

Our Common Threads: A Month of Our American Stories Through the Art, Music, and Literature of the Civil Rights Movement

Karen A. Donaldson

Overview

We all have stories to tell. That's one thing we all have in common.

When we think of ways that we are different in this world, this is a thread that binds us together in our human experience.

When I first began to explore the opportunity to create a unit of study about the literature of the Civil Rights Movement, I struggled with presenting a realistic picture of such an important and violent time to five through nine year old students.

How do I teach about hatred and fear? How could I do this topic justice and leave out the story of Emmet Till? How could I, truthfully reflect the agony of a marginalized group of people who traveled this road to equality, when I did not experience these struggles? Will my unit be valid to all? Would I be able to create an authentic unit of study to inspire young learners to learn about and behave with tolerance towards one another, as a result?

As a teacher in the public schools for twenty seven years (sixteen in schools of poverty), we would focus each February, on Black Americans who had made significant contributions to our country. Students would choose a name from a list, do some reading, and write a report on the findings. We hung the projects in the hallway and did not discuss their contents until the following year.

President Gerald Ford made Black History Month an event to highlight worthy citizens who had never been allowed into the American history books. Unfortunately, many students who needed to read about these heroes often did not have access to the books. Black students in segregated schools received the worn cast off texts of white students while whites received new, updated books. Those who had survived the different levels of abuse and neglect, received minimal attention in the public arena during a "month long tribute". Could I use this forum to raise the consciousness of twenty first century learners? I now realize that this is one of those times when the thread of another's experiences is one of the base lines for my own life. An anchor thread, so to speak. Therefore; here is the story of some of the beautiful voices we began to hear during the middle of the Twentieth Century.

I have designed a twenty day unit of study geared to give kindergarten through third grade students a picture of the events leading up to and including the Civil Rights Movement in the Southern United States.

I am intentionally using the framework of Black History Month to support the original intent of the event; looking closely at individuals who, through their contributions changed the lives of Black Americans and life for all citizens while utilizing the literature (poetry, art, stories, and music) to spotlight specific individuals and avenues of change.

Over a twenty day period, I will offer anchor themes arranged from simplest concept to most complex ideas. In order to take the students deeper into the true meanings behind the themes, I will provide stories, music, poetry, articles, artwork, or a video of a short interview to support the ideas expressed in the theme. Using a triangulation of texts will serve to give students a counter argument for discussions on the subjects presented.

Every five days, a teacher can utilize the texts presented to hold a Socratic seminar on the subtopics offered. The first five days of the unit are appropriate for kindergarten-aged students, the first ten days of the unit used for first grade level children, the first fifteen days, for second graders, and lessons one through nineteen for third graders. Each seminar is designed with Pre-Seminar and Post-Seminar activities to support the multiple intelligences of students represented in a K-3 classroom. Teachers will be free to go as far into the unit as necessary based on the needs of the students.

I have discovered how little I know about the Civil Rights Movement. I grew up in the south, beginning in 1968. While my parents preached tolerance, they sheltered us from the important events in the news. I'm truthful when I say that I had never heard of Emmett Till until our class. I can also say that I am forever changed by his story. I have a taste of the agony Emmett's mother experienced at his murder since I have watched her interview. I am building a foundation of understanding of the events of this period of time, and I will choose stories to give life to the overarching ideas of the movement.

This unit must be multi-purposed. The Common Core insists that we teach students how to think deeply and critically about real world issues. This unit will challenge students to read, listen, write, and speak about what they have learned, form opinions they are able to express, and use the texts to provide support for their understandings.

Objectives

This unit of study is specifically designed with our Kindergarten through third grade students in mind.

Collinswood Language Academy is a public magnet school in Mecklenburg County of North Carolina. In the Kindergarten classrooms, eighty percent of the school day is

delivered in Spanish. The remaining twenty percent of learning is in English language arts and special area classes that rotate over a six day cycle. I am responsible for teaching the English language arts strand to the four Kindergarten classes. We tackle Reader's and Writer's Workshop using the elements of a balanced literacy framework: Guided Reading, Shared Reading, Independent Reading, Interactive Writing, and Independent Writing.

Once the students are in first and second grade, the children receive half of their instruction in Spanish and half in English. Lack of time is our biggest challenge. Our literacy block is split between the English and Spanish classes; therefore, all reading and writing instruction is halved and shared with another teacher, teaching with different methods, in a different language, and a different curriculum. Teachers must plan closely as a team to share skills, strategies, and unit plans, so the other side can support the students.

During my past two years at Collinswood, we have invested time in vertical team planning as a school in order to understand the needs of students in the grade ahead and provide support from the grade below. The Common Core Standards are unique in this way; they show teachers a continuum of objectives for students working above grade level expectations or below. We have spent a great deal of time unpacking these standards in order to meet the unique needs of our students, particularly the Second Language Learners. One hundred percent of our students are learning a second language!

Our school is diverse. Roughly half of our faculty is from Spain or a Hispanic/Latino culture, and the remaining students are diverse, as well. One hundred twelve students are African American, four hundred ten are Hispanic, one hundred sixty five are white, and five students are Asian/Pacific, one Indian American. We have a significant population of Limited English Proficiency students who come to school with very specific learning needs. The percentage of our students participating in the free or reduced meal program at Collinswood grows annually.

We have instituted the practice of Socratic Seminars into our curriculum amidst a demanding dual-language curriculum, because we feel it is an excellent way to expose children to the art of conversation, while training them to respect the opinions of others. Careful planning and practice are given during class meetings to get ready for these "grand conversations". The students rehearse how they will listen and how they will contribute to discussions, using the texts they have explored to support their opinions. Written reflections and artistic expressions often accompany the seminar's conclusion.

The Common Core Standards are explicit about what and HOW we need to teach in order to prepare our twenty first century learners for college and career readiness. The students are not only to be prepared within content areas (reading, writing, math, social studies, and science), but also prepared to effectively and persuasively express

themselves (orally) regarding the content they are learning. Kindergarten students will be presented with familiar texts and with appropriate levels of support from more capable others in order to be successful.

By the end of this unit, the students will have an (age-appropriate) working knowledge of the aims and achievements of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. They will explore a bit of the land African Americans called home, the culture that they brought to America, and the unique gifts they shared that helped to shape our nation.

The children will not be taken deeply into the atrocities of the defined struggles, but rather explore the desired outcomes of the leaders of the Civil Rights Movement: tolerance, freedom, peace, and rights. The students will need to have a clear understanding of the definitions of these words. The opposite of the violence toward individuals or the masses is peace. Peace is defined as a state without war, or freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts and emotions. The antonym of prejudice and bigotry is tolerance. Tolerance is sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one's own. The reverse side of racial segregation is freedom. Freedom, of course, is the state of being free from the control or power of another. The antithesis of disenfranchisement is "right". Merriam- Webster defines "right" as "the practice of giving others their due; something to which someone has a just claim"(Merriam Webster, 2012). The children will participate in discussions rooted in these themes. Our current character education program at our school focuses on healthy relationships with others; enjoying the ways we are the same, yet celebrating our differences with tolerance and respect. Correlations will be made between the Civil Rights Movement and the issues of today. Even the youngest children will be challenged to listen to the stories and retell the big ideas in their own words. All children will be encouraged to state their opinions orally and in writing to open-ended questions. Different texts with related ideas will be used to make comparisons during conversations. In addition, the children will be exposed to specific examples of the beautiful literature, art, and music that developed as a result of voices being heard publicly for the first time.

Understanding that leaders organized local people to act (in the beginning) non-violently with the intent to abolish racial discrimination in the United States is the cornerstone of this unit of study. History highlights the violence and unrest that often accompanied the sit-ins, marches, bus rides, and speeches. New laws were challenged by groups like the Freedom Riders, but amendments were created to undermine the change and success the new laws promised. Racial discrimination, white supremacy, lynching, segregation, and voter disenfranchisement peaked during these times of upheaval. Through it all, African American families survived, many with scars, to see laws changed, voter rights reinstated, and new freedoms enjoyed.

The seminar, "African American Literature of the Civil Rights Movement," has opened my eyes to the talents of a group who yearned for the freedom to identify and

express themselves as never before. My limited experiences with my students over the years during Black History Month are past. I know my children must hear this story; our story, in order to synthesize the character education traits we have asked them to emulate within a culture of conflict. Have we internalized the lessons taught us from the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement? Will our computer-savvy video-impressed elementary children, be moved by the themes that are brought to life in this unit of study? Our seminars hold the answers. The future depends on it.

Louis Armstrong reminds us in the 1968 recording of "What a Wonderful World", that life is filled with hope and beauty. The people, whose voices were silenced and unheard for so many years, found their courage, with the help of other brave souls, to change their destiny and that of others, forever. Our common threads have woven a new story with a hopeful theme...pass it on.

Socratic Seminar

A planned discussion is the center piece to a Socratic Seminar. Teachers follow in the footsteps of the Greek philosopher to question our students (no matter how young, or the language they speak) in order for them to think deeply about subjects we help them care about.

Educators begin with character education traits that we want to see in our school's citizens. Twenty-first century learners need to take responsibility for their own thoughts and actions, as well as looking out for one another. Our school communities are a practice field for adult life.

When we begin with the end in mind, our teaching becomes deliberate. There is intent and purpose with every lesson. We specifically choose books in order to give students background knowledge and understanding of the ideas they will soon discuss. We create tiered questions using the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy to help students understand the *true, deeper* meaning of a book. Creating "essential questions" ensures that we know what we want our students to know in a broad way. "Key" or "Guiding questions" are designed to lead students to the specifics of the lesson. When we tier the questions, we differentiate the lesson for specific learners; there is something for everyone!

Pre-Seminar activities are multi purposed. When we consider the learning styles of our students (are they visual, auditory, sensory, or kinesthetic), we design tasks that meet *their* specific needs so they are available for the lesson we are delivering. This is a great place in the learning process to build vocabulary knowledge specific to the topic. it is equally important to explain new words *in context*. I find that *using* the words while reading the text surrounding them, gives children more information to go on (context clues). Of course, we must choose our texts (written, visual, music, pieces of art) with forethought and care. Considering the learning styles and the gifts of the children, will

lend a rich, complexity to this study. We have been known to create a rap to practice a skill, create a collage to integrate a group's thoughts on a subject, or dramatize a poem to more thoroughly understand its meaning.

The key in getting the best seminar conversation, in the end, is that the children have many repetitions with a text and know it well. Time is our enemy in the classroom, but using time wisely to delve deeply into our texts yields knowledge.

Triangulation of Texts

When preparing for a Socratic Seminar, I plan to use at least three texts around the same subject. Whether I am using three different versions of a fairy tale, or a newspaper article, book, and video clip, I intentionally choose texts with some similarities and some differences. I design my seminar questions to be open-ended; there will be no clear cut answers. In this way, my students (even the youngest) will be able to reference the text that best supports her opinion. Since we value differences in opinions in this setting, this is a unique way to get a student to delve deeply for answers. Often during our discussions students will challenge one another's opinions while referencing the text to support their position.

As teachers, we are being challenged to increase the rigor of our lessons in order to raise student achievement. Using a seminar plan is most helpful to me. I know my students, I know my subject, and I have planned my questions ahead of time. I encourage you to try the seminar approach if you have not done so before. This strategy, paired with referencing multiple texts, has been very effective for teaching comprehension skills, and satisfies the objectives from the Common Core. All students need to read and write about the subjects they are studying, but also must listen actively to the opinions of others and be ready to speak with authority and clarity in response.

Schedule of Events

Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Week 1 1. Locate Africa on World Map Listen to African drum music African drums and enjoy ribbon dancing	2. Read <u>The Sneetches</u> , by Dr. Seuss	3. Read <u>To Be a Kid</u>	4. Read <u>Of Thee I Sing A Letter to My Daughters</u> , by B. B. Obama	5. Hold Socratic Seminar on Tolerance

Week 2 1. Read <u>Happy Birthday, Martin Luther King</u>	2. Watch video of Earl “Fatha” Hines play jazz on the piano	3. View Romare Beardon’s collage, “The Block”	4. Read <u>A Picture Book of Jackie Robinson</u>	5. Hold Socratic Seminar on Freedoms
Week 3 1. Watch video of the Freedom Riders and the Montgomery Bus Boycott	2. Watch video of the Greensboro sit-in	3. Watch the Marches on Washington View two versions of anthem, “We Shall Overcome”	4. Read <u>Harvesting Hope the Story of Cesar Chavez</u>	5. Hold Socratic Seminar on Activists for Peace
Week 4 1. Read “I, Too, Sing America”	2. Watch video of “Montage of a Dream Deferred“, by Langston Hughes, narrated by Danny Glover Read, “The Dream Keeper”, by Langston Hughes	3. Watch video of “The Sneetches and Segregation”	4. Watch/Listen to two versions of “Lift Every Voice and Sing”	5. Hold Socratic Seminar on Rights

Notes to the Educator

Week 1: Tolerance

People fail to get along because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don’t know each other; they don’t know each other because they have not communicated with each other.”

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

To understand how slavery began in America is to acknowledge that the lives of Africans were stolen. This story was made clear on a recent visit to the *America, I Am* exhibit. The landscape of economic welfare, cultural passions, and democracy’s future were forever changed by the introduction of African people to American society.

Martin Luther King's quote zeroes in on the reason for intolerance toward Africa's people. Did the first slave holder turn a blind eye to African society as a whole? I wonder how Southerners, who are depicted as genteel and civil, did not recognize the value of family and their lives, albeit different from ours. Did the greedy need for laborers to produce a market to establish a first class system of wealth for a select few allow the people involved to disregard the rights of other humans?

The Sneetches was written during the time of the Civil Rights Movement by Dr. Seuss. He was responding to the hatred/intolerance of Nazi Germany to the Jews.

I have included it in this unit to help our young learners understand that differences are not always bad...they are just different. How do we settle our disagreements? How can we celebrate diversity that occurs because of cultural, societal, and economic influences? I agree with Dr. King's statement. If we dialogue...fear often dissipates.

Barak Obama's book, *Of Thee I Sing A Letter to My Daughters*, illustrates this. We are able to see some of the same traits in ourselves that have made heroes great. They have used their gifts to make life better for others. If the Americans highlighted in this book could do this, do we hold that same potential as well?

I plan to spend the first day of the unit looking at the continent of Africa on the world map, listening to the music of the drums (YouTube, Oldest African Drum Footage Ever, uploaded by AyoVEVO, 2-2-11), dancing with ribbons to their captivating beat, and thinking of the family life of people faraway.

If you feel it is necessary to delve deeper into the stories of slavery in order for the students to understand the ideals of tolerance, feel free to do so. If you have some good resources on the subject, I would appreciate hearing about them.

I plan to trickle the idea of the stolen lives of the African people as an illustration of intolerance of one group of people to another throughout the week.

Please weave your first thread of paper into your class weaving. Have the children write a message to the drum musicians or the Sneetches before they pass the paper over and under.

To Be a Kid is a gem among stones. It is not a book to be read once; it is meant to be studied.

It is easy to view similarities, but a challenge to name differences and accept them. My objective is to launch discussions with young children that lead them to the alpha of understanding; diversity is present in the plant kingdom, the animal kingdom, and humankind, and we are able to coexist. Learning to use the reply, "That's not my style" is golden. If children are able to note a difference (one student brings anchovy pizza for lunch) and say, "That's not *my* style" (instead of eeooo-yucky), they have the initial strategy to act with tolerance toward others.

Remember to add a paper thread for each book, poem, or video viewed to give a visual to the idea that our stories tie us together.

Week 2: Freedoms

“...and I like books for all the reasons, but mostly cause they make me happy.”
Nikki Giovanni

What would we do...what kind of people would we become if our freedoms were taken away? I have chosen several “dreamers” to showcase the freedoms of expression, speech, existence, and choice.

Martin Luther King Jr., known for his prowess of speech, is one of the biggest dreamers of all. How could he have known the messages he left would be pertinent fifty years after they were delivered? He represents the ideal that individuals are important and can make a difference when/where it matters most. Reading *Happy Birthday Martin Luther King* by Jean Marzollo sets the stage for peace and rights because Dr. King used his ideas, words, and life to speak for those who could not and to empower those who had forgotten how.

Day two highlights Earl “Fatha” Hines, a jazz pianist. When I watch videos of him as he played (*Memories of You, Earl Hines, 1965*, uploaded by erwigfilms, 2-18-11), I was reminded of a poem by Eloise Greenfield entitled, *Way Down in the Music*. It is as if he is an extension of the piano! I wanted to include him so that the children could become familiar with his music. It is said that his playing “shaped the history of jazz”. As I read, I found evidence of how Hine’s music helped influence the work of another artist.

Romare Beardon was inspired as he consistently listened to Hine’s music as he created his collage, *The Block*, 1971. Beardon said of his music, “I was able to block out the melody and concentrate on the silences between the notes.”

As you look carefully at *The Block*, focus on a different aspect each day. What do you notice? What was Beardon saying to his audience by creating this collage? What stories were being told by Romare Beardon in the neighborhood? Why did he feel it was important to create *The Block*?

As the children listen to jazz, read the poem referenced earlier, *Way Down in the Music*. Play some of Michael Jackson’s music, or some Earth, Wind and Fire and consider how music “moves” us. Ask yourself what music moves you? What does the poem’s title mean?

If we can answer these questions, we can help the children understand what Beardon meant when he listened to Fatha Hine's jazz music.

When a person is moved by the creative expressions of another, there is a shift in his understanding of the world as he knows it.

That leads us to consider the life of Jackie Robinson. He was chosen to be the first African-American to play on an all-white major league baseball team. He had courage beyond measure. This was evidenced by the way he challenged the inequalities Blacks faced at this time (separate hotel rooms, restaurants, ball teams).

Why were Jackie's accomplishments so important to the cause of the Civil Rights Movement?

Jackie Robinson receives a thread of his own, for our class weaving. He used his gifts to acquire freedoms for many who had never experienced them before.

I have included Eloise Greenfield's poem, *To Catch a Fish* and Nikki Giovanni's poem, *I Love Chocolate* as a reminder that many of us enjoy doing the same kinds of things. Whether playing the piano, listening to music, creating works of art, playing games, or eating chocolate, people from all backgrounds in life share the pleasures of chilling out. Ask the students what freedoms they enjoy when they are "just chillin".

Week 3: Peace

"We're a rainbow made of children. We're an army singin' songs. There's no weapon that can stop us. Rainbow love is much too strong."
Camp Occoneechee

This week is about the activists who worked despite personal peril, to make changes to existing laws and convince lawmakers to create new laws for the benefits of others. I want you to look up The Freedom Riders and the Montgomery Bus Boycott on Discovery Education and watch some video clips.

The Montgomery Bus Boycott began on 12/1/1955 with Rosa Parks' refusal to move from her seat and ended with the Supreme Court rendering bus segregation laws unconstitutional. We know Rosa's story well. Rosa was tired, from hard work but also from the inequalities the Jim Crow laws had mandated. The book *Rosa Parks Freedom Rider* is a quick read that reviews her life, but also enlightens readers on her further involvement in the Civil Rights Movement.

Rosa receives a paper thread on our weaving for her bravery and actions to take a stand for what is unjust and make it right.

The North Carolina History Project Encyclopedia is a good resource for events that occurred in NC during the Civil Rights Movement. I encourage you to access the Greensboro sit-in to gain background information for your commentary on the video clips you will show your second and third grade students. I plan to stress to my children that the students utilized non-violence and passive resistance to challenge and change unfair practices and laws that kept African-Americans from enjoying the same freedoms and rights as white civilians.

These videos give our students a clear picture of these events. It is fascinating to see these stories from the history books come alive. Watching these clips ahead of time will allow you to anticipate your student's questions and plan places for student discussions just as we do in our read- alouds.

When the children view the *Marches on Washington*, they will understand that a quarter of a million people of every culture, color, and creed participated in this demonstration. What a powerful way to deliver a message to the law makers!

New threads must be interwoven for each of these events. The weaving of our American stories is growing.

Please share the recordings of *We Shall Overcome* by the Morehouse College Choir and by folksinger Pete Seeger. This song was said to become the unofficial anthem of the Civil Rights Movement. While you share visual and audio versions of the song, discuss how these words gave a voice to the participants of this movement. How does a song like this help the cause?

I have also included the story of Cesar Chavez to show that many people throughout the world lacked basic rights and freedoms and were searching for changes in laws and deliverance from inequalities. Our Hispanic-American students will connect with this brave hero as he strove tirelessly to improve working conditions for the poor who had no voice.

The Discovery Education video is detailed, but frontloading your knowledge by previewing the clip and the book, *Harvesting Hope*, you will be able to lead a thoughtful discussion on Chavez's contributions of reformation.

For his lifetime of leadership and service to the Hispanic Civil Rights Movement, Cesar Chavez receives a colorful thread of his own for our weaving.

To conclude our week of activism, please have the children listen to Louis Armstrong's rendition of *What a Wonderful World*. The song was purposely written as a balm to cover the wounds caused by the injustices of this era. The words will remind the children in a way they can understand what the leadership of the Civil Rights Movement hoped to achieve: tolerance, freedoms and, yes, peace.

Week 4: Rights

“Mighty mountains loom before me and I won’t stop now.”

Naomi Long Modgitt

Langston Hughes created my favorite poem of the entire unit, *I, Too, Sing America*. The children need to hear and recite this poem many times over this week in order to become familiar with the ideas and themes Hughes presented. Use the seminar questions to lead your discussions and encourage students to refer to the events of the Civil Rights Movement we have studied to lend support for their answers. Remind the children of the timeframe for the writing of this piece. The discussion that ensues will clarify some of the reasons the Civil Rights Movement began.

Follow the lesson on the first poem with Hughes, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. Watch Danny Glover recite a verse (taken from the original seventy-plus pages). Discuss the images presented in the poem and their meaning. We often talk in Writer’s Workshop of using words that “show, not tell”, and Hughes does this powerfully in his poem.

Next, read Langston Hughes, *The Dream Keeper*. I plan to hear my students recite this poem from memory and perform it!

I found an audio recording of a performer singing the words of the poem. It is whimsical and lovely, and will inspire the children to think deeply about Hughes reasons for writing this for us.

Be certain to read the seminar questions to yourself before you present these poems. Discuss the rights that all people deserve and the rights that some people are denied because of racism, intolerance, and ignorance.

In order to create a civilization that embraces all and rejects none requires education. In honor of your work to help children understand the reasons the Civil Rights Movements occurred, add another thread to our weaving.

I ask you now, to share an amateur video called *The Sneetches and Segregation*. The creator compares the struggles between the Sneetches to the struggles of African-Americans during the Civil Rights Movement. It will be necessary for you to preview the commentary and tie in the ideas you have read on your own on the Jim Crow Laws. I think that students who had confusions coming into this lesson will gain insights on the need for reforms pertaining to the rights and freedoms denied our Black citizens.

Day four asks us to listen to the song, *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, the African-American National Anthem (James Weldon Johnson, 1900). The first version is a

traditional rendition of the song used at an Inaugural Ball in 2009. The pictures show many faces from the Civil Rights Movement the students will recognize as well as events they have become familiar with. The second recording is a jazz/pop rendition by singer Melba Moore and Friends that brought a fresh version to a new generation of listeners.

Consider how a song can support the dreams of a group of people. As we close the unit, *Our Common Threads: A Month of Our American Stories Through the Art, Music, and Literature of the Civil Rights Movement*, I ask that you have the children reflect on our weaving. There will be at least 18 paper threads to represent how the stories, songs, artwork, and poems have told a story, our story, of the journeys of African-Americans to find their collective voice, show the world their identity as a people, and gift the world with their presence.

Have the students write a journal entry detailing what they have learned as a result of their study and how their thoughts on tolerance, freedoms, activism for peace and the promise of rights for all have been challenged. Be certain to share the results of the reflections at the end of the final seminar.

Seminar 1: Tolerance

Vocabulary: tolerance, diversity, diverse, courage, kindness, respect

Pre-Seminar Activities: Listen to the music of the African drums and move to the beat of the rhythms. Wave colorful paper ribbons in time with the music.

Read *The Sneetches* by, Dr. Suess. Read the story, *To Be a Kid*, by Maya Ajmera and John D. Ivanko. Read, *By Myself* by Eloise Greenfield. Read the stories multiple times in order to familiarize the students with the texts.

Explain the vocabulary within the context of the texts.

Building background knowledge with the students by talking about how the two kinds of Sneetches were the same and different will yield a rich discussion. Create a bubble map to compare and contrast these characters. Discuss which character the students would rather be and why they feel that way. Consider: is one kind of Sneetch better than the other? Why did you choose that answer?

What did the Sneetches learn by the end of the story? Practice using the book to explain your answers. Show the picture that helps to prove your answer.

Conduct a class meeting. Give background on racial prejudice by telling the story of injustices from one group of people toward another in our history. Relate this story to the

fictional Sneetches, and relate the lessons that have been learned to our class rules of respect and kindness. We have to begin somewhere, use the book *To Be A Kid*.

Maps are fascinating to young children. Spread one out and look for the places mentioned in the text on the map. Notice if we live close or far away from each other. How is it possible that we could have so many things (families, clothing, ways we have fun) in common? What would cause us to be different (consider clothing, cultural activities you can easily identify from the pictures)?

Find a kid in the book. How is he/she the same as you? In what ways is she/he different?

What do all of the families do in the photo-story, *To Be a Kid*? Think of the many ways children play sports and games. How are children highlighted on the book the same as you? In what ways are they different? What do all of the kids learn when they play games together? What surprised you about this book?

Read the poem *By Myself* one line at a time. Dramatize your line by adding actions to show the meaning. Practice fluent recitation of the lines so that the poem flows. Videotape the poetry reading and share on the school wide broadcast along with a brief introduction of the poet Eloise Greenfield.

Seminar Questions

Opening:

What is the best kind of Sneetches?

Core:

Why did you answer the opening question that way?

Is it a good thing or a bad thing to be different from someone else? Why do you think that?

Closing:

Do you think that it is scary to be different than other people? Can you think of a time when you dressed differently or said something that someone else didn't like, and he or she made fun of you? How did you feel? What happened?

Post Seminar Activities

Draw a picture of the story you told before (#1, closing question). Talk to a friend and tell the story of what happened. How did you solve the problem? Did the other person change his or her mind about how he or she treated you? Did you fight with your fists or your words? What did you learn?

Seminar 2: Freedom

Vocabulary: freedom, liberty, jazz, expression, collage, racism, prejudice

Pre-Seminar activities:

Watch the Discovery Education clip of the Freedom Riders. Discuss what the Freedom Riders wanted to achieve. Why were they called the Freedom Riders?

View Earl "Fatha" Hines on YouTube. Listen to the music throughout the week. Let the music wash over the children so that they begin to "feel" the rhythms and understand how jazz sounds. Give the students a large piece of paper and time to have freedom of expression. This is the way that Romare Beardon created his artwork, and will serve as background to understanding his work, *The Block*.

Read the poem, *Way Down in the Music*, by Eloise Greenfield. Consider the reasons that E. Greenfield felt the ideas were important enough to be written for others to read. How do you feel when you listen to jazz? What about other genres of music?

Read the *Picture Book of Jackie Robinson* and read the two pages in President Obama's book *Of Thee I Sing* that relate to Jackie Robinson. Discuss the challenges that he faced, and how he handled these inequities. How did he change the world?

Read the poem *To Catch a Fish* by E. Greenfield. From my point of view, there are many freedoms, but none so relaxing (but as challenging) as fishing. Take this opportunity to discuss the freedom just to be. Brainstorm ways that many Americans are free (consider freedom of expression, to dream, to choose, to travel, ride a bus, to eat lunch in a shop, or cast a vote...).

Conduct a class meeting to discuss freedoms given to some people, but not given to all. Relate the travels of the Freedom Riders (riding in any seat, anyplace, anytime) to the inequities of people during this period of history. I wonder what we would do if our freedoms were taken away?

Look closely at the collage *The Block*, by Romare Bearden. Share the story of its creation with the students, and remember to include how he listened to Hine's jazz music as he worked. What was Beardon's inspiration for this piece? Why does an artist create? What did Beardon want to accomplish with his artwork? What did he give to the world with his artwork?

Seminar:

Opening Questions:

What is freedom?

Core Questions

Eloise Greenfield writes about catching fish and listening to music. What happens when someone is denied a freedom, such as talented Jackie Robinson, to play ball?

Can people live happily without freedom? What happens to people when their freedoms are taken away or restricted?

Why do you think Romare Beardon created *The Block*? What did he want for people to think of when they gazed at *The Block*?

Closing Question:

Think about your experiences. How has reading about a group of people who had freedom of expression, the freedom to be, or the freedom to express themselves made you think about your own life? What freedoms do you enjoy?

Post-Seminar Activities:

How did you answer the closing questions? Create a quilt square to show the freedoms that you enjoy as an American. Refer to the artists we have looked at closely and think about the freedoms they enjoyed or the freedoms they struggled for. You may include those freedoms you both shared. Turn on jazz music in the background, and share your squares in small groups. Reflect on how different our day would be if we could not go to our school, or walk safely on the sidewalk because of the color of our skin.

Students can "stop and jot" on post-it notes what they are thinking and feeling as they create their quilt squares.

On a large sheet of bulletin board paper, place the squares evenly, as if they were patches on a quilt.

Hang the quilt in a prominent place and allow students time to look at it, soak in the details that have been included, and chat about what they have noticed.

Leave blank post-it notes and encourage students to jot their impressions and thoughts about their shared experience of freedom of expression.

Seminar 3: Activists for Peace

Vocabulary: peace, ideal, boycott, marches, activist, sit-in, idea

Pre-Seminar Activities:

Watch the Discovery Education video, *The Montgomery Bus Boycott*. This is adult content, but can be watched with guidance. Discuss why people would put themselves in

harm's way for an ideal. It is important for you, the instructor, to view this first, in order to understand the history that culminated in these actions.

Read about the Greensboro sit-in in the *Encyclopedia of the NC History Project* website. Read students the account of the event. Discuss the motivations of the participants. Consider why they behaved with such care (nicely dressed, using polite manners) when the managers of the shop refused to serve them. What did these young adults hope to achieve by their sit-in?

Watch the Discovery Education video of the March on Washington (sequence 15 of 28). Who attended this march? Read more, to understand what the organizers hoped to gain from this event. What were the big ideas to come out of this march? Look up the lyrics to "We Shall Overcome" that is featured in the background of the video clip. What does this song mean to those who sing it?

Read the story of Cesar Chavez, *Harvesting Hope*. Compare the March on Washington to the migrant worker's march from Delano to the State Capital. Who attended this march? What did Cesar hope to change? What changed as a result of these events? What happened after these marches?

Do any of your family members remember these marches? Talk to your families about what you are learning. Ask them why these events were important to them (or discuss why they were not involved).

Bring a bunch of lovely grapes to school. Relating to the book, talk about the labor it took to produce those grapes. Dramatize a conversation between a mother and child about the decision to not eat grapes any longer to protest the poor working conditions and unfair pay to the migrant workers. How will the child react? Will changes in fair treatment come about because of this action?

Listen to the recording of Louis Armstrong's, *What a Wonderful World*. Read the background information that describes the events that led Louis to record this beautiful piece. Discuss why people listen to it today, decades after it was made. Other poems to share: *Incident*, by Countee Cullen and *The Dream Keeper* by Langston Hughes. Discuss why the poets would write these poems. For whom were they written?

Opening Questions:

People we learned about this week had an idea that turned into an event (the bus boycott, the sit-in, the marches). How can one person's ideas make a difference?

Core Questions:

Why were the activists willing to risk their own safety to take part in these events?

What did the activists accomplish?

Why are they still important enough for students to learn about in 2012?

Closing Questions:

All of the activists that we have talked about chose to make others listen to and watch them give their message in a non violent way. Why was this so important? What do you want to do when a bully is making your life miserable? What stops that person from bullying you? Is non-violence a solution to this problem?

Post-Seminar Activities:

Divide the class into groups. Choose from the Civil Rights Events we have studied thus far.

With your group, create ready to dramatize the events you have chosen using the following questions as a guide.

Where does your event take place?

What would the people at this event be talking about? What do you think their conversations would include?

Would the participants all agree to act in non-violent ways? Would they all get along?

Act out a scene that depicts a main event...what did the people think, say, and do?

Describe what the activists hope to achieve by their actions.

Give students time to plan (write simple lines, if needed) and present. Encourage students to speak clearly and audibly.

W2 task: Use your Language Arts Common Core to address the degree of difficulty when students are writing about what they have learned during this week of study. The children will include facts from the video clips, books, poems, and music from the week's lessons.

Seminar 4: Rights

Vocabulary: rights, dreams, segregation, Jim Crow Laws, perseverance, opportunity, equality

Pre-Seminar Activities:

Brainstorm a list of civil rights that students would expect Americans to have. Continue to add to this list as you progress through the week.

Read, *I, Too, Sing America*, by Langston Hughes. Who was the narrator? Why was the narrator sent to the kitchen to eat when company comes? Why will *they* be ashamed? Who are *they*? Why did L. Hughes write this poem? Who did he write this poem for? What does he want us to know? What does the narrator mean when he says, "...but I eat, I grow strong..."

Listen to actor Danny Glover recite Langston Hughes poem, *The Montage of a Dream Deferred*. Who is the audience for this poem? Why did L. Hughes write this poem? What is his message?

As an educator, read the background information regarding the Jim Crow laws. Deliver a lesson on the inequalities of the times. Create a double bubble or comparison map, to chart the rights of white citizens versus African American citizens.

Watch the YouTube video, "*The Sneetches and Segregation*". Why did the author choose "*The Sneetches*" to draw comparisons with the civil rights issues?

Read the poem, "*I Can*", by Mary Evans in the book, *Pass It On*. What *can* you do? With a partner, brainstorm a list of all of the creative, unusual, interesting things that you can do, "...because I want to!"

Read Lucille Clifton's poem, "*Listen Children*", on page 28, *Pass It On*. Discuss the big ideas in her writing.

Seminar

Opening Question:

Have all people received their civil rights?

Core Questions:

Looking back over our weeks of study, discuss why people have been denied their civil rights?

Are all people equal? How do you know?

How can we ensure that *all* people are treated fairly (or treated the same)?

Closing Questions:

Are you more like a Plain Belly Sneetch or a Sneetch with a belly star? Why did you answer this way? Would you change your mind if you could?

In Lucille Clifton's poem, "*Listen Children*", she tells children to "pass it on". What does she mean? What can you do to "pass it on"?

Post-Seminar Activities:

Write a class poem paralleling Mari Evan's poem, "*I Can*". You can choose to write a free verse poem, using the student's brainstorm lists, such as, *I can run and write and sing. I can slurp, and hopscotch, and ...*

Read the poem to a beat tapped by the students...really enjoy their recitation!

Consider videotaping their performance and airing it on the school broadcast.

W1 Task:

Write your response to the Core Question #3. Support your opinion with examples from the writings and stories of the Civil Rights Movement in this unit.

W2 Task:

Refer to the Common Core Language Arts standards for degree of rigor and details for your grade level when writing about your understanding of civil rights that you have learned about in this unit of study.

Consider This:

What are the "common threads" between the readings and poems of week 1 theme of tolerance, the second week's video clips, artwork, poems, and stories regarding

Freedoms, the peacemakers/activists of wage third week of study, and the rights examined during the fourth week?

How is this combined story *our* story in America?

What part do I play in this history?

If I was not present during the civil rights events, how am I affected by what happened to our citizens?

Additions to Week 1

Create a paper weaving to symbolically express how these stories from the art, music, and literature of the Civil Rights Movement are interconnected. After a story is shared, a paper “thread” will be woven through slits cut on a large sheet of paper (envision a placemat many of us made as children).. The “thread” is then pushed down to the bottom of the paper weaving. My weaving will be made from the paper used to cover bulletin boards (approximately 2’x 3’. I will cut six vertical rows, leaving a 3” margin on all sides. I will cut twenty paper “threads” 3.5’x 2” that will be used to write on/creatively label by students before it is woven into the weaving.

Additions to Week 2

At some point during this week, read Eloise Greenfield’s poem, *To Catch a Fish*, and Nikki Giovanni’s poem, *The Reason I like Chocolate*. Refer to the “Notes to the Educator” for details on the use of these poems.

Essential Questions

Week 1:

- How are children in the world the same?
- How are they different from one another?
- What does it mean to be tolerant?

Week 2:

- How do kids from around the world have fun?
- How does your answer compare to how you have fun?
- What can you conclude?

Week 3:

- How can boycotts, sit-ins, and marches lead to peace?
- How can one person make a difference?

Week 4:

- What are rights?
- What would happen if you could not pursue your dreams?

List of Materials for Classroom Use

Chart paper to record poems

Computer

Document camera

Glue sticks

Map of the World

Mounting paper

Paper ribbons

Paper “threads”

Scissors

Screen

Writing Implements

Reading List for Second and Third Grade Students

Barak Obama, *Of Thee I Sing A Letter to My Daughters*

Dr. Suess, *The Sneetches and Other Stories*

Kathleen Krull, *Harvesting Hope The Story of Cesar Chavez*

Keith Brandt and Joanne Mattern, *Rosa Parks Freedom Rider*

Wade Hudson, compiler, *Pass It On*

Resources

Annotated Bibliography for Teachers

“*America in the 20th Century: The Civil Rights Movement*”, you tube (blog),(accessed November 20, 2012).<http://www.discoveryeducation.com>

Twenty First Century learners have the advantage to experience the events of the Civil Rights Movement on video. We learn about the leaders, the plans for change, and the outcomes of rallies through the sights and sounds of newsreels.

Barak Obama, *Of Thee I Sing A Letter to My Daughters* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 1-36. “*Black History Month Lift Every Voice and Sing*”, you tube (blog), (accessed November 1, 2012), <http://youtube.com>.

Regardless of your political affiliations, this book is thoughtfully written, beautifully illustrated, and a treasury of Americans who have left their mark on our history. This text was the cornerstone for my unit of study, highlighting the ideals we strive for in our lives. President Obama wants his daughters to recognize these traits in themselves.

Common Core Standards and Strategies Flip Chart, <http://www.mentoringminds.com>.

This resource is a must-have for teachers. This concise chart is cumulative from grades Kindergarten through grade twelve, outlining the language arts standards.

“*Danny Glover reads Langston Hughes, Montage of a Dream Deferred*”, uploaded on October 14, 2007 (accessed September 13, 2012). <http://www.youtube.com/>.

A unique way to experience poetry is through a reading. This is but one small part of the entire text, but gives the learner a slice of figurative language to digest.

“*Dictionary*”, last updated November 25, 2012 (accessed November 25, 2012), <http://www.merriam-webster.com>.

A comprehensive dictionary is an imperative tool for all learners. Keep this online dictionary bookmarked for easy access; using it during the unit will give students practical experience when vocabulary help is needed.

Dr. Suss, *The Sneetches and Other Stories* (New York: Random House, 1961), 1-16. Written as a response to the Nazi/Jew atrocities, this story of how differences can divide us or unite us is a simple approach to a complex subject. The youngest learners can understand the big ideas of diversity, intolerance/tolerance, and rights. You’ll want to have a copy of *The Sneetches* for your own class.

Jean Marzollo, *Happy Birthday Martin Luther King* (New York: Scholastic, 1993), 1-27.

This is a great beginner’s biography for young learners. The illustrations are lovely, detailed prints that support a simple, yet complete story of Dr. King’s life.

Kathleen Krull, *Harvesting Hope The Story of Cesar Chavez* (New York: Scholastic, 2003), 1-44.

I have not seen a plethora of literature telling the story of Hispanic Civil Rights in history. This book will be treasured by all young learners, but especially by our Latino population. The illustrations are exquisite.

Keith Brandt and Joanne Mattern, *Rosa Parks Freedom Rider* (New York: Scholastic, 2006), 1-54.

This is a quick read, but has a lot of biographical information on Rosa Park's life and work as Civil Rights Activist. I would suggest that you read this story prior to the unit so that your students will have background knowledge to understand the reasons the Freedom Riders came into existence.

Langston Hughes, "*I, Too, Sing America*", last updated November 25, 2012 (accessed October 23, 2012), <http://www.poets.org>.

If you can not find an anthology of African-American poetry for this unit, utilize this website to access the poets and their works for your study. I was able to find Langston Hughes' poem when I could not access it in my other resources.

Maya Ajmera and John D. Ivanko, *To Be a Kid* (Massachusetts: Charlesbridge, 1999), 1-28.

This book is a non-negotiable for your personal library. It has been on my shelf for many years, but this is the first time I will use it! Our opening discussions on tolerance will be enhanced with these photographs, labels, and simple ideas. Our children will be able to use this book as a reference in our discussions.

"Memories of You, Earl Hines", uploaded February 18, 2011 (accessed November 2, 2012), <http://www.youtube.com>.

Students will find this video clip quite interesting bit of our history. Watching Earl Hines play the piano effortlessly, without music is incredible! He is recognized as a leader in the birth of jazz music.

"Melba Moore and Friends, Lift Every Voice and Sing", uploaded April 29, 2009 (accessed November 1, 2012), <http://www.youtube.com>.

Listen to a contemporary version of *Lift Every Voice and Sing* multiple times so that students become familiar with the tune and lyrics. They are a number of artists lending their voices to this recording.

"Oldest African Drum Footage Ever", uploaded February 2, 2012 (accessed October 31, 2012), <http://www.youtube.com>.

This is an antique film from the 1930s. I felt lucky to find this because it show tribesman drumming and dancing. I hope the children move to the drumbeats, wave their paper ribbons, and dance with abandon!

“Romare Beardon: The Block”, updated November 13, 2012.

<http://www.netmuseum.org/teah/works-of-art/1978.61.1-6>.

This is the best website I could find showing the details of Beardon’s work, *The Block*. I can imagine this opened and displayed on the Smartboard, so the children can get a close look at the details. I will keep it open during our seminar, as well, for the students to reference.

“The Sneetches and Segregation”, published on April 3, 2012. <http://www.youtube.com>.

This is not a scholarly resource, but an interesting piece to include. The creator used The Sneetches as a comparison to the struggles of African-Americans during the Civil Rights Movement. The students will already know the story well, and will be able to understand some of the Jim Crow laws because of the photographs used.

Wade Hudson, compiler, *Pass It On*,(New York: Scholastic,1993), 5-32

This is an exquisite book showcasing the poems of famous African-Americans. Please obtain a copy. Teachers must have the best of children’s literature to share with their students, and this book is useful not only for the poetry, but the illustrations, as well.!

“What a Wonderful World”, you tube (blog), uploaded December 330, 2010.

<http://youtube.com>.

The song was written to soothe the hurting nation during the time of violence, hatred, and segregation. Louis Armstrong was the first to record it; he couldn’t have known how popular the music would be decades later.

Reading List for Second and Third Grade Students

Barak Obama, *Of Thee I Sing A Letter to My Daughters*

Dr. Suess, *The Sneetches and Other Stories*

Kathleen Krull, *Harvesting Hope The Story of Cesar Chavez*

Keith Brandt and Joanne Mattern, *Rosa Parks Freedom Rider*

Wade Hudson, compiler, *Pass It On*

Implementing District Standards

Kindergarten

Standard (W.K.!)- Students will use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose opinion pieces in which they tell a reader the topic of the book they are writing

about and state An opinion or preference about the topic or book (e.g. My Favorite book is...).

Standard (W.K.2)- Use a combination of drawing, dictating and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic.

Grade 1

Standard (W.1.1) Write opinion pieces in which the introduce the topic or name the book they are writing about, state an opinion, and provide some sense of closure.

Standard (W.1.2) Write informative/explanatory texts n which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic, and provide some sense of closure.

Grade 2

Standard (W2.1) Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or the book they are writing about, state an opinion, use linking words to connect opinion and reasons, and provide a concluding statement or section.

Standard (W.2.2)-Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section

Grade Three.

Standard (W.3.1)Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.

Standard (W.3.2)Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

These standards are cumulative and build in complexity as the students progress developmentally. The focus will be on their burgeoning ability to form opinions through their reading, writing, and discussions, and to be able to clearly write their thoughts down with a reader in mind.