

An old Cherokee was teaching his grandson about life.

'A fight is going on inside me', he said to the boy. 'It is a terrible fight, and it is between two wolves. One is evil - he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego. The other is good - he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith'.

'The same fight is going on inside you, and inside every other person, too.'

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, ' Which wolf will win?'

The old Cherokee simply replied, 'The one you feed.'

### **Overview**

The intention of this unit of work is to enhance children's understanding and acceptance of other people's point's of view. I plan to consider one 'thing' - water, from two different standpoints. Students will think of their own opposing stories and will explore the differing attitudes towards the value and role of water around the world. Students will consider some tales from the view of a protagonist whose story is not traditionally told. Three further activities will be suggested; one inviting guest speakers to share stories, one deepening our class discussions based on a read aloud novel, and one using photographic images to find connections and celebrate difference.

### **Objectives**

A metaphor that is commonly used when feeling empathy towards another is to 'stand in someone else's shoes. In Harper Lee's words "you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view"' (To Kill A Mockingbird, page 30). My objectives are to motivate students towards empathy rather than sympathy. People in other countries may not live in the same houses, go to the same schools, eat the same food or speak the same language, yet that doesn't mean their lives aren't filled with excitement, wonder, joy and love. The photographs in the Barbara Kerley books I will share underline this message. I hope to encourage my students into understanding that having diversity is a wonderful

thing; that peoples with differing values, cultures, languages and religions don't need to convince each other that they are in the right.

Stories are essentially useful because they allow us to explore a situation or a problem without it being too 'personal' to discuss. J. Edward Chamberlin speaks of this unique quality; "it is ... all the more important to turn for sustenance to the treasury of values that stories and songs provide. These values do not inhere in opinions, which may vary, nor in doctrines, which may differ, but in imaginative structures... They introduce us to the profoundly human values of friendship, love and loyalty, as well as to the profoundly human conditions of envy, failure and despair" (p.191 – 192).

Exploring stories about multiculturalism allow students to talk about prejudice and racism without feeling that they are labeling themselves, it is a safe way of having this discussion, especially with a class of eleven year olds! This is one of the most valuable strategies for teaching I have learnt; the diplomatic, indirect yet genuine nature of discussion that stories allow. As Mara Sapon-Shevin wrote, "Teachers must find ways of teaching students about community and global problems that are age appropriate and developmentally appropriate, neither talking down to students nor overwhelming them with information and feelings that overpower them" (p.157).

The mistrust and preconceptions of the people that coins as 'Us and Them' is age-old and global. As educators, we owe children the courtesy of taking off the blinkers to participate without prejudice in today's global village. It is our role to help students realize the beauty of diversity. Chamberlin goes further to highlight that "to give up these differences would be to give up something that seems essentially human, and that which helps us understand who we are and where we belong" (p.15). There are so many people in our world that seem lost when at home, unable to identify who they are and what they value. As future citizens, our students need to feel at home when surround by cultural difference, yet connected by shared goals, hopes and dreams. A further strand within this unit that I value is helping students to understand that there are many truths and that all truths are valued to the person that believes them.

## **The Plan**

### **Activity 1**

I originally wanted to take two stories that contained the same element or entity that had important but entirely different effects on a story. I found three tales; The Bird who Brings Rain: a traditional story from Gabon, Sinnan and the Shannon: an Irish myth, and The Gecko: A Balinese story. The Gabonese and Irish story feature water as force that brings life or death. The Balinese story highlights how 'all things are connected.' ( to find the stories see the reference section at the end of the lesson) These stories are fairly short and if I can tell these stories rather than read them, this would be ideal. Students could share their thoughts about these stories, the protagonists and their differing attitudes, and the contrasting conclusions to the stories. The whole class can chart these differences and similarities as a group.

### **Activity 2**

Thinking of this common element to the stories the students have heard and discussed, students begin to draft, polish and publish their own 'twin tales', where a common object or element has significantly different roles. The object or element can be anything they choose, from a tangible thing to an abstract concept. To extend this activity students could also draw a scene from each story that represents the common entity in differing ways. What materials, colours, mood and textures they choose would depend on the role this element plays in the story and should also be decidedly different.

### **Activity 3**

Thinking back to the first three stories the students and I discuss what water means in each situation and what it means to us. What do we use it for? It is often something that we let run down the plughole while we clean our teeth. How does this differ from others around the world. I would share a picture book with the class titled 'A Cool Drink Of Water' by Barbara Kerley, a National Geographic photographer. This book contains beautiful images of people drinking, transporting and enjoying water from all over the world.

**\*The following activities are not necessarily progressions along one avenue. Rather they are variations on a theme. Whether I would in reality choose one or a combination of them would depend on where we are as a classroom of people and what feels right.**

#### **Activity 4**

Fractured Fairy Tales are traditional 'fairytales' heard from the perspective of a character that doesn't ordinarily tell their story. The wolf is a character that invariably plays the 'bad guy' and there are many to be found about him. Two amusing fractured fairytales that children often enjoy are 'The True Story of the 3 Little Pigs' and 'The Frog Prince Continued,' both by Jon Scieszka. There are even alternative versions told as poetry in Roald Dahl's ' Revolting Rhymes' such as Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf (Appendix 2). Students can explore a selection of these books independently and share why they picked their favourite. They can then write their own fractured fairy tale as a poem to be performed to the class.

#### **Activity 5**

My fifth activity would involve finding parents, grandparents, or elders to visit our classroom and share a traditional story. There are also several organizations in Winnipeg such as the Manitoba Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre or the Winnipeg Scandinavian Cultural Centre that would be able to find someone to visit the school and share a story. Sharing a story with a similar theme would be open students eyes to other ways of thinking and traditions. Creation stories could be a possible theme as they exist in many cultures around the world. All the stories would be 'true' in the same way that each painting mentioned previously is 'true.' Otherwise, sharing stories of family would be a uniting topic, where children hear different settings, food, names but make connections with similar events or situations. Hearing these stories would breed further stories and connections from the students and could be collated in a class book.

#### **Activity 6**

Another avenue would be to take what we have learnt about diversity and similarity to a deeper, more reflective level by studying a novel as a class that deals with issues of cultural difference, stereotype and prejudice and how it could be overcome. In Prue Mason's 'Camel Rider' just such a situation occurs. A young Australian boy living as an ex-pat in a fictional middle-eastern country finds himself alone and scared in the desert and finds another boy, a Bangladeshi Camel rider who had been kidnapped from his home and left for dead. Students would have copies to follow along and share the story as I and other volunteers read the story, making connections and sharing stories as we explore the themes in the book.

### **Activity 7**

Another picture book by Barbara Kerley 'You and Me Together' contains pictures of families from every continent, eating, drinking, learning, working and having fun together. After sharing the book with the students and discussing what is happening in each picture, students could pick a picture to 'freeze frame' or create a living tableau with. Other students could question each tableau to find out what each character is thinking. Students could then create their own image using digital cameras to create a class picture book without words.

### **References**

Chamberlin, J. Edward. 2003. *If This Is Your Land, Where Are your Stories? Finding Common Ground*. New York: Alfred Knopf.

Dahl, Roald. Roald Dahl's Revolting Rhymes. New York : Alfred A. Knopf, 2002.

Kerley, Barbara. *A Cool Drink of Water*. Washington, D.C. : National Geographic Society, c2002.

Kerley, Barbara. *You and me together : moms, dads, and kids around the world*. Washington, D.C. : National Geographic Society, c2005.

Kerley, Barbara. *A Little Peace*. Washington, D.C. : National Geographic Society, c2007.

Mason, Prue. *Camel Rider*. Watertown, MA : Charlesbridge, 2007.

Sapon-Shevin, Mara. 1999. *Because We Can Change the World: A Practical Guide to Building Cooperative, Inclusive Classroom Communities*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Manitoba Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre      <http://www.mjccc.org/index.htm>

Winnipeg Scandinavian Cultural Centre      <http://scandinaviancentre.ca/>

An Ocean of Stories : Pygmy Tale From Gabon: The Bird Who Brings Rain  
[www.seed.slb.com/en/things\\_to\\_do/projects/ocean\\_of\\_stories/index.htm](http://www.seed.slb.com/en/things_to_do/projects/ocean_of_stories/index.htm)

An Ocean of Stories : Tale From Bali Indonesia: The Gecko  
[www.seed.slb.com/en/things\\_to\\_do/projects/ocean\\_of\\_stories/index.htm](http://www.seed.slb.com/en/things_to_do/projects/ocean_of_stories/index.htm)

Sinnan and the Shannon  
[http://www.wateryear2003.org/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=6420&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://www.wateryear2003.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=6420&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html)