklets from the different centers located where she once lived.

7. Read several of the books and create riddles related to Laura's experiences, her relatives, and the locations of her different homes.

8. Create a book jacket for one of Laura's books that illustrates an important event in the book.

9. Try writing a story about an important event in your daily life that you would want others to know about.

10. Prepare one of the recipes from the cookbook and serve it to the class. Make a chart showing the ingredients and how the recipe was prepared.

11. Using the information from the travel brochures and a road map, prepare travel plans for a trip on a map that shows where you would go to see one or more of the many places where Laura Ingalls Wilder lived. Figure out how many miles you would travel on your round trip and how long it would take.

Center: Quiltmaking and Memories

Literature Experience

1. Quilts in pioneer days provided creative outlets, beauty in the home, social times, and physical well-being (warmth). Look at some of the following books:

America's Favorite Quilts, by Leslie Linsley
(New York: Delacorte, 1984)

Let's Make More Patchwork Quilts, by Jessie
MacDonald (Philadelphia: Farm Journal, 1984)

Patchwork Pattern Book, by Carter Houck (New York:
Dutton, 1981)

Quilting, by Averil Colby (New York: Scribner, 1972)

Woman's Day Prize-Winning Quilts, Coverlets, and
Afghans, by Julie Houston (Sedgewood, 1982)

2. Read one or more of the following books about quilts.

The Bedspread, by Sylvia Fair (New York: Morrow, 1982)

Josefina Story Quilt, by Eleanor Coerr (New York:
Harper & Row, 1986)

Sam Johnson and the Blue Ribbon Quilt, by Lisa
Campbell Ernst (New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shephard
Books, 1983)

The Quilt, by Ann Jonas (New York: Greenwillow, 1983)

Patchwork Cat, by William Mayne (New York: Knopf, 1981)

The Patchwork Quilt, by Valerie Fournoy (New York:
Dial, 1985)

The Quilt Story, by Tony Johnston (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1985)

3. Look at the quilts on display in the classroom.

Expressive Activity

1. Referring to the books on quilting, construct a traditional quilt block by using different kinds of paper (wallpaper, wrapping paper, and construction paper).

2. Sometimes pioneers gave a quilt as a gift. It was called a Friendship Quilt. Each person contributed a block they had designed. With craypas, design a block on a piece of cloth to be compiled into a class quilt.

3. Quilts constructed many years ago contained many memories. Ask your family if they have memories associated with quilts. Share these memories with the class along with the quilts if they are available.

Center: Music and Dancing

Literature Experience

1. Pioneer children sang many songs and often danced to the music as they sang. Look at some of the following song books.

Go Tell Aunt Rhody, by Alike (Brandenberg) (New York: Macmillan, 1974)

Ol' Dan Tucker, by J. Langstaff (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1963)

Oh, a Hunting We Will Go, by J. Langstaff (New York: Atheneum, 1974)

She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain, by R. Quackenbush
(Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1973)

Pop! Goes the Weasel and Yankee Doodle, by R. Quackenbush
(Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1976)

Will You Take Me to Town on Strawberry Day?, by
M. Singer (New York: Harper & Row, 1981)

The Farmer in the Dell, by D. Zuromskis (Boston: Little,
Brown, 1978)

Old MacDonald Had a Farm, by Tracey Pearson (New York:
Dial, 1984)

Expressive Activity

1. Prepare a song to introduce for group singing.

Literature Experience

1. Look at the following books about square dancing.

Square Dancing is for Me, by Mildred Hammond
(Minneapolis: Lerner, 1983)

Square and Folk Dancing: A Complete Guide, by Hank
Greene (New York: Harper & Row, 1984)

Expressive Activity

1. Prepare a dance to teach to the group. You may demonstrate with a partner.

Maintaining Learning Through Learning Centers

Through daily journal writing, children recorded and reflected on their activity in the centers. The teacher used

these journals to support and redirect children in their exploration of the study. Each day the children, in a sharing period, had opportunities to plan their study as an individual or in pairs or a small group, to share activities, ask questions about their study, and request assistance on a project. They gained feedback from other students and the teacher about their projects. As children focused on an activity that was meaningful to them, they became more involved learners. Children were also faced with the dilemma that the more they learned, the more they wanted to do to continue that learning process. There were always more activities to pursue and not enough time to accomplish all they wanted to do.

SUMMARY

In using centers, children quickly became involved in developing thinking and language abilities. Even though the centers were changing in content as different areas of study were introduced, the children continued to have experiences with different genres and many forms of expressive activity. From exposure to well-formed stories presented through quality literature, children learned that stories include a setting, characters, a theme, plot episodes, and a resolution.

Listening to, reading, and discussing good literature selections led children into story retelling that enabled them to express their own meanings. Retelling stories also allowed

them to play an active role in developing their unique way of sharing a story with an audience and to interact with others about the elements of the story and their interpretation of it.

The many literature experiences in the centers specific to the unit with many forms of suggested expressive activity fueled children's involvement. These experiences extended children's comprehension of story elements and the different genres of literature. From these activities, children can create more meaning from present and past events in their lives and can resolve conflicts that seemed unique only to each individual.

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