Who Am I to You? An investigation into Stereotypes, Inequalities, and Social Status

Jill Spaulding

Introduction

I often wonder about my students' futures, as most teachers do, and where they will end up. I wonder who they will become, what roles they will play in our society, and whether or not I have made any impact at all. But more than even that, I wonder if *they* know who they will become, what roles they will play in our society, and who they will impact during the course of their lives. Now, I do realize my students are only twelve years old. I cannot expect them to know the answers to these questions nor do I ask these questions of them often. But as I observe my students language and mannerisms, behaviors in and out of the classroom, I begin to see that many of my students have no idea that their first impression on others forms a significant opinion of them as a person. This opinion, whether they like it or not, will shape how others react, who they develop relationships with, and if they get that job they long to attain in the future.

Here is the abbreviated version of my ideals: I want my students to be successful in their lives. In order to help them as they progress towards that, I want them to understand the influence of their background, race, body language, dress, and speech when meeting new people and developing relationships. At the tender age of eleven or twelve, many of my students do not realize that the color of their skin and the manner in which they address a stranger may monumentally impact the person others perceive them to be.

During the course of my unit, students will investigate stereotypes and inequalities relating to race, gender, and social status. This unit will not only give them an outside perspective on "real world" circumstances, but also encourage them to reflect on their own background and behaviors in relation to the elements we study. My hope for this unit rests in students building awareness for the inequalities which still exist in our society today and how through their open-mindedness and respect, some of those inequalities can begin to change. Starting now.

My School

First, I would like to take a moment to acquaint you with the environment of my school. Quail Hollow Middle School, a FOCUS (Finding Opportunities; Creating Unparalleled Success) school, prides itself on building relationships and diversifying instruction. Being a FOCUS

school means that according to our state's standardized test scores (End of Grade or EOG) our students do not perform at a proficient level and thus, do not meet all of the achievement goals mandated for a school of our size and/or makeup. (This is called Annual Yearly Progress, AYP, of which our school achieved 25 out of 29 necessary progression goals in 2008.) Many of our students perform below grade level and with the high stakes of EOG pass rates, teachers feel the pressure of "making the grade." Being a 6th grade Language Arts teacher, I know that the limitations of my students do not come from them being inadequate or not being "smart," but rather that their reading level does not necessarily match where national standards suggest they are supposed to be. For example, in 2008 approximately 49% of our 6th graders earned a I or II (failing) on the End of Grade test, nearly 60% received a I or II in 7th grade and 38% in 8th grade (1).

In direct correlation is the socio--economic breakdown of our school. Our school definitely exhibits a salad bowl of culture with its 950 students creating a pie of 36% African American, 31% White, and 25% Hispanic, with significantly lower levels of Asian, Native American, or Multi--racial students (2). Although our school nestles next to an exclusive golf club, we bus the majority of our students in from lower--income housing or apartments. The one thing the majority of my students have in common is low economic level. Sixty--three percent of our school population receives free/reduced lunch and ninety--two percent of absences get categorized as unexcused, with no parent/guardian contact. Many parents shut off their phones or cancel service when a bill cannot be paid and several move to a different apartment without notifying the school of the address or contact information changes.

This correlation between minority populations, socio--economic status, and low achievement has been coined the "Achievement Gap." Nothing creates a better image of this than the separation of students into Standard (lower level), Standard Plus (proficient) and Honors (above average) classes. I teach three classes of a heterogeneously mixed Standard/Standard Plus, which allows for lively debates and discussion given the diversity in my classroom. However, my classes frequently struggle with school--wide fundraisers, while our neighboring classroom of Honors students excels. Often I find that my students lack background or prior knowledge of information or concepts we read in our stories simply because they may not have had the opportunity to learn them elsewhere: the beach, items in a museum, the experience of being at a baseball stadium during a game. You can probably imagine then that their understandings of other cultures may be severely limited. With rare circumstances to even branch out within their own society, the likelihood of my students having experienced another culture becomes nil. Acknowledging this, I have to consider that my students also have a limited view of the inequalities and injustices of our current society. They may have personal stories or experiences to draw from, but once again, these may be limited snapshots of a bigger picture. My goal is to

open the lens to seeing stereotypes and inequalities from as educated a view as possible.

Objectives

Stereotypes

As noted in the title, my primary objective for this unit will be studying stereotypes. For the majority of my students, this is a completely new concept. In elementary school, students study characterization, plot, and even basic literary elements of poetry. But the mention of the word "stereotype" often elicits open mouths on confused faces. I define stereotype to my students as a belief held by a society about a group of people whether or not it may be accurate. I then always supply over-used examples such as "Blondes are dumb" or "Eskimos always wear parkas." The examples I give initially must be safe; meaning, I do not want to offend any of my students and must therefore be able to quickly prove the statement is not necessarily true. I usually also supply pictures of that particular belief for my visual learners, who instantly understand the concept.

However, my students seem to only understand the concept when one is brought to their attention. If I give them examples and show them pictures, they instantly express, "Oh yeah. I know what you mean." Yet when we read texts in which characters may portray certain stereotypes, my students never discover it on their own. I hope to resolve this problem.

The North Carolina Standard Course of Study states that students must "investigat[e] examples of distortion and stereotype" (3). But what does investigating entail? Firstly, in order to investigate, students need to have a concrete understanding of the concept itself, in this case, stereotypes. Then, they must be able to seek out examples of stereotypes in literature and assess their components. Such as: Is this a believable stereotype? Why was this stereotype initially created? Why would someone believe this stereotype?

Stereotypes are tricky. They can easily cause offense and therefore often get pushed to the wayside of our 6th grade curriculum. On the other hand, many of my students make stereotypical jokes without realizing the consequences of their jokes. The majority, because they are so young and still developing their own perspectives, adhere to their parents mindsets and prejudices. Making jokes about Mexicans or African Americans may seem funny in a certain crowd, but within the context of the classroom (or appropriate behavior!), they are not. How can a diverse classroom unwrap stereotypes without offense? How can we discuss the matter without hurting feelings? In my strategies section, I will further discuss how I plan to investigate and debate stereotypes with my students in an educational, effective, and appropriate manner.

Inequalities

The second objective within my unit deals with educating the students about current inequalities of our society. While some of my students may have personal experience with this component of our research, others may not. The inequalities my class will discuss during this unit will be race, gender, and social class.

Race

Racial inequalities are one of the most talked about in our society today. Many of my students can verify studies of this through personal experiences: parents being constantly checked or inappropriately served at stores (ogled by security, doubtful expressions from a cashier during payment), teachers not calling on them as much as others, etc. While it may be one of the most talked about inequalities, it may also be one of the more difficult. In a 6th grade classroom, I need to set high expectations for our discussion when communicating about racial inequalities. Every person belongs to a racial group and therefore has a unique story to tell. As a teacher, it is important for students to know that everyone's story is legitimate and real – not to be teased or provoked. Discussion must be appropriate and sincere. I hope my students will share their personal stories, but in order for them to do so the stage must be set for a "safe zone" in which to share. Also, due to the population in my classroom, we will primarily discuss inequalities relating to Hispanic, African American, and Asian people within the United States. While there do exist inequalities in other racial groups, these are the most essential to discuss given my classroom demographics.

Gender

Many of my students believe the United States treats men and woman fairly. Although my students may see inequalities within the classroom (girls called on more than boys or boys getting more attention, etc.) they tend to believe that woman and men have an equal chance when it comes to employment. This is simply not the case. During this unit, I want to unravel this truth for my students by allowing them to first: discuss examples of men and woman being treated unfairly that they have witnessed and second: sharing real-life narratives (such as showing the salary for men vs. women in certain professions) they can explore and investigate. By allowing my students to question the state of men versus women in our society, I hope they will become more aware of ways in which they can be successful individually.

Social Class

As stated earlier in my narrative, the majority of my students come from low socio-economic backgrounds. Many receive free or reduced lunches and may question whether or not there will be a full meal waiting for them at home. A handful of them my school identifies as "MCV" (McKenny-Vinto), which essentially declares the student as homeless or in an unstable living situation.

I do not need to teach my students about the inequalities of social class. They witness it everyday. This is a topic I want my students to discuss respectfully with one another. How does our income influence how people view and treat us? How does our society place value on certain possessions and how does this influence everyone (even those not *owning* those items)? What circumstances affecting our income may be out of our control? What, financially, is in our control? This area of my unit will not only benefit all the students in my class (regardless of socio-economic status), but also me. I so often take for granted my middle-class upbringing and need to be reminded of the ways I can be a better person to others in our world.

Background Information

In order to teach a unit to middle schoolers devoted to reflection upon inequality, one must educate them on how our society still demonstrates elements of injustice in the areas of race, gender, and social class. While I am absolutely positive that all of my students will produce concrete examples on inequality witnessed in their own lives, it is imperative that I supply them with the facts they need to make informed decisions about viewing their individual lives, their social or educational environments, and their nation as a whole. As I did earlier in my discussion of this unit, I will break this down into the three sections of our unit's study: race, gender, and social class. Here I will provide the information I feel necessary to know in order to successfully complete this unit of study with my students.

Race

It has become a seldom-discussed fact that white privilege remains practically untouched in the United States today. As Allan Johnson summarizes, this privilege "shows up in the daily details of people's lives in almost every social setting" (6). In this section, I will briefly paraphrase some the inequalities Johnson found in his years of research on the topic.

African Americans are more likely than whites to be arrested, and once arrested, convicted of theirs suspected crimes (7). Walker supports this evidence saying "For many people, the term 'crime' evokes an image of a young African American male who is armed with a handgun and who commits a robbery, a rape, or a murder," (8). Walker continues by providing statistics

showing that police arrest African Americans at twice the rate predicted based on their population size. This contradicts the rates of legitimate arrested offenders, two-thirds of whom are white with less then a third actually being African American (the perceived belief) (9).

African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, and Native Americans must also always recognize their race in social situations, whereas a white individual can choose to ignore it. As Johnson states, "Whites can choose whether to be conscious of their racial identity or to ignore it and regard themselves as simply human beings without a race," (10). This manifests itself in all social situations: the grocery store, the mall, school, work, etc. A white person can walk into a social setting without having to factor race into any potential encounter and the outcomes of that meeting. A white person can assume they will always be treated fairly and with respect, whereas a person of a minority may always wonder if they received sub-par treatment due to his/her race.

Even more alarming, the majority of whites have access to quality education, community services, job offers, and schools because they are not intentionally segregated into areas of the city with deficient resources. Elijah Anderson noted this in his study of Germantown Avenue in Philadelphia, that white people from the higher-income Chestnut Hill district would drive to other parts of the avenue and notice "a sea of black faces, the noise, the seeming disorder, and the poverty," (11). He discusses Germantown High School, a place where almost all the students are black and living in poverty, nestled directly across from a liquor store where many of the young people hang out (12).

This type of educational experience mirrors the ones described by Jonathon Kozol in his research of the inequalities in our nation's education system. For example, in Detroit, Michigan, the 1975 *Milliken v. Bradley* court case ordered a "metropolitan desegregation plan" which only "accelerate[d] white flight out of the city" (13). During his years of study, Kozol submits that "What startled me most – although it puzzles me that I was not prepared for this – was the remarkable degree of racial segregation that persisted almost everywhere" (14). He visited racially segregated schools across the country where students lacked textbooks and tissues, using bathrooms in disrepair and closets for classrooms. One parent living in a low-income community tried to explain the situation to her son, saying the government had difficulties finding the money for his school. But, she remarks, they "don't believe it and they know it's a *choice* that has been made – a choice about how much they matter to society," (15).

Even in Charlotte, we see racial segregation happening as we track students into Standard, Standard Plus, and Honors classes. The majority of students in a Quail Hollow honors Language Arts or Math course is white, with only a few African American, Hispanic, or Asian students sprinkled in. From where does this inequality develop? Do teachers in the elementary tested

grades treat the students differently depending on race? I do not necessarily believe this is the case. However, by the time students enter our doors at Quail Hollow, minority students are already behind, many by entire grade levels. How do we close this achievement gap in the minority subgroups to level the playing field and label *every* child as honors?

Gender

Gender inequalities permeate our society. Not only do they affect the workplace and men's or women's ability to attain their "dream" job, but inequalities also exist within the roles men and women are "required" to play. First I would like to explore this field as it relates to the workplace and then examine the ways in which our society judges women and men, girls and boys differently.

In 1943, when the United States was heavily entrenched in World War II overseas, industry here required women to fill men's vacant positions. In *Transportation Magazine*, an article outlined for male supervisors which traits would be desirable in a female employee. They included such characteristics as: 1) Husky girls tend to be more even-tempered and thus work more efficiently, 2) Every girl requires a certain number of rest periods in order to keep her hair "tidied" and apply fresh lipstick, 3) Women require a full day's list of duties so that they will not bother management every few minutes with bothersome questions, and 4) Married women perform better than single women because they have a greater sense of responsibility and duty (16).

This list of ridiculous female "requirements" for the workplace demonstrates how, in terms of work and efficiency, manager held inaccurate expectations for women at the time. However, the inequality for women at work has not subsided. As Johnson found in his study, companies hold woman to a higher standard and view their contributions more critically (17). Men are also more likely to be given chances for professional growth including promotions and pay raises than women of comparative skills in their job (18). Our culture also allows men an almost limitless range of job opportunities, whereas women still get shuffled into certain "gender specific" fields such as nursing, librarianship, secretarial work, and teaching (19).

However, men receive limits from our society in another way. William Pollack perhaps said it best when he writes, "[men and boys] feel it is necessary to cut themselves off from any feelings that society teaches them are unacceptable… -- fear, uncertainty, feelings of loneliness, and need" (20). In our world, boys and men must show no fear; they may not cry and should not show weakness. Many men fit themselves into the stereotypical role of strong, aggressive, football-loving male willing to suit up in armor to protect house and home. Pollack affirms this,

saying “The idea is that a boy needs to be disciplined, toughened up, made to act like a ‘real man,’ be independent, keep emotions in check,” (21). Pollack noted that around the age of five or six, boys become less likely than girls to express weakness, be it in the form of hurt or distress due to this “toughening up” process. According to our norms, boys should feel shame when exhibiting weakness and should separate themselves emotionally from their mothers (22). But in so doing, many boys and men suffer silently – not sharing their feelings of stress or vulnerability and thus increasing risks to their health and overall happiness.

Pollack’s study also found that boys tend to have more fragile self-esteems when it comes to learning than that of girls (23). Because of this, many boys try to be “cool” by not being “too smart;” they don’t want the negative label of being a nerd. They also do not want the humiliation that comes with providing a wrong answer. Boys will brag about their abilities to perform on classroom tasks in order to hide their feelings of inadequacy or possible failure. In direct correlation with boys’ need to proving aggression and disassociating with school, they constitute 71 percent of school suspensions, demonstrating their interest in violence and apathy towards education (24).

Social Class

You need only walk down Tryon Street in uptown Charlotte, North Carolina to see the inequalities of social class creeping along in our society today. Our city’s homeless sit on bus benches clutching wrinkled plastic grocery bags carrying their belongings, hoping to get a few dollars from someone passing by. Most of the time, we walk past. We ignore the plight of humanity sitting only a few steps away from us. We comfort ourselves by creating judgments of the individual: He’s a drunk. She’ll only spend it on drugs. Yet we do little to find out how to help or solve the problems existing in our society that create their homelessness to begin with.

In Anderson’s study of Germantown Avenue, he noted that middle-class blacks would “choose styles and colors that are noticeably expensive: they are expressive in laying claim to middle class status,” (25). Why do they feel the need to do this? Anderson explains this saying “The distinctions of wealth – and the fact that black people are generally disenfranchised and white people are not – operate in the back of the minds of people here,” (26).

Americans make many distinctions based on the perceived appearance, or lack thereof, of wealth. Your level of education, style of dress, hospitality, manners, values, future aspirations, and speech all rank according to your wealth. I had the unfortunate experience to hear one of my fellow colleagues say, regarding holding a spelling bee in her classes: “Can’t I just send three kids to the school bee from my Honors class? Do I have to send one kid from each class? The

Honors kids are the only ones who are actually going somewhere in life." And many other teachers in the room nodded in agreement, as if to say, "Yes, the affluent children attending our school are more likely to succeed than their low-income counterparts."

It is true that our low-income students have limited access to experiences that would advance their educational goals. They do not often see the insides of museums or nature conservatories, attend all the possible field trips, or take family vacations in various parts of the country. Their economic status limits their worldview to what presents itself before their eyes: in their neighborhoods and classrooms. It should be our responsibility as teachers to make sure these children get to "see" as much as possible.

In the next section, I will explain the strategies I plan to incorporate within my unit to maximize student learning and creativity.

Strategies

My students vary in their reading ability. I have some that read at an eighth grade level and others who can barely muster a fourth grade chapter book. With this in mind, I need to use multiple learning strategies in order to facilitate the learning for all of my students. Certain components will be visual, others auditory, some mathematical, etc. In order to maximize the learning for everyone, I must differentiate as much as possible. As you read below, you will find various forms of individualized instruction through each of the strategies used in my unit.

Lexile level reading groups

Lexile levels are a scientific way of determining a person's reading ability. It takes into account the level of vocabulary, sentence construction, and phrasing. As the Lexile Framework states, "A higher Lexile reader measure represents a higher level of reading ability on the Lexile scale" (4). By the time students reach sixth grade, they should already read at a Lexile level of 900. However, many of my students come to me with the Lexile level of your average fourth grader (700L) (5). If I give that student a book at 900L, he/she will become easily frustrated, skip over words to make sense of the story, and eventually dismiss the book as "no good." It is important to target readers where they are comfortable in order to challenge them to learn potential vocabulary without upsetting their confidence in reading or overwhelming their abilities.

For this unit, I chose three novels at varying Lexile levels for my students to read and discuss. Students will be given the book that best identifies with their reading ability. The students will sit in groups of four, each group consisting of representatives from each book. This insures that

when groups discuss the topics of stereotypes, race, gender, or social class, members in each group will be able to give examples from their own book and make comparisons and connections among the different novels.

For my low readers, Esperanza Rising by Pam Muńoz Ryan, will be used. This story follows Esperanza and her mother as they enter a Californian work camp from their forced evacuation of their plantation home in Mexico. At 750L, this novel will allow students to determine and analyze elements of social class stereotypes, the influence of race in the various work camps of California during the time, and the roles men and woman played to survive.

My middle or proficient students will read Maniac Magee by Jerry Spinelli. This novel weaves a tale about a boy dubbed "Maniac Magee" who, after leaving his aunt and uncle's house, ends up on the street and taken in by an African American family on the "wrong side" of town. At 820L, this novel will give students the opportunity to discuss the components of race and gender in Maniac's town, as well as the influence his social class had on his life.

For my higher readers, The Watson's go to Birmingham – 1963 by Christopher Paul Curtis will be used. This 1000L novel chronicles the lives of the Watson family from Flint, Michigan as they journey to Birmingham, Alabama to stay with Grandma Sands. This story gives readers the chance to discuss the race-related historical events (the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing) of 1963 along with how the Watsons' social class influences their family.

Each day, my class will study a particular facet of the unit (stereotyping one day, African American inequality the next, etc.). The class will begin with teacher-directed instruction about the topic. Afterwards, students will have an assigned amount of pages to read from their novel. When finished with the reading, students will develop connections between the topic of the day (for example: stereotypes) and what they read in their novel. Because many of these topics do not appear in the novel until later chapters (in order to develop the characters and provide background information), the initial days of my unit will be devoted to re-teaching concepts of basic literary elements crucial for my 6th graders' success, such as: characterization, conflict, setting, cause and effect, etc. After my students have read into their novels by a couple of chapters, we will then begin our investigation of stereotypes and inequalities and I will expect students to find and elaborate on examples from their text.

Film – the visual learner approach

Many of my students only comprehend new concepts when instructed visually. For these learners, I want to incorporate the use of film clips into my unit. I have seen so many moving

pieces of film that I believe would allow for lively and educational debate in my classroom. I will address a few examples here.

Prom Night in Mississippi

This documentary follows the Charleston, Mississippi high school senior class of 2008 as they plan their first racially integrated prom. Particular scenes from this film highlight the students' perspectives towards the discrimination held by their parents and the denial of the school board to make progressive change. Students in my class would be able to discuss the inequalities of such a situation and evaluate what circumstances contributed to the continuation of segregated proms.

The War

Starring Kevin Costner and a young Elijah Wood, this film depicts the coming-of-age story of a brother and sister living in a rural community. While raised in a middle-class home, the siblings maintain a rivalry with another sibling pair from a poorer family. One scene illustrates the kindness their father demonstrates to the poor children and his reasoning behind his actions. After showing this film clip, students will discuss and critique the father's actions and evaluate whether or not they would have behaved in the same manner.

Hairspray

This musical follows a young, overweight girl who dreams of one day dancing on a hit (and segregated) TV show. Certain clips from this movie will allow my students to evaluate the stereotype of body shape for girls, the racial integration of television, and the possible complication of interracial relationships.

Homecoming

In this Hallmark film, Dicey leads her younger siblings on the journey across the country by foot to stay with their grandmother after being deserted by their mother. The film illustrates the trials associated with social class and the struggles to survive with nothing. It also demonstrates an interesting dynamic of a female leader (Dicey) confronted by her younger male brother.

Socratic Seminar

Socratic Seminar is a method I like to use in my classroom to promote conversation and debate

among my students. In Socratic Seminar, the teacher merely facilitates as a mediator rather than leading the discussion. According to one definition, during a Socratic Seminar "participants seek deeper understanding of complex ideas in the text through rigorously thoughtful dialogue, rather than by memorizing bits of information," (27). In this unit, Socratic Seminar will be used to discuss poetry displaying the themes of stereotypes and injustice for the class to debate.

When I hold a Socratic Seminar in my class, the students re-arrange the desks to form a large circle. After reading a particular text, each student received a sticky-note marked with a specific color. This color aligns with the question stems students see displayed on my whiteboard in the front of the room. On the whiteboard, I write question stems based on Bloom's Taxonomy of thinking (Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Evaluation), each level written in a different color (28). If a student receives a sticky note marked with blue that means I want that student to create a question from one of the blue question stems on the board. The lowest level on Bloom's Taxonomy demonstrates the simplest cognitive behavior and increases as you work up. I give my students different colors for different cognitive levels for a few reasons: 1) This makes differentiating based on a child's readiness level quite easy, 2) Not all the children in my classroom can handle an "Evaluation" level question, so I can modify for their unique ability, and 3) It allows for diverse discussion when we all create *different* questions to answer.

After receiving the sticky note, the student then write a question about the text in his/her Bloom's question stem domain. The students must also write their answer to the question, even if they are not entirely sure of the answer. Then, we discuss! One student volunteers to begin the discussion with his/her question and posits it to the class. His/her classmates then discuss possible answers, asking for clarification from one another when necessary. Once the question has been sufficiently discussed, the opening student then gives what he/she provided as an answer and we continue to the next question.

Students love this exercise because it puts them in charge. They lead the discussion. They generate ideas and provide feedback to one another's questions. Students love the idea of being the "teacher" in the classroom for a change.

Classroom Activities

In this section of the curriculum unit, I would like to share three activities which will help my students achieve academic success in this stereotypes and inequalities unit. My hope is for these activities to be easily modified and manipulated to fit any Language Arts classroom regardless of grade level.

"If I Were A Boy" music and dance video comparison and evaluation

First, students will read the lyrics of the song "If I Were a Boy" by Beyonce. This song expresses the differences in expectations that women and men face in their relationships with one another. My students will discuss the perceptions that Beyonce has about men and their role in romantic relationships. (See the appendix materials relating to this activity).

Next, students will watch the music video for this song. In the music video, Beyone reverses the stereotypical roles by playing a police officer in a relationship with a man who is not the "breadwinner" of the household. It also depicts her socializing fluidly with other men and how this should be "okay" as it would be stereotypically normal for a man to socialize with other women without offense. During and after the video, my students will answer questions regarding the stereotypes portrayed and whether or not they agree with these gendered social stereotypes.

Afterward, students will watch a different interpretation of Beyonce's song through the dance performance by Dominic and Lauren on So You Think You Can Dance. In this performance, Lauren portrays a woman in an abusive relationship struggling to get out. Students will judge how the lyrics connect to this new interpretation of the song and also analyze the components of the dance for the story they tell: how does the man appear abusive? How does the woman appear to struggle? Who finally wins? Is there a winner? This activity allows my students to analyze the text of Beyonce's song in a multi-faceted way while also integrating the engaging component of dance which we overlook so often in school.

Langston Hughes Socratic Seminar

Using one of my strategies described earlier, I want my students to discuss the elements of poetry and components of inequality addressed in Langston Hughes's poems "Merry Go Round" and "Mother to Son."

Prior to reading "Merry Go Round," I will instruct my students about the Jim Crow laws and what those meant. Without this background knowledge, the poem will not make much sense to my students (it refers to these laws). Then both poems will be read aloud; the first reading will be done by me, then we will read each poem a second time in unison. Choral reading is not something I use frequently, but with short poems it often works well because for students who enjoy reading, they get that opportunity and for students who dislike reading, their voice blends in with the mass of sound.

During the reading, I want students to mark the text. In my classroom, I use three different symbols when I have students mark a text. An exclamation point (!) next to a phrase means that the student was surprised or shocked by the information presented there. A question mark (?) means the student has a question about this particular section or phrase from the text. A star (*) symbolizes that the sentence noted is important for the student to remember, either because it expresses a main idea or because it gives a significant fact. While we read these two Langston Hughes poems, I want my students to mark each poem at least three times. This can be in any combination of symbols (three question marks, a question mark and two stars, etc.), but they need to mark at least three times for each poem. Then in their reader's notebook, the students will explain why they marked that piece of text in the way they did. What question did they have? Why did they find that sentence shocking? What is important about that phrase?

After doing this, I will disperse the sticky notes for students to generate their Socratic Seminar question and answer. Students will get sufficient time to do this as I want their questions and answers to be thoughtful and not rushed. We will then participate in Socratic Seminar and close the class by expressing and explaining what parts of the text we marked during our reading. This is a great time for students to express questions that still linger about the text or the content that they remained unanswered during the class.

People Tags

This activity is one I discovered while looking at materials on the "Understanding Prejudice" website which includes numerous lessons for teachers to use to teach tolerance and understanding to children of all different ages (29).

In this class exercise, students get into groups of four. Each groups will receive a set of four people cards and eight object cards, but they should not have them yet. I will explain to each group that they will be buying a gift for four different individuals: Uncle Frederick, a motorcycle rider; Aunt Mina, a librarian; Cousin Wei, a Navy recruit; and Great-Aunt Keesha, a senior citizen. At this time, students should choose a gift from the eight object cards that they feel would be best for each person. After students have decided who will receive which gift, the class will discuss why we picked certain gifts for particular people. Why did Cousin Wei get a tattoo? Why did Great Aunt Keesha get a rocking chair? How did the labels influence your choices?

Next, students will receive fact cards for each of the people they "purchased" gifts for. After examining the fact cards (which elaborate more detail about each person), the students can adjust

their gift choices. Then the class will discuss how the new information changed our decisions. When the activity is over, we will discuss our labels and stereotypes influence the judgments we make about other people. (See appendix for resources with this activity.)

Notes

1. "Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools: School, District, and Learning Community Profiles," accessed October 5, 2010, http://apps.cms.k12.nc.us/departments/instrAccountability/schlProfile05/profiles.asp.
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7. Ibid, 25.
8. Walker et. al, 45.
9. Ibid, 48.

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