

## **Teaching the Concept of Equality Through Literature**

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### **The Academic Setting**

I teach eighth grade language arts and literature at Washington Middle School. Washington is an inner-city school located two blocks south of Central, 10 blocks west of downtown. Although it is in close proximity to the area around the Albuquerque Country Club, we seldom have students from that area. Our population is composed of approximately 89% Hispanic, with the remaining 11% divided among Blacks, American Indians, and Whites/not Hispanic.

Ninety-two percent of the students from Washington qualify for free lunch and many live in extreme poverty. Out of 723 students whose home language is Spanish, 38 speak no English, 294 have limited English proficiency, and only 149 are considered to have no trouble with English. Many of these students go home to parents who are illiterate in their own language and in English. Forty-eight percent of our parents are not high school graduates. Sixty-five percent of our students are not with their biological parents and are considered homeless. Our stability rate is 55.5% so about half of our student population is highly mobile.

When the students from our feeder elementary schools come to Washington, the majority are reading below the 20th percentile. The Terra Nova reading total for March 1999-2000 for sixth grade was 18.7. The Terra Nova reading total for the eighth grade for March, 1999-2000 was 36.8. Fifty percent is grade level. Therefore, at the eighth grade level, I am still teaching decoding and encoding skills. I must often adjust the readings from literature or textbooks written for an average eighth grader. The non-fiction readings may sometimes have to be paraphrased to fit my students' reading levels. What to read and how it is organized must be a major part of my curriculum.

My challenge is to present readings that will meet my students' needs and also help them achieve a higher reading level. The readings will build comprehension skills and the discussions and writings will build critical thinking skills. I will use various novels and non-fiction readings to get them thinking about and writing about what equality and citizenship mean as stated in the Declaration of Independence and in the Constitution. In this process, students will also be working on vocabulary acquisition and writing skills.

Terms used: Hispanics or Mexican-Americans or Latinos? African-Americans or Blacks?

Each of the books and articles I have researched uses a different term to differentiate citizens of Spanish descent. At Washington the majority of our students are Hispanics descended from early settlers or Mexicans whose families

are immigrants. Therefore I will use the term Hispanics. Because my knowledge of the Black Civil Rights Movement started in the late 50's, I have learned to use the term "Blacks." Now the trend is to use the term African-Americans. My African-American students tend to use the term "Black," and I must admit it is the term I am most comfortable with. Therefore, unless I am quoting a particular article, I will be using the term "Black" instead of African-American.

## **Narrative**

This last year, when I offered my enriched students an opportunity to write a 300 word essay on why they were proud to be an American, only two students could think of reasons why they might want to write the essay. Only one girl bothered to write it for the contest. I was surprised at their reaction, and I was worried about it. Why were they so against being an American? Thinking about my experience and discussing it with other teachers, I realized that most of my students identify themselves as Mexican or Hispanic because they are proud of their ethnicity and culture. They do not know the difference between ethnicity and citizenship or residency. Therefore, one of the springboards to this unit must be to have the students develop definitions of ethnicity/culture and citizenship/residency. Then we will address the concept of "All men are created equal" and what it means to someone living in the United States.

I also noticed a belief among some of the students that the system wouldn't work for them. That, in fact, it was far removed from their lives or spheres of influence. By the end of the year I want students aware of the ways they can influence the government, and what rights they have as residents or citizens of the United States. The Hispanic population is being targeted for voter turnout in 2000 because of its ability to influence legislation. The article on this subject in the *Albuquerque Tribune* of June 22, 2000, will be posted in the classroom.

The literature I will use at first will introduce them to the history of exclusion of Blacks, Indians, Hispanics, and women from the American system of government. Using that literature as a base, we will discuss what these people wanted in the way of equality and what they had to do to achieve their goals. Many of the readings reinforce the idea of the need for education in order to obtain equality in other areas. Since so many of my students have a background of poverty, they are focused on economic equality. Through this unit I hope to help them realize that to achieve economic equality they must achieve equality in education. To achieve educational equality, they need to know what rights the Constitution gives them that will enable them to reach that goal.

Also, among my female students I often see the type of thinking that was a part of the 1950's. They want to have babies, and they want to be in love, but they're not thinking about what responsibilities those things carry. Part of their thinking may be guided by cultural norms, but I believe that part of their thinking is based on a belief that they don't have choices. Whether this is because of living with mothers or family members who don't feel empowered and feel trapped, or whether this is

being acculturated to believe women should be subservient to men, their basic premise needs to be challenged. I am hoping that by providing information about what rights other women have felt necessary to fight for, by providing examples in literature of strong women who are also Hispanics, or Blacks, or Indians, they will raise their sights and find reasons to stay in school when they reach high school.

Although there have been programs developed to provide students with extra help in staying in school, and to have them sign agreements to maintain grades in order to qualify for a lottery scholarship, 48% of last year's class entering Albuquerque High had dropped out by Christmas. Groups like LULAC and Big Brothers, Big Sisters continue to make an effort to stay involved in some of our students' lives. The University of New Mexico provides programs that offer students tutoring help to stay in school. There are laws which provide for equality in education. Clearly, a change in attitude has to occur as well.

As of 1973, the New Mexico Constitution included an amendment which promises that **all people** shall have the equal protection of the laws, and that equality "shall not be denied on account of the sex of any person" (Constitution of the State of New Mexico, p.5). It also provides for the "Educational rights of children of Spanish descent," and ensures "perfect equality" in "public schools and educational institutions" (Constitution of the State of New Mexico, p.64).

Washington Middle School provides bilingual education and tries to ensure that all Hispanic students have the chance to succeed in their native language. All of Washington's feeder schools are also bilingual or have instituted the dual language program where students are taught first in Spanish, and then at about the third grade level, English is added. Bilingual education was first considered by the Washington faculty because they understood that students not only would be validated in their own language, they also would develop better reading and writing skills in English if they were literate in their own language. However, bilingual education at Washington and its feeder schools has not made a great difference in raising reading scores or in keeping children in school.

The dual language program may make a difference in the future. The first group of sixth graders who have been in a dual language program throughout elementary school are entering Washington next year, and Washington will be instituting their own dual language program. Although the claim has been that these students read at grade level in both languages, the recent Terra Nova tests for East San Jose, one of Washington's feeder elementary schools, show scores for the fifth graders which were "12.3 points lower" than their scores in fourth grade. However, these same students tested much higher on the La Prueba which is a Spanish language achievement test. The principal of East San Jose believes these scores will be equal by middle school (Rudi Keller, Albuquerque *Journal*, June 22, 2000). If this proves to be true, it will exponentially increase their chances to succeed at Washington and high school.

However, the number of children who have been in a dual language program is still

only about one-fourth of all entering sixth graders. Historically, sixth graders as a whole have been reading at about the third grade level when they enter middle school. What can be done to correct this deficiency? Perhaps the focus on early education proposed by Superintendent Brad Allison and the new law passed by the New Mexico State Legislature may have an impact. The new law, which goes into effect in July 2000, says that parents can only waiver their failing child into the next grade once during their elementary and middle school years. Parents can no longer waiver children into high school. (Waiver means social promotion. A failing child has been able to be "signed on" by their parent through the eighth grade. High school has never allowed this, so many students drop out the first nine weeks of high school because they don't have the necessary skills to pass and earn credits. I have had some students who have been "waivered on" since the fourth or fifth grade).

Children who have a very low reading level do not automatically acquire the reading skills they need for high school in their middle school years. No matter how much teachers at Washington focus on the teaching of reading, the majority of our students exiting eighth grade are still one or two grade levels behind as evidenced by the scores on the Terra Nova tests above. They are already at a disadvantage entering high school. Added to the problem of lower reading scores, there is cultural expectation. If 48% of our students have parents who did not graduate from high school, how can they be convinced to stay in school? Since Hispanics and Mexicans have a history of high dropout rates, and since immigrants from Mexico have parents who could not continue past the sixth grade if they were poor, high school and college seem impossible dreams for many children.

What type of curriculum might inspire these students to stay in school, to become an informed part of the electorate? What type of curriculum would engage their interest, get them involved in the process of voting, and still help them to build their comprehension and critical thinking skills? A curriculum which focuses on the "ideal and reality" of America will, I hope, help students to think about their rights and the importance of exercising them. The study of literature about minorities and women and what they had to go through in order to obtain their "equal rights," will make students aware of what their rights and responsibilities are. I hope to engage my students in the election process so that they may begin to see a future as voters. With the study of the empowerment of minorities and women, I want students to begin to recognize the possibilities ahead of them.

Although the Declaration of Independence said that "all men are created equal," it only applied to white male landowners. It has taken over 200 years since the Constitution was written for Blacks, Hispanics, American Indians, and women to be included in that phrase. Equality before the law is a right guaranteed to every American citizen, yet it has taken a Civil War and many Supreme Court cases to enforce that belief.

Bruce Catton states in an introduction to a book of his lectures about the Civil War

that "It is one of the great datum points in American history;...it was not an ending but a beginning," a victory of democracy over slavery (Catton 12). Then he argues in his final lecture in 1958, the "Civil War is an unending challenge; a challenge to the world's greatest democracy" to provide freedom and equality for all (Catton 126). His lectures were four years after the Supreme Court ruled in 1954 in *Brown v. the Board of Education*, that "separate but equal" was no longer legal. Chief Justice Earl Warren said that "Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children." "Equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment" meant that Negro children should be allowed to attend a white school. The Fourteenth Amendment had been passed after the Civil War but was not implemented until about 100 years later.

In the years 1865-1890, a few blacks attended white schools in some of the Southern cities. This was a very small percentage, but urban blacks had more of a chance to attend school than those who lived in the rural areas. Most of the Southern states did not have free public school systems until late in the century. Therefore, originally, white teachers traveled from the North to teach blacks. By 1890 the South had decided four things about public education: (1) there would be state supported public schools, (2) blacks and whites would be served, (3) they would be segregated, (4) and black teachers would teach blacks (Rabinowitz 152). "General Clinton B. Fisk, Assistant Commissioner of Freedmen for Kentucky and Tennessee...wrote from Nashville: 'You cannot gather the whites and blacks into the same school. Both races rebel against it'" (Rabinowitz 155). Although there is no record of blacks complaining, certainly the white population made their position clear by the development of laws which separated blacks from whites. These laws came to be called the "Jim Crow" laws.

Eventually, of course, the funding for black schools fell far below that of white students. Black students would have to wait for funds before they could expand while white schools had first call on those public funds. New schools were built for whites; black schools were placed in renovated old buildings. "The principle of separate but equal also went largely unheeded in the number of advanced grades available to Negro pupils" (Rabinowitz 171). Richmond and Nashville were the only cities to provide some kind of high school education for blacks. Blacks turned to private schools or tried to get funding from lawmakers. Blacks pushed for separate but really equal rather than for integration. In some cases they were successful. However, by the end of the century, "the benefits of education were unevenly distributed." (Rabinowitz 181). These problems continued until the middle of the twentieth century and would lead to the Supreme Court decision in 1954.

In the young adult novel, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, a clear picture of black education in rural Mississippi emerges. Black students would receive books that had been used for ten years by white students. When the condition of the book was judged to be very poor they were given to "Nigras." The books were literally falling apart. The white students had a bus to get them to school; the black students

walked. Cassie, the heroine in the book, describes one of her brother's best friends walking three and a half hours from the plantation where he lived. The only school in his area ended at the fourth grade, and most children from his area ended their education at that time. Cassie doesn't think she would want an education badly enough to walk that far. The Black school Cassie attended was terribly crowded with a curtain to divide the second and third grades from the first and fourth grades. This fictionalized picture of the rural South is based on the stories of Mildred D. Taylor's father who grew up in Mississippi. The novel provides a perfect example of the "Jim Crow" laws.

An example of these laws is one my mother witnessed. She visited Chattanooga in the early 1930's. If she went shopping downtown with her mother's family and they saw a Negro approaching, they would whisper, "The black clouds are coming." The black or blacks would step off the sidewalk and walk in the gutter to pass them. This same attitude is illustrated in *Roll of Thunder...*. The book and the movie, *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, and the book, *The Diary of Clotee, A Slave Girl*, also provide excellent examples of inequalities the black people faced and what they had to go through to become educated.

Once the Supreme Court ruled that separate but equal was no longer valid, you would expect that there would be no more problems. Yet schools in the South were not quick to respond. In her autobiography, *Warriors Don't Cry*, Melba Patillo Beals describes her efforts to integrate Little Rock High School with nine other teenagers in 1957. It is a powerful story about the willingness to fight for equality in education. In his book, *The Glory Field*, Walter Dean Myers tells the history of the Lewis family from slavery to 1994. In the section entitled, "January 1964, Johnson City, South Carolina," he writes about the members of the Lewis family who are involved in the Civil Rights marches and protests. These pieces of literature as well as the two short biographies of Martin Luther King, and *African American Poetry* are excellent ways to get students thinking about the need for civil rights for all people in the United States. The blacks' struggle for civil rights led to various movements for equality in education and opportunity by Hispanics, American Indians, and women. Therefore, students first need a good understanding of the Black Civil Rights Movement before going on to study the movements which addressed the needs of other minorities and women.

In 1964, the Civil Rights Act gave district courts the power "to provide injunctive relief against discrimination in public accommodations" (The U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission). Yet many schools did not make changes in who they would admit. When I was living in Galveston, Texas, Ball High was integrated for the first time in 1968, fourteen years after *Brown*. Since school districts continued using segregation, in 1971, *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* imposed judicial supervision to ensure that integration would occur. In the 1990's the "Rehnquist Court began easing judicial control over supervised school districts" (Epstein & Walker 630-633). Although the legal barriers may be down which keep students segregated, economics work their own segregation. Bussing

was used to address this problem in some of the larger cities. Yet, today, our school is 92% free lunch, and 89% Hispanic. Economics still impose their own form of segregation.

One example of economic segregation was a Supreme Court case in 1973. *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* asked whether schools with a poor economic base could receive matching funds from the state in order to equalize their education with wealthier schools. The Supreme Court ruled that the finance method of school districts in Texas was not violating any civil rights because they said the poor did not meet the criteria of "suspect classifications." That, in fact, "Education...is not among the rights afforded explicit protection under our Federal Constitution." (Epstein & Walker, p.647) Still, after this decision, many states did change their funding procedures for their school districts. In the Albuquerque Public School District, each school is funded from the same economic base. However, many of the older schools, particularly in largely Hispanic areas, are more run down and in need of greater renovation than many schools in the Heights. One of the reasons for this is a lack of state funding for repair and renovation.

What about Hispanics' civil rights in other areas of education? Texas and California had a segregated school system where Hispanics had to attend separate schools. Segregated schools were ruled unlawful in California in 1946, and in 1954, *Hernandez v. Texas* said that "Latinos are not being treated as 'white'" and they are seen as "suffering extreme discrimination." However, it wasn't until the Chicano Movement in the late 60's that Latino students began to demonstrate and demand more educational rights (McClain & Stewart 201).

Originally Hispanics in New Mexico did not have the same problems that Hispanics in California and Texas did. In 1915, New Mexico had a 57% majority of Hispanics in the population, and they were among the first ones to be elected to the House of Representatives and the Senate once New Mexico became a state in 1912. Thirty-two out of 100 representatives from New Mexico who met to form a constitution were Hispanic. It wasn't until 1950 that the Hispanic population in New Mexico dropped to 37%, and it became harder for Hispanics to gain office. There was also a large migration of Texans into Eastern New Mexico, which added to the prejudice against Hispanics there. In Eastern New Mexico, there were some schools which limited Black or Hispanic participation in sports up until the 1950's. Senator Dennis Chavez, who served in the U.S. Senate from 1937 until 1962, the time of his death, was one of the few Hispanic officials who were able to carry the state once the population had shifted to a majority of whites (Perrigo 1985). A short biography of Dennis Chavez is in the book, Hispanos, and can be used as a role model for students.

Today, there are no legal barriers to equal education for Hispanics. In fact, in APS, there are many programs which try to address the problems Hispanics face. More Hispanic students drop out than any other group in the United States. In the

article, "Increasing Hispanic Participation in Higher Education (as) a Desirable Public Investment," Stephen Sorensen and other authors argue that although Hispanics are the fastest growing segment of the population, they are still lowest in education. In order to introduce the concepts of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" to Hispanic students, some of the literature can be used to give them an idea about what struggles Hispanics had to achieve equality.

One reading is a short biography of Cesar Chavez which covers his background and his fight for better living conditions and wages for migrant workers in California. The short story "The Circuit" by Francisco Jimenez, can be used as an introduction to Chavez's biography and the problems migrant workers faced. "The Circuit" is an autobiographical story about a family of migrant workers in California and of a young boy's struggle to get an education. Another book about the Hispanic experience is Jesse by Gary Soto which is about two brothers who have to work in the fields to pay their way through college. Gary Soto is a wonderful role model, and I use his stories and poems all the time in class. He grew up in poverty in the barrio in Fresno and became a world renowned poet and professor at the University of California, Berkeley.

"Applying for a Civil Service Job," a poem by Mario Garza, lists all the reasons someone in authority gives the Hispanic speaker in the poem why he can't apply for the job. After the applicant has met all the qualifications including having "three Purple Hearts," he is told he has to be able to walk on water. This poem and others like it in Latino Poetry, speak of the struggle of Hispanics to gain the good life. These poems can be a springboard to a discussion of the Constitution and its amendments and what legal means an Hispanic has to overcome those struggles. The movie Stand and Deliver about the math teacher Jaime Escalante is another way to spark discussion on ways Hispanics can succeed.

Another group who have been trapped in poverty are the American Indians. American Indians have a history of discrimination equal to that of Blacks in the United States. Since they were a conquered people, the whites, the people in power, decided where they would live and how they would live. It wasn't until 1924 that The Indian Citizenship Act finally recognized Indians as citizens of the United States so that they could qualify under the 15th amendment to vote. However, it was not until the late 1940's that Indians were finally allowed to vote in state and county elections in Arizona and New Mexico (McClain & Stewart 23).

The history of education for Indians under the United States government has been to "Americanize" them. Indians were sent away to missionary schools to learn to live like white men and to give up their Indian cultures. In the 1950's Navajos who had been schooled on the reservation were suddenly bussed into Gallup and forced to live in boarding schools and attend Gallup public schools. I was asked by my eighth grade teacher to help one of these girls with her social studies. She told me that if she had stayed at home, she would have her own herd of sheep and would be planning to marry. She hated being taken out of her home and all she knew. The

Chinle Unified School District #24, which is on the Navajo reservation has made significant changes in the way Navajo children are educated. Their district goals include increasing accreditation, parent involvement, and integration of the Navajo language and culture into all curriculum areas (Chinle Unified School District #24's Computer Services Department, 2000). In the 1960's and 1970's tribes began to "create tribal colleges to ease the transition from reservation to mainstream schools" (McClain & Stewart.199).

Indians were the last group to be recognized as U.S. citizens and their access to equal education has only occurred in the last 30 years or so. Many still struggle with maintaining their tribal identity while they try to fit into an urban society. One of my students from Santa Clara Pueblo still took part in the ceremonies and celebrations at Santa Clara while attending school at Washington. She has a balance in her life which seems to give her strength to succeed in school, and she is planning on going to college. Although our Indian population may be small at Washington, it is much larger than our Anglo population. These children often need the same kind of help and support that Hispanic children need. As an additional way of building background knowledge about the problems facing American Indians, I have read different anthologies of Native American literature. Two of them are: *Talking Leaves*, and *The Remembered Earth*. These books are collections of short stories by Indians describing what it is like to grow up Indian in the United States. Another book is a collection of short stories and poems by Sherman Alexie, *The Business of Fancy Dancing*. A non-fiction book which has useful information is *Daughters of the Earth*, particularly the chapter that discusses the education of young Indian girls before "Americanization."

The books that I will use in my classroom are *Plains Native American Literature* which is a collection of short stories, poems, and one play about the Indian experience, and *Sing Down the Moon*, which is the story of a young Navajo girl who is captured by two Spaniards and sold into slavery. After escaping, her family is captured by the United States army and becomes a part of the Navajo Long Walk. This book is an excellent vehicle to use for discussing civil rights and human rights for Indians. *I Heard the Owl Call My Name* can also be used. It is an autobiographical story about a young Indian girl.

So far I have discussed equality in education for Blacks, Hispanics, and Indians. These are the minorities represented at Washington Middle School. What about women? Women make up half of all our students and half of all the citizens of the United States. Since the ERA amendment did not pass, what rights do they have? They are considered citizens, and with the 19th Amendment were given the right to vote in 1920. It took the Women's Movement in the 1970's to open other doors for women. They fought for and won the right to enter certain professions. Before the 1970's middle management positions were not often open to women. Certainly women could not be CEO's unless they owned their own companies. By 1964, the Civil Rights Act gave women equal employment opportunity along with Blacks, Latinos, and Indians, and in 1968 the National Organization of Women

fought a case through the Supreme Court "To make it possible for a woman to hold any job for which she is qualified." With Title IX in 1972, "equal access to higher education and to professional schools became the law" (Eisenberg and Ruthsdotter, 1998). Yet, today, women still find it difficult to move beyond middle management positions, and there are still instances of a woman being paid less than a man for the same job.

Because of this, there is a need to provide role models for young women as well as to acquaint them with what rights they have. One of the books which can be used to start discussion on women's struggle for equality is *They Led the Way*, which is a collection of short biographies of women. Two plays about courageous women are "Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad" which is in a literature anthology, *The Language of Literature* and "Remarkable Susan" a play about Susan B. Anthony which was printed in Scholastic Scope, April 13, 1978. *House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, and a short biographical piece on Nina Otero Warren in *Hispanos* are portraits of strong Hispanic women. Excerpts from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, by Maya Angelou can be found in the anthology, *Worlds Apart*. It is an inspiring story of a black woman and is an excellent biography to read in class.

While Congress and the Supreme Court have enacted laws and handed down judgments to ensure racial and gender equality, there continue to be areas of discrimination. Affirmative Action has been used to try to address these wrongs. These "programs direct government and private institutions to take positive measures to ensure that equality becomes a reality"(Epstein & Walker 655). Affirmative Action places minorities and women on equal footing with white males. There are various ways it can be done. One way has been to look at two candidates for a school, and if one is a minority and has a lower SAT of one or two points than the white male, the minority candidate would be given preference over the white male. Some schools had a quota for minorities. However, in *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, the Supreme Court ruled that a quota for minorities was not legal, but that extra considerations should be given to minority students. Since the Court was split five to four, there was no strong, overriding opinion against affirmative action.

Still, the decision of Bakke made an impact on minority applications. When California and Texas banned affirmative action, the number of minorities applying for admission to some universities in these states dropped. For example, in one year, "Admissions of Hispanic students were down 64% and admissions of African Americans were down by 88%...to the University of Texas Law School. At the University of California at Berkeley admissions of minorities fell by over half. Admissions of minorities to the three law schools of the University of California dropped 71.6% for African Americans, 35% for Latinos and Chicanos. Yet, at the Berkeley School of Law, the average grade point was only raised from 3.72 to 3.74. Not a significant change. "The new students averaged only one point higher on the LSAT" ("What Would Our Nation's Schools Be Like Without Affirmative

Action?" ACLU, 1998).

If Congress bans affirmative action nationwide, opportunities offered to students of minority status and women will once again be limited. Who can prevent these changes? Who can continue to make sure that gains made are not lost? Only an informed electorate. Only young people who stay in school, who stay focused on the issues, and who vote when they have the opportunity.

## **Implementation**

I propose to use readings geared to a middle school level on the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution to coordinate with their lessons in Social Studies and to provide background for the fiction and non-fiction we will read in language arts class. Once we have covered the basic background information on these documents, I will have the students write their own Declaration of Independence to get them thinking about what they want in the way of equality. As an integral part of this lesson, students will conduct debates and straw votes on the issues of Campaign 2000.

Then students will read different stories about Blacks, American Indians, Hispanics, and women and their struggles for basic civil and human rights. We will discuss and write about what it means to be a citizen or resident of the United States. What are our rights and responsibilities? What issue would each one of us consider important enough for us to take a stand?

Lesson plans will include vocabulary, comprehension questions, and multi-sentence paragraphs about the various readings. The multi-sentence paragraph developed by Jane Schaffer has been adopted by the Albuquerque High Cluster, and our students are required to have a working knowledge of it by the time they enter high school. A lesson plan on that paragraph is included.

I will vary the readings based on a group's reading level. For example, *Warriors Don't Cry* might be read by students with sixth grade and above reading ability, while a group of students who are basically Limited English Proficient might read excerpts from *The Glory Field* and shorter stories and biographies. Often this will mean that students in the same classroom may be reading from different texts. Therefore, my reading lesson plan includes different ideas to meet the needs of individual students.

The skills which will be developed in this unit are reading information, comprehending the meaning of the information, and applying what they have learned. Students will also analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what they have learned. Students will be examining values and developing goals.

## **Lesson Plans**

"When people change the way they look at themselves, they force the world around them to change" Kerner Report.

In order to get students thinking about how they look at themselves, I want them to respond to some questions such as, "Who are you?" "What is your nationality?" and "What is the most important thing about you?" Students are to use a timed three minute free write or a web to answer the questions. A "free write" is writing as fast as they can by keeping their pencil to paper and not worrying about grammar or spelling. A web, which will be demonstrated by the teacher, is formed by writing a person's name in the middle of a circle and writing facts about that person on radiating lines around the name. At this point in the lesson, I tell students to write in Spanish if they can think faster in that. In order to help with their comprehension of the questions, some examples need to be given: "Do you first think of being black or being a girl?" "Do you think of yourself as Hispanic, Latino, Mexican, or Chicano?" "Do you think of yourself as a soccer player or Laguna?" "Do you think of yourself as a boy, or Anglo or a writer?" Since one of the problems that Anglo children have at Washington is a feeling of separateness, of not belonging because they are such a small minority, I want to stress the value of being proud of ethnic heritage in a way that includes my Anglo students. One way of doing this is talking about my own ethnicity of English and Scots-Irish. Since eighth graders tend to think there is one right answer, it must be emphasized that there is no right answer, only what comes to mind first.

Then I will read aloud the column by Goldie Garcia which appeared in the *Albuquerque Tribune*, "My blood's mixed but not my heart: I'm an American."

After I have read this article which talks about her background of being Mexican, German, Italian, Catholic, and Jewish, I want the students to write a response to her column. Do they agree? Do they disagree? Explain once again there is no wrong answer, they are just expressing their opinion. Allow class discussion after the writings. Then collect papers and read them. This exercise receives an A if students do the work, an F if they don't.

The second lesson will build on the first. Have students look up the definitions of ethnicity/culture, and citizenship/residency. Each student should have a dictionary definition. Then students can work with a partner or alone to come up with their own definition of each word. Building on what the dictionary says, how do they interpret these terms for themselves? Once the papers are done have students write the dictionary terms on the blackboard and have a discussion of their findings. Have students help brainstorm a list of things which can go under each definition. Example: citizenship - right to vote, residency - all rights except voting.

Once students have identified the difference between ethnicity and citizenship, I want them to take home some questions to ask family members. The list would include, "What do their parents or guardians believe being a resident of the United States means?" "What do their family members want in the way of equality?" "What is the best thing about living in the United States?" "What is the worst thing about living in the United States?" "What responsibilities do residents of the United States have?" When students return with their answers the next day, groups

of four will make a list of responses to each question on butcher paper with magic markers. After five classes of language arts, there should be a fair number of responses put up around the room. Once again, the grading is fairly simple. An "A" if a student does all the work; an "F" if they do nothing; a "C" if they do about half the work. The grade would include contributing their part to the group effort. This would be explained beforehand. The teacher should walk around the various groups to make sure all are on task and understanding the assignment.

This curriculum on literature and equality is designed to last the school year; therefore, it is important for each student to develop a background of information which will help him to understand the literature assigned, and to write intelligently about what he read. After the first two assignments there will be several readings in *Why We Remember*, a social studies text, and *Worlds Apart*, which cover the American Revolution and the writings and ideas which guide America today, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. One reading in *Why We Remember* talks about freedom today and what rights and responsibilities citizens of the United States have. Rights of residents also need to be emphasized.

After reading and analyzing the sections on the Declaration and the Bill of Rights, students will write their own definition of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" on butcher paper. (The readings need to be broken down into manageable parts to ensure comprehension). Then students will demonstrate their own idea of equality by using either artwork or some form of writing. With this they are to include their own Declaration of Independence.

Next, students will view the acceptance speeches of the candidates for President. While they watch the video, they are to write down what they think each candidate stands for. Using this data, students will do a compare and contrast on each candidate. If they are unsure what each one stands for, then it will lead to a discussion of why they weren't able to tell by their speeches. What were the candidates trying to accomplish with their speeches? After viewing the video students will be given articles from the *Albuquerque Tribune* and the *Albuquerque Journal* to use in compiling information about each candidate. They will be assigned the task of finding out what they can on their own. Depending on what magazines are available in the library, students will also use these to help form opinions. Students will be asked to poll parents to see who they will be voting for and what the parents' opinions are of each candidate. If there are parents who are not registered, students will take registration forms home for the parents to fill out. Students cannot do the registering, but this will be a way to involve them in the voting process.

Some of the ideas in the following lesson plan are based on a curriculum called Kids Voting as detailed in *Engaging the Public* by Johnson, Hays, and Hays. Kids Voting has been found to be successful in some communities as a way to increase voter participation. The lesson is not a certified part of Kids Voting. More information about this program can be found on the internet.

Once students have acquired a knowledge about the different candidates, each class will have the chance to take sides and choose a candidate. Then, through a structured debate, each group will have the opportunity to try to persuade other classmates to cast their vote for the one the group supports. After that, there will be a straw vote to see which candidate won the debate in each class. A final activity will be to categorize the views expressed by the debaters. Which were the strongest arguments? Which were the least important?

Other lessons which will be included before the Presidential election: writing to one of the candidates using a persuasive essay to argue for one thing the student wants the candidate to do if elected, and watching taped debates of the candidates to evaluate their strengths and understand their proposed programs. Once the election has been held, students will have a chance to compare their results with the national outcome. Since this lesson covers many days and many different types of activities, students will be evaluated on each individual activity they complete.

The majority of Washington Middle School's students go to Albuquerque High, and the teachers at Albuquerque High want their incoming freshmen to be able to organize their writing by the Jane Schaffer method. The multi-paragraph essay or multi-sentence paragraph was developed by Jane Schaffer, a teacher in California. The form was developed in order to raise scores on standardized testing that sophomores have to take. The change in writing worked very well, and sophomores raised their scores in the San Diego district of California. So incoming freshmen are drilled in writing this type of essay. Middle school teachers need to prepare their students by teaching them how to write the multi-sentence paragraph. Once students learn the form they are able to build on it in longer essays.

The paragraph follows a definite format. First students need to learn the vocabulary and to practice different parts of the paragraph. Some of the terms are *concrete detail* which means facts and *commentary* which means opinions, ideas, thoughts, and feelings. The paragraph begins with a topic sentence which includes fact plus opinion. Examples: "Riding a horse can be the most satisfying form of exercise." "I feel nervous about going to high school next year." Once students are introduced to the topic sentence, they are asked to practice this type of sentence several times over and also to learn to recognize one when they see it. Following the topic sentence, students write one sentence of concrete detail. They then follow this sentence with two sentences of commentary about the sentence of fact. They repeat the process for the next three sentences, concrete detail, commentary, commentary, and finish the paragraph with a concluding sentence which can be all commentary. Both concrete details relate to the topic sentence and all commentary is on the topic. It is believed that students become better writers if they have to write more commentary than concrete detail, and the commentary builds their critical thinking skills. Once students have been introduced to this format they will be asked throughout the year to use it in answering essay questions about what they read.

One of the books that some of the students will read is *Roll of Thunder, Hear My*

Cry. Some of the vocabulary in the book is difficult, and vocabulary lessons will involve having pairs of students look up a set of words and get the official definition, and then having the class as a whole come up with a simple definition all students can understand. Mildred D. Taylor uses dialect in her book, and students who struggle with language acquisition often have trouble with her idioms. Therefore, the class will need to keep a running chart of words and idioms they don't understand accompanied with their own definitions. This chart will be posted in the room.

Since reading groups will be used, some students who read at grade level or above might want the chance to read on their own. All students will be asked to keep a list of main events and descriptions of main characters in their journals since there are several different children in the Roll of Thunder... These lists need to be checked regularly by the teacher and discussed in class. The main events and the characters in the first two chapters need to be written on the board so that all students can see how to organize the information and what kind of events are considered the most important. Another tool for understanding the book is for students to make a map of the area where Cassie and her brothers live. They need a visual tool for understanding some of the conflict. I often form groups after four to five chapters of a book, assign a chapter to each group and have each person in the group make a picture of one of the main events in that chapter. Then I post the pictures sequentially around the room. These pictures include setting and characters for that event. Sometimes I assign all students to make some kind of visual rendering for a particular part of the book.

Limited English Proficient students do better reading a book aloud as a class and discussing issues as they come up, so reading groups sometimes depend on how many ESL students I have in that class, or what that class's special needs are. I vary the instruction to fit the student. The format described for Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry is one that can be used with any novel or reading.

This unit will be ongoing throughout the year and will conclude with reading The Giver, which is about a utopian, totalitarian society where individual freedom and diversity are not allowed. It is a society where everything that could cause problems has been removed: color (of any kind), emotion, memory, family structure as we know it. After reading The Giver, students will need to come up with a final project. The rubric will be: (1) Compare The Giver with the second paragraph in the Declaration of Independence, "What was Jonas's idea of 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' before he received the memories; what did he want for 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' when he left?" (2) "What would you have done?" (3) "What would you want in your perfect world?" (4) "What choices can you make in your life to bring the ideal and the reality closer together?" The final project will be a student's choice: a play or video, a diorama, work in artistic medium, short story, collection of poems (one for each question), or essay. Students will be reminded that their ideal world may not be the same as someone else's, but to remember that achieving their ideal world still needs to be

part of the "common good."

## **Documentation**

Language Arts Requirement/Standards and Benchmarks for Eighth Grade

*Requirements for Eighth Grade Language Arts at Washington:*

**Enriched:** Placement based on teacher recommendation, Gates or Star reading scores of 40% or above, writing samples, and grades. Students will demonstrate mastery of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills according to New Mexico State Standards. They will be expected to write comprehensive commentary about what they read and will be expected to master the multi-paragraph essay. Integration of writing, reading, research, and technology will include focus on other content areas.

**Regular:** This class is designed to strengthen and extend competency in the basic skills of reading, writing, spelling, grammar, listening, and speaking, with attention to the individual needs of students. Library and research skills are reinforced and refined. The writing process, Schaffer multi-paragraph essay, and computer literacy will be included.

*Language Arts State Standards and Benchmarks for New Mexico*

This curriculum unit will focus on Content Standards 3, 4, 7, and 9. Standard 3 states that "Students will listen and read for a variety of purposes." They will read and study a wide range of materials, increase and use vocabulary, listen to, react to, and interpret literature.

Standard 4 states that "Students will use a variety of listening and reading strategies appropriately." They will apply knowledge of culture and context to aid comprehension, demonstrate comprehension of written language.

Standard 7 states that "Students will respond personally, analytically, and critically to written and spoken language, and other media." They will analyze and critically respond to a variety of print and non-print materials in order to build understanding of content, self, and the cultures of the United States.

Standard 9 states that "Students will use language and literature to gain insight into their own and others' lives, and to build understanding of the moral and aesthetic dimensions of human experience." They will use language and literature to build understanding of self and others.

*Social Studies Standards and Benchmarks for New Mexico*

Standard 1 states that "Learners exhibit an understanding of the ways human beings view themselves in and over time" and under benchmark (I) "analyze the implications of cultural diversity, as well as cohesion, within the United States."

Standard 4 states that "Learners exhibit an understanding of the ideals, principles,

and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic and in other forms of governance." Under this standard benchmarks (b) "describe how democracies depend on informed citizens who participate in government by investigating and discussing issues and voting," and (e) analyze the influence of diverse forms of public opinion on the development of public policy and decision-making."

### Student Reading List

Beals, Melba Pattillo. *Warriors Don't Cry*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1995.

The autobiography of one of the students to integrate Little Rock's Central High School in 1957.

Collier, James Lincoln and Christopher Collier. . *The War Comes to Willy Freeman* Yearling Books, 1987.

The story of a young black girl who is the daughter of freed slaves. Her father is killed in a battle of the Revolution, and her mother is captured by the British. Willy dresses as a boy and heads for some family members who are still slaves. The novel tells the story of her journey to escape and find her mother again in New York City.

Davidson, Margaret. *I Have a Dream*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1986.

The biography of Martin Luther King, Jr. Short biography of King.

Falstein, Mark. *Martin Luther King, Jr.* Paramus, New Jersey: Globe Fearon, 1994.

Short biography of King.

------. *Cesar Chavez*. Paramus, New Jersey: Globe Fearon, 1994.

Short biography of Cesar Chavez and his fight to help migrant workers.

Johnston, Johanna. *They Led the Way*. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1973.

Short biographies of women who led the way for equality. Includes stories about Anne Hutchison, Abigail Adams, Emma Willard who started the first college for women, Elizabeth Blackwell who was the first woman to attend medical school, and several others.

Kelly, Tim. *The Remarkable Susan*. *Scholastic Scope*. Vol. 26. No. 21, April 13, 1978.

An adaptation of a play by Kelly based on Anthony's trial for trying to vote when she wasn't allowed to legally.

Lee, Harper. *To Kill a Mockingbird*. New York, NY: Warner Books, 1960.

A novel dealing with prejudice in a Southern town towards Boo Radley, a recluse, and a black man, Tom Robinson, who is unjustly accused of raping a white woman.

Lowry, Lois. *The Giver*. Evanston, Illinois: McDougal Littell, 1993.

A Newberry award winner about a society which is completely controlled and

safe - a utopian state. When Jonas is picked to be the receiver of memory and feelings for his community his attitude toward his community changes.

McKissack, Patricia C. *A Picture of Freedom: The Diary of Clotee, A Slave Girl.* New York: Scholastic.

"Freedom is one of the first words I teached myself to write." This book is an autobiographical account of a young slave girl on the Belmont plantation in Virginia during the Civil War. Her epigraph on her tombstone reads, "Freedom is More Than a Word."

Miner, Richard H. *Dr. Seuss Goes to War.* New York: The New Press, 1999.

Dr. Seuss was a political cartoonist before the Second World War. Along with cartoons lambasting pacifism, there are also political cartoons about the exclusion of Blacks from the defense forces.

Myers, Walter Dean. *The Glory Field.* New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1994.

A novel tracing the fictional history of the Lewis family from slavery to August, 1994. Myers has included sections that show particular problems in Black history: the Civil War, the 1930's in Chicago, the Civil Rights Movement in 1964, and a young musician who is involved in drugs in 1994.

O'Dell, Scott. *Sing Down the Moon.* New York: Laurel-Leaf Books, 1976.

The story of a young Navajo girl's slavery and the Navajo's long walk to Fort Sumter.

Perrigo, Lynn L. *Hispanos: Historic Leaders in New Mexico.* Santa Fe, NM: Sunstone Press, 1985.

Short biographies of Hispanic leaders from Juan de Onate to Dennis Chavez.

Petry, Ann. "Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad." *The Language of Literature.* Evanston, Illinois: McDougal, Littell, Inc., 1997.

A dramatization of an incident while Harriet Tubman was helping slaves to escape the South.

Pikulski, John J., et al. "The Declaration of Independence." *Worlds Apart.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991.

This is an article taken from World Book Encyclopedia about the problems and compromises of the Declaration.

Salazar, Roberto Felix. "The Other Pioneers." *The Language of Literature.* Evanston, Illinois: McDougal, Littell, Inc., 1997.

A poem about the Spanish pioneers in the Southwest and California.

Seeley, Virginia, ed. *African American Poetry.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Globe Books, 1993.

Includes poems by Nikki Giovanni, Alice Walker, Langston Hughes, and others.

----- . Latino Poetry. Paramus, NJ: Globe Fearon: 1994.

Poems by Gary Soto, Pat Mora, Francisco X. Alarcon, Mario Garza, and others.

----- . Plains Native American Literature. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Globe Books, 1993.

An anthology of fiction and non-fiction about growing up Indian in the U.S. Stories and poems by Joy Harjo, N. Scott Momaday, Leonard Crow Dog.

Soto, Gary. Jesse. New York: Scholastic, Inc., 1994.

Two Mexican American brothers work in the fields to get through college. They keep striving to better themselves and to make way for others who will have to take the same path. Eventually they go different ways.

Taylor, Mildred D. Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry. New York: Dial Press, 1976.

A story of a Black family in Mississippi in the 1930's and their struggle to hold onto their land and to have dignity.

Taulbert, Clifton L. "Once Upon a Time When We Were Colored." The Language of Literature. Evanston, Illinois: McDougal, Littell, Inc., 1997.

Excerpt from the book of the same name. When Cliff was 12, he helped his uncle at the ice house and was rewarded by a trip to Jackson, Mississippi where they encountered prejudice.

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"Fight for Equality Today." (editorial): *Tribuno del Pueblo*. January, 1997. <[www.hispanic.com](http://www.hispanic.com)>.

Glasser, Ira. "Remembering '68." ACLU 1996. <[www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org)>.

----- . "How to Celebrate the Constitution." ACLU: 1991. <[www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org)>.

Gonzales, Stephanie. Constitution of the State of New Mexico. The State of New

Mexico, 1997.

"High School dropouts and completions, by race/ethnicity and recency of migration." Current Population Survey, Bureau of the Census, 1996.

<[www.nces@ed.gov](http://www.nces@ed.gov)>.

Hobson, Geary, ed. *The Remembered Earth*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990.

Hopkins, Connie. "The Whitewashing of Higher Education." *Hispanic*: June 1999.

<[www.hispanic.com](http://www.hispanic.com)>.

Johnson, Thomas J., Carol E. Hays and Scott P. Hays, eds. *Engaging the Public*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publ. Inc., 1998/

Lesley, Craig, ed. *Talking Leaves*. New York, NY: A Laurel Trade Paperback, 1991.

Maier, Pauline. *American Scripture, Making the Declaration of Independence*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.

McClain, Paula D. and Joseph Stewart Jr. *"Can We All Get Along?"*. Boulder, Colorado - Westview Press, 1999.

Nelson, Kate. "Lonesome Polls." *The Albuquerque Tribune*, June 24, 2000. C1.

New York Times News Service. "Groups Seek Huge Hispanic Voter Turnout." *The Albuquerque Tribune*, June 22, 2000. A1, A4.

Niethammer, Carolyn. *Daughters of the Earth*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1977.

Pelavin, Sol H. and Michael B. Kane. "Minority Participation in Higher Education." Washington, D.C.: Rand, 1995. <[www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)>.

Rabinowitz, Howard N. *Race Relations in the Urban South 1865-1890*. Oxford University Press, 1980.

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