MULTICULTURAL AMERICAN HISTORY THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Deborah A. Ellermeyer, Kay A. Chick





Multicultural American History Through Children's Literature

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With love and best wishes to my brothers and sisters: Ronald Sanko, Doug Sanko, Pam Salsgiver, Dan Sanko, and Sandy Beck. A special congratulations to my nephew, Deo Beck, on his high school graduation.—DAE

This book is dedicated to my family, Bill, Tyler, and Tim. Special thanks go to Tyler for his computer assistance.—KAC

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Introduction

PURPOSE

Multicultural American History Through Children's Literature is an integrated teacher resource book designed to provide intermediate grade level teachers (grades 3–6) with lesson ideas for the instruction of social studies/history concepts within the context of quality multicultural children's books and picture books. Many of the books and activities, however, can be easily adapted for use in a primary classroom. Each chapter provides teachers with the titles of three picture books related to various multicultural themes in American history, covering topics in history from the 1400s when the pilgrims traveled to America to the present day. This resource book provides teachers with a brief summary of each book, a listing of limited materials needed to implement lesson activities, a listing of key concepts for each area of study, and student-centered learning activities designed to develop and enhance social studies/history concepts in accordance with the most recent history standards, which are outlined and described in the *National Standards for History* (1996) (see Appendix). Also included is a matrix that will, at a glance, identify and summarize the history standards highlighted in each of the units of study. Additional book titles and poems related to the themes are included at the end of each chapter.

RATIONALE

Why Teach Social Studies Concepts to Children?

Teaching children about social studies concepts is an essential component of every wellbalanced elementary curriculum. The following four reasons have been identified by the authors of the *National Standards for History* (1996) for the inclusion of social studies and history instruction at the elementary level:

- 1. A knowledge of social studies/history concepts connects each child with his or her roots and develops in each child a sense of personal belonging. Children need to be aware of their own personal heritage and understand how they fit into the larger global community.
- 2. A knowledge of social studies/history concepts allows each child to move to an informed discriminating citizenship, which is essential to foster effective participation

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in democratic processes. Learning about the characteristics of good citizenship should commence during the early elementary years and continue to be developed throughout the education of every individual.

- 3. A knowledge of social studies/history concepts allows a society to share core values, a common memory of where it has been, and how past decisions account for present conditions. In this sense, history is the common thread that binds the past to the present and the present to the past.
- 4. A knowledge of social studies/history concepts is the precondition of political intelligence. In essence, informed citizens will be better able to make intelligent decisions regarding the issues that affect them and their country.

Why Use Multicultural Picture Books to Teach Social Studies Concepts?

There are several advantages of using quality multicultural picture books to teach social studies concepts. The advantages are discussed briefly below.

- 1. Picture books can be used as a supplement to textbooks to arouse students' curiosity when a new unit of study is introduced. As a result of the colorful illustrations, intriguing characters, story format, manageable length, and understandable language, children are attracted to picture books. Consequently, picture books can effectively capture students' attention in a particular area of study.
- 2. Picture books can add depth to a specific topic by providing detailed information that is often missing from standard textbooks. Because of space constraints within a textbook, standard texts often present students with a very narrow view of historical concepts. Picture books expand students' knowledge and understanding of historical events and concepts.
- 3. Picture books can present students with alternative views and perspectives on specific historical events, which are often lacking in standard textbooks. In this way, picture books have the capability of more fully informing students of various viewpoints on any given historical event.
- 4. Picture books reveal history through the eyes of characters, either actual or fictional, who have lived through historical events, instead of through the eyes of biased and remote textbook authors. Students often find that the information presented in texts is presented in a detached and factual manner. History, when revealed through the eyes of people who lived through events and time periods, becomes more real and personal for the reader. Picture books present to children the human side of history that is lacking in standard texts.
- 5. Picture books lend themselves to presenting sometimes difficult or sensitive concepts to children in an age-appropriate and tasteful manner. Consequently, young students can learn about an event, such as the Holocaust, within the context of quality children's literature that has been specifically written for them.

Criteria for Choosing Multicultural Picture Books to Use in the Teaching of Social Studies Concepts

Farris and Fuhler (1994) have identified criteria for choosing picture books to use in the teaching of social studies concepts. Additionally, Beaty (1997) has suggested guidelines for choosing appropriate multicultural picture books. Outlined below is a list of questions to be used with each picture book that is being considered for use within the elementary social studies curriculum.

- 1. Are the facts presented within the text authentic?
- 2. Are facts and opinions clearly differentiated? Are opinions adequately supported?
- 3. Will the content of the picture book extend the social studies topic that is being studied?
- 4. Are the text and illustrations free of stereotyping?
- 5. Does the language or dialect show respect for the culture?
- 6. Is there a balance of books showing different facets of each culture?
- 7. Is there a variety of genres, including poetry, historical fiction, biographies, folktales and legends, and informational books?
- 8. Will the story, illustrations, and characters appeal to the students and is the content developmentally appropriate?
- 9. Are the illustrations accurate reflections of the text, the historical period, and the culture?

BENEFITS FOR TEACHERS

The benefits of using the teacher resource book *Multicultural American History Through Children's Literature* are many. Several benefits are discussed below.

1. Teaching Social Studies Concepts within the Meaningful Context of Quality Multicultural Children's Picture Books

Picture books can bring social studies and history alive for young learners. Picture books can get children in touch with the human, feeling side of history. Whereas social studies texts have long been criticized for their rather dry and factual presentation of material, the colorful illustrations, readable text, and story format of picture books appeal to children. Learning about key historical events and people via a quality picture book makes learning a pleasurable and meaningful experience for students and teachers alike.

2. A Variety of Student-Centered Learning Activities to Develop and Reinforce Social Studies Concepts in Accordance with the National Standards for History.

Students learn best when they are actively engaged in the learning process. The student-centered activities provided herein are designed to involve students actively in meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences while teaching essential social studies concepts. The authors identify the national history standards each unit of study addresses.

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3. Integration of Other Instructional Skill Areas within Social Studies Activities

In addition to involving students in social studies and history-related activities, this resource book provides teachers with activities that effectively integrate other areas, including: math reading; writing; oral language; listening; creative dramatics; social, environmental, and community awareness; art; creative and critical thinking; problem solving; and cooperative learning. Areas of integration are clearly delineated and specified for each learning activity included in the book.

4. Ease and Versatility of Use

Multicultural American History Through Children's Literature is a teacher-friendly resource book that is easy to use. It is written in a style that teachers can easily read and understand. Each unit of study is based on quality children's picture books, most of which are accessible through school book clubs. Each unit identifies the books and other limited materials necessary to complete the activities. A brief book summary is also provided. Key concepts and areas of integration, as well as history standards, are identified for each unit of study.

The lessons can be used in a variety of ways within the social studies curriculum. The book can be used effectively by teachers who use an adopted social studies textbook and by those teachers who use a more holistic, eclectic approach to instruction. Teachers using adopted social studies texts will find the book helpful in introducing social studies themes and providing supplemental information and learning activities. Teachers with more eclectic approaches to instruction will find the book a developmentally appropriate alternative to social studies texts.

Students will enjoy the selected picture books and the creative, student-centered learning activities. The variety of books, topics, and activities will maintain the interest of students in any classroom.

5. Opportunity for Authentic, Performance-based Assessment

Through the use of this teacher resource book, teachers are afforded the opportunity to assess their students' learning via the completion of a wide variety of authentic, enjoyable, performance-based tasks. The variety of ways in which students demonstrate their understanding of concepts also recognizes and applies the theory of Howard Gardner's (1993) multiple intelligences.

TIPS ON USING THE BOOK WITH STUDENTS

1. Familiarize Self with the Picture Books in Advance of Reading to the Class

It is suggested that teachers obtain copies of the book(s) they wish to use with their students and familiarize themselves with them in advance of presenting them to the class. Since the teacher will be reading the picture books aloud to the group, only one copy of each book is required for each lesson. A pre-reading allows the teacher an opportunity to develop questions that can be used to engage listeners actively throughout the reading of the text. A pre-reading also gives the teacher an opportunity to examine closely illustrations and note points of particular interest that might be discussed with the class during the reading of the book. Finally, a pre-reading of the text helps ensure a more fluent and expressive reading in class.

- 2. Decide the Best Way to Use the Picture Books and Activities to Enhance Student Learning The picture books and accompanying lessons contained within this teacher resource book can be used in a variety of ways. They can be used by themselves or in conjunction with an adopted social studies text. The units can be used to introduce a particular social studies topic or broaden students' understanding of concepts that have already been introduced. Teachers have the option of choosing how each unit best fits into their existing social studies curriculum.
- 3. Read the Book Aloud to the Class

In order to facilitate discussion and focus students' attention on key vocabulary and concepts, it is recommended that the teacher read the books aloud to the students. Begin the reading by giving students a purpose for listening. Ask students to make predictions throughout the book and check them for accuracy as the reading continues. Encourage students to reread the book on their own and suggest other books, which are listed at the end of each unit, on the same historical event or concept.

4. Prepare Lessons in Advance of Teaching

Some of the lessons require minimal teacher preparation and materials. Necessary materials should be obtained in advance of the teaching of the lesson. Teachers can easily adapt individual lessons to meet the needs of the learners in their classrooms.

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CHAPTER **1**

Coming to America

Building a New Land: African-Americans in Colonial America

Jim Haskins and Kathleen Benson (New York: HarperCollins, 2001)

Book Summary: This picture book for older readers examines the lives of African-American slaves beginning in the 1400s, with an emphasis on the colonial period in America (1607–1763). From the settling of Jamestown to the slave revolts of the 1700s, the authors share the experiences, traditions, and contributions of African Americans in a changing society.

Key Concepts: Slavery, colonial America

National History Standards: 1, 5, and 6

Activity #1: Design a Postcard

Materials for Activity #1:

- Sample picture postcards from various places
- $4'' \times 6''$ blank white index cards (1 per student)
 - Markers, crayons, colored pencils, and paint

Areas of Integration: Creative and artistic expression, oral language

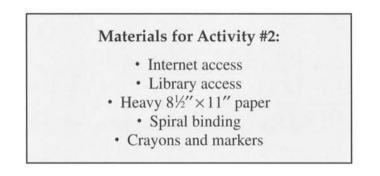
After reading *Building a New Land: African-Americans in Colonial America*, ask students if they have ever gone on trips with their families. Ask if they have ever mailed a postcard to someone back home while on their trip. Following a brief discussion, show students samples of picture postcards from various places. Have students note and discuss the format of postcards.

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Next, have students assume that they are slaves being brought to America. Have them design postcards to send back to relatives in their homeland that depict an aspect of their journey or new life in America. Encourage students to depict scenes detailed throughout the book.

After designing the front of the card, have students complete the back of the card by scripting messages to relatives that relate to the front illustration on their postcards. They can also create an appropriate destination name and address, as well as design a stamp for their postcards.

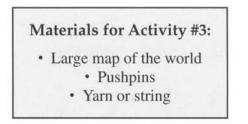
Activity #2: Book Making: The Contributions of African Americans



Areas of Integration: Research skills, written expression, artistic expression

After reading and discussing the chapter "African Contributions to Colonial Society," ask students to list the contributions of African Americans in the areas of art, music, and literature and storytelling. Record students' ideas on the chalkboard or poster board. Have students expand on the contributions mentioned in the book by researching on websites or in other books. Students may also want to interview parents, grandparents, or other adults who may know of the cultural contributions of African Americans. After the list is complete, have each student select one contributions of African Americans. The book could be divided into three chapters: art, music, and literature and storytelling. Each page would include an artistic representation of the contribution and a short paragraph detailing the history of the item. The book could be spiral bound and placed in the library or classroom.

Activity #3: The Forced Immigration of African Americans



Areas of Integration: Geography skills, critical thinking