

## PROBLEM

Children today face more fears and dilemmas than did children of previous generations. Today's children interact with people from more diverse backgrounds than ever before. As we move through the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the world is fast becoming a smaller place. Advances in technology, communication, and travel have made physical distances less significant and instantly connecting with others around the world a reality. However, most school curriculums do not prepare students to operate effectively with these advances.

## CONTEXT

The following unit plan has been designed to help alleviate the above stated problem. It has been designed for a grade five class in an elementary school which has seen an influx of new immigrants. Cross – cultural understanding has become a primary requirement of a healthy learning climate. The unit plan combines many subject areas: language arts , social studies, and computers. Using the art of storytelling, some of the curricular objectives I hope to accomplish are stated in the “ Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth Curriculum Guide” (2008).

## OBJECTIVES

The goal for language arts states that “the student will make connections through “the use of oral language, written language, and media technology”. The objective states that a “student will conduct research from a variety of sources for assigned or self-selecteted projects.”

The objectives for social studies under the heading of Society and Culture is for students to study “ Canadian culture, preservation and transmission of culture, contributions of various peoples to Canada, immigration to Canada, citizenship, equality, and fairness, and topographical and thematic maps.”

My personal objectives for planning this unit while working within the framework stated above may be summarized as follows:

- (i) To promote awareness of the various cultures in our society
- (ii) Through storytelling, develop imagination, skills in writing, listening, and oral presentation.
- (iii) To build a sense of community in our schools and students.
- (iv) To accept and enjoy differences among people and cultures.
- (v) Learn peaceful conflict resolutions and promote peace in our classrooms and schools.

To build tolerance of the various cultures in our society today.

## RATIONALE

According to statistics, we are expecting over 200,000 new immigrants in Manitoba alone in the next year, (as stated during lecture in class by Dr. Senehi), leading to an increased multicultural society. Given these changes in our society, there is a great need for our children to be raised so they understand and communicate well with others. They will be members and leaders of a truly international workforce, and therefore need to develop the skills necessary for living and interacting with others productively and peacefully.

The first step toward understanding how he/she fits into a family, neighborhood, classroom, city, country, and the world is knowing his/her own background. The more a student has a solid grounding in his/her own family's beliefs, culture, and tradition, the more he/she learns to move with grace and confidence among people and cultures that are different than his/her own. Thus, the closer we get to building a world of respect, acceptance/tolerance, curiosity, and peace. Differences are not something to be feared, but they are natural and refreshing.

I wanted to use the art of storytelling to accomplish my objectives stated in my unit plan because it is a tool that can be used for any/all subjects in the curriculum. It deepens understanding of self and others and enhances confidence and self-esteem by speaking before a group.

In an age of technological wonders and instant, global communication, the ancient arts of storytelling and the oral traditions are being revised. People are natural storytellers. As Ms. Simms states in her book, "Becoming the World" (p.9; 2003), "One way to really know the spirit of another culture is to hear their stories. Literally, to become these stories as you listen is the first step in true multicultural education."

Stories are effective in increasing tolerance and understanding of people from other cultures. Stories help bind people together, forge group identities, and create a sense of common culture and understanding. As Beah states in "a long way gone" (2007), listening to stories was often a known, safe, and culturally relevant method of imparting knowledge and important values.

## THE UNIT PLAN

The unit plan in general will provide students with opportunities to:

- 1) Develop skills in research, organization, writing, listening, and oral presentation
- 2) Cultivate imaginative engagement with the world of stories.
- 3) Keep the oral tradition of their culture alive.
- 4) Meet curricular objectives of social studies and language arts as stated above.
- 5) Teach tolerance of other cultures and conflict resolution through storytelling.
- 6) Build a sense of community in the school.

## Lesson 1 : Choosing a Folktale From Your Cultural Background

Folktales help foster an atmosphere of inquiry and appreciation of other cultures as students learn about and read various folktales from around the world. Popular folktales usually generate genuine interest and enthusiasm both among young and adults alike. They include elements of history, geography, or even climate. They give insight into customs, traditions, and problems faced by a community. Learning folktales from our cultures and sharing it with students from other countries will teach tolerance.

*Objectives of Lesson 1:* Students will:

- (i) Read cross-cultural folk tales
- (ii) Research world countries using the internet
- (iii) Present folk tales through storytelling to class
- (iv) Gain a better understanding about other countries

*Time Frame of Lesson 1:* one to two weeks

*Procedure:*

Each student would bring a folktale from their cultural background. These can be tales as related to the student by his/her parent(s), researched on the internet, or found in a book. Discuss origins of student's families by plotting out the countries on a World map. Record all the countries of student ancestry to illustrate the multicultural aspect of our classroom.

Write the folktale in a version that the student would relate to the class in the form of storytelling.

Students will then learn their stories and rehearse them at home.

Students will practice in class with a partner(s).

I will model the process by first telling the tale of , "How The Squirrel Got It's Stripes", (Becoming The World, p.57 ; 2003). This is a tale from my East Indian culture. Each student will then share his/her folktale in the art of storytelling. Schedule one evening from 6:00 p.m to 7: 30 p.m to hold a Storytelling Event in the school library for family and friends.

*Assessment:* This will be done using a Rubric for written, oral, and comprehension skills. Children will have learned that they carry the knowledge within themselves that will hold the attention of others without using television, video games, or computers.

## Lesson 2: Dealing With Prejudice through Storytelling and Teaching Tolerance.

Students form prejudices and stereotypes of others who are different than ourselves. This is sometimes passed on through parental ignorance or other mediums such as friends, television shows like “ All in the Family” from the 1980’s.

### *Objectives:*

Students will discuss and define the terms prejudices, tolerance, and peace.  
Students will explore the connections between these three words and their own environment.  
Students will analyze the current classroom environment and discuss ways to make it more peaceful.

*Time Frame of Lesson 2:* Two, maybe three class periods

### *Procedure:*

Using chart paper and markers, write the definitions of prejudice, tolerance, and peace and display it in front of the class. Ask students to restate these definitions in their own words. Provide examples or anecdotes to support their definition. Ask students what a peaceful classroom might be like. Record responses on chart paper. Students will form small groups of six, select a story from one of the following: Slug and Crow, The Great Python, ( Becoming the World, pgs. 42 and 25, 2003), “Why Frog and Snake Never Play Together”, and “ The Three Butterfly Brothers”. ( Handouts in class).

Students will write the stories in their own words and put on a Puppet Show depicting the stories they have written. Through visualization students will become aware of how prejudice hurts us all and creates a toxic classroom environment.

## Lesson 3: Learning About Other Cultures

In a multicultural school setting many students have built walls around their ethnicity. Friendships are challenged and students from other races are sometimes excluded from social groups.

### *Purpose:*

To have students within a small group get to know each other by sharing cultural traditions which make our families unique. It shows that all families are different, and it’s okay to be different.

## Objectives:

- (1) List cultural differences, attitudes, and traditions which show that all families are different in some way.
- (2) Identify similarities as well as differences within the group and write about them.
- (3) To better know and understand students within the classroom.

*Time Frame of Lesson 3:* approximately two weeks

## Procedure:

Each member of the group discusses the ways in which their family does the following:

- (a) celebrates holidays
- (b) some traditional foods and eating patterns
- (c) observance of religious customs
- (d) traditional family trips

One topic is discussed at a time within the group. While one student describes what his/her family does, the other team members take notes, and ask questions. This process is continued until all the students in the group have covered all the topics mentioned above.

The students return to their desk and choose one culture from their group each and write a story about it. The students then share the story with the class. The students will then design a Prayer Flag (as discussed in class lecture with Ms. Laura Simms) each representing the ways in which their families do things differently. The Prayer Flags will be displayed in the hallway for the whole school and community to see.

Field trips will be arranged to observe the various religious customs where possible to the church, temple, mosque, and synagogue.

Once the unit is completed, an evening will be assigned for a Cultural Potluck Dinner where friends and family will be invited to see the displays, sample various cultural dishes, observe traditional clothing, and listen to stories related to the various cultures in our classroom. This event will be held in the gymnasium which will be decorated with the Prayer Flags, Folktales, and flags of the various countries.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I feel this unit plan is almost mandatory in today's society in most schools in altered forms, depending on age group and grade level. We as teachers are challenged to introduce children to the world of their future, a world that is and will increasingly become multicultural and multiracial.

## REFERENCES

Handouts in class of the various stories by Mrs. Jessica Seehi ( " Why Frog and Snake Never Play Together" and " The Three Butterfly Brothers")

Beah, Ishmael., a long way gone memoirs of a boy soldier, Douglas & McIntyre; Vancouver ,B.C (2007).

Manitoba Education , Citizenship, and Youth Curriculum Guide ( 2008)

Simms, Laura., Becoming The World, ( 2003)