A Life in Images

by Mary Catherine Grant, 2014 CTI Fellow
David Cox Road Elementary School

This curriculum unit is recommended for:
(Third Grade Social Studies and Literacy Classrooms)

Keywords: (history, research, visuals, picture books, graphic organizer, timeline, collage)

Teaching Standards: See Appendix 1 for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: In this curriculum unit, third graders will engage in research about historical figures in order to find out important information about their lives. Students will work in groups and will present their new knowledge in the form of a visual representation of their historical figure’s life.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year in to 22 students in third grade.

I give permission for the Institute to publish my curriculum unit and synopsis in print and online. I understand that I will be credited as the author of my work.
A Life in Images

Mary Catherine Grant

Introduction

I was born and raised in Charlotte, North Carolina. If you are familiar with the area, I was raised in the University area. I lived in the same house until my freshman year in high school when we moved to the Mallard Creek area. Although the two areas are just miles apart, I was exposed to a lot of different people and their cultures because I attended seven different schools throughout my K-12 years. I graduated from a small high school, which lead me to a small university. I graduated from the University of North Carolina at Asheville with a bachelor’s in Psychology and a K-6 teaching license.

Although I loved the Asheville area, I knew Charlotte was calling me home. I decided to go to school full-time at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNC-Charlotte) to prepare myself to take the tests to add a K-12 Special Education teaching license to my current license. I graduated in a time of economic turmoil, and teaching jobs were scarce, so continuing my education made sense. To my surprise, I was offered a teaching position at David Cox Road Elementary, the elementary school that I spent four years at as a child. I continued to take classes at UNC-Charlotte during the first year and a half of my teaching career.

I am still a teacher at David Cox Road Elementary School, part of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School district. CMS is a large, urban district in North Carolina. David Cox serves students in grades pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. Each grade level, kindergarten through fifth, has a total of six classes. There are three pre-kindergarten classes. David Cox opened in 1993 as a magnet school, which allowed students from around the county to attend through a lottery program. Since the magnet program dissolved, the school’s student population has dramatically shifted. When David Cox opened its doors in 1993, it was predominately attended by Caucasian, middle and upper-middle class students with highly involved parents. The 2014-2015 school year has brought a new program available to all David Cox students. The Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) provides all students with a healthy breakfast and lunch, free of charge. This program does not require families to fill out free and reduced lunch applications in order to receive free meals. Once David Cox qualified for this program, it became an indicator that showed the dramatic shift in student population. North Carolina third, fourth, and fifth grade students take End-of-Grade tests in Reading and Mathematics at the end of the school year. Students at David Cox exceeded expected growth in the 2013-2014 school year. Although that is means for celebration, only 42.5% of students are performing on- or above-grade level.
My third grade classroom is the home of twenty-two students, thirteen girls and nine boys. The student population of my class includes one Armenian, three Caucasian, and eighteen African American students. All third grade classrooms are self-contained which means I teach all subject areas, all year long. Students are provided with six, forty-five minute special area classes per week- Art, Media/ Library, Music, Physical Education (PE), Science Lab and Technology. The Science Lab is new to us this year. Curriculum for the lab is based on the North Carolina Science Essentials Standards. David Cox refers to special-area classes as “CONNECT” classes because the goal is that they connect to what is happening in the regular education classroom. CONNECT classes are all taught by teachers with specialized degrees.

Of my twenty-two students, I have three students who receive Special Education services for Learning Disabilities and/or Speech, one student that qualifies for the Talent Development (TD) program, and one student whose first language was not English. The TD program is for students who are documented to be performing above grade level in Reading Comprehension and/or Mathematical Reasoning and Skills. Students are placed in this program by the results of testing that takes place in second grade. All four students are provided with additional services outside of the regular education classroom to meet their individual needs. A student whose first language is not English is considered Limited English Proficient (LEP) and is also supported outside of the regular education classroom until the student tests into the proficient range on specialized standardized testing. Parents have the ability to waive these services if so desired.

Rationale

I wanted to create this unit in order to get students interested in learning about themselves and their families as well as historical figures that impacted our community or historical events. My school has a very transient population, and many do not have time to build strong ties to any home, school, or community before they move again. It is important for students to learn about the significant roles other people have played to make a difference in the world and community they currently live in. I am afraid that many of my students believe they are too young or not good enough to make a big impact. I enjoy the discussion students have when they learn about others who overcame odds and succeed when others did not think it would be possible. Most people that achieve great things also failed many times before they succeeded, so they also serve as a model of perseverance and believing in yourself even if nobody else does. I think it is very important that these are conversations my students have at school because, sadly, sometimes school is the only place they are encouraged to work hard, do well, and leave the world a better place than they found it.

The historical figures I included had to meet one or more of the following criteria: have a tie to North Carolina, have had a significant impact on a historical event or his or her community, or would be of great interest to the students. It was also important that I
chose figures from different professions, had both genders represented, included figures from differing backgrounds and, of course, I had to make sure there were enough grade-level appropriate resources for students. Websites could also be used as another source for information if there are holes in the information found in the books. Teachers should always monitor student use of the Internet.

Students will be working in groups to research the life of their assigned historical figure. I chose Duke Ellington, a musician with ties to Washington, DC; Mae Jemison, the first female, African American astronaut to go to space; The Wright Brothers, the inventors of the airplane who took flight in North Carolina; Wangari Maathai, an environmentalist from Kenya and the winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize; Martin Luther King, Junior, a Southern civil-rights activist; and Romare Bearden, an artist from Charlotte, North Carolina. Maathai will be the historical figure we work through together as an example for the work that will be completed each day during the curriculum unit. Guided practice allows students to understand the expectations before working on their own assignment. I chose Maathai as the whole-group example because some of the information is found beyond the text.

**Background Knowledge**

The elements that make up a visual determine the feelings that are evoked while looking at it. The elements can be mixed and matched in many different ways in order to make the person looking at the visual feel a certain way. Some of the feelings are instinctual and others are learned. In Molly Bang’s *Picture This: How Pictures Work*, she describes the emotions that are brought about by the different visual elements. She uses the classic story of *Little Red Riding Hood* to explain the feelings associated with the following visual elements.

**Line**

Straight lines are more mechanical. Curved lines make us feel more relaxed because they are more organic. Horizontal lines evoke a feeling of stability. Vertical lines are stronger. The thinness or thickness of a line can also affect our feelings. Thinner lines are more delicate whereas thicker lines are stronger and more masculine.\(^1\)

**Color**

There are many ways for color to affect feelings. The color itself, and also the tone or brightness, can sway or encourage particular feelings. Bang’s example includes the color red. She describes it as “a warm color, bold, flashy; I feel danger, vitality, passion.” She goes on to relate it to blood and fire, which explains her feelings about the color in general.\(^2\)
Shape

Shapes with points are more rigid, but shapes with rounded corners are perceived as softer. Illustrators use more angular shapes to show dominance. Shapes with a wide base are perceived as more stable.

Size

The larger the object, the more attention we give the object. If its presence overpowers the other objects or takes up the majority of the background space, it becomes the focus of the visual.

Content Objectives

Speaking and Listening

Within the English Language Arts section of the Common Core there are standards for Speaking and Listening. In the third grade, students are expected to have meaningful, academic conversations. According to Standard One, students are expected to be able to have collaborative discussions in which they articulate what they understand about a topic with various counterparts. Standard Four states that students should also be able to appropriately articulate and present detailed information to others.

History

The Department of Public Instruction is in charge of creating the Social Studies standards for students in North Carolina. The standards are broken down into five strands. This unit focuses on the first History standard. Students are expected to “understand how events, individuals and ideas have influenced the history of local and regional communities” and “analyze the impact of contributions made by diverse historical figures in local communities and regions over time.”

Teaching Strategies

Read Aloud

Children love to be read to at any age. The power and benefits of a good read aloud are extensive. A read aloud is a great time for teachers to expose students to texts that are above their reading level, which is a great way to build vocabulary. Teachers can withhold the visuals from the students, which allows students to visualize in their minds without the influence from the illustrator. Teachers can then facilitate a great discussion about what mental images the students saw while the teacher read, and then compare the actual images to those the illustrator created. Other reading strategies that can be
modeled during read alouds are predicting, questioning, and even updating predictions while reading. Read alouds also offer teachers the ability to model reading with expression and complete a think aloud.

Think Aloud

Think alouds give teachers the opportunity to model how students should be thinking as they read a text. When students are learning a new reading strategy, think alouds enable teachers to lead by example in an authentic situation that students will be able to relate to. For example, a teacher can stop reading mid-sentence to model what to do if you come across an unknown word. Teachers can also model how to think through a confusing part of the text, whether it is a sentence, paragraph, or whole page. The goal of think alouds is for teachers to show students the important of slowing down and monitoring their reading to be sure they are understanding what they are reading.

Turn-and-Talk

Teachers can engage students in mini-lessons by requesting their participation. When a teacher asks students to engage in accountable talk, there are some specific procedures that should be followed in order to have the best outcome. First, students should turn to a partner, and, one at a time, share their ideas based on the teacher prompt. The student not sharing should listen to his or her partner’s response. When the first partner is finished, it is the second partner’s turn to share his response. Once both partners have shared, students should turn back to the front and sit silently as a signal to their teacher that they are done. When teaching students to Turn-and-Talk, I create an anchor chart that outlines the directions above with emphasis on turn, speak, listen, turn and wait. Turn-and-talks can also allow for teachers to do a check for understanding by moving around the meeting space and listening to what students are talking about with their partners.

Stop-and-Jot

While reading, students stop at predetermined times to write about what they are reading. For example: at the end of the page, every two minutes, when you learn something new, when something is confusing, etc. The writing encourages students to think about what they are reading while they are reading, so they do not forget about something before they write it down. Stop-and-jots also create stopping points that allow students to share what they are learning. By nature, students will also engage in discussions about what they are reading.

Anchor Charts

Anchor charts are teacher-made posters that are hung around the classroom in a way that allows students to reference them when needed. Anchor charts are created with the
Mixed-Ability Groups

Mixed-ability groups occur when a teacher strategically groups students together based on their ability. A mixed-ability group includes students of different abilities, meaning that there could be a student performing below grade level, a student performing on grade level, and a student performing above grade level in the same group. I like the advantages that I see in my classroom when students are in mixed-ability groups. Students learn to look for and appreciate the unique talents, experiences, and perspectives that each group member brings to the group. It is also typical of what they will experience in the real world.

Graphic Organizer

Students will complete a graphic organizer during the research portion of the unit. Graphic organizers are great tools to facilitate learning. Without giving students the exact information, it guides them to what kind of information they should be looking for during their research. Graphic organizers can be very simple, like a t-chart, or more guided like the organizer students will be using during this unit. Teachers are able to create organizers, as simple or complex as necessary, to meet the needs of the particular lesson or topic.

Conferencing

A conference allows teachers to check-in with students or groups. Teachers are able to monitor the completion of work, redirect as needed, set goals, and clarify expectations. Conferencing allows the teacher to meet one-on-one with students, or in groups if it is a group assignment. The attention students receive during a conference has much more impact than written feedback. Conferencing is not labor-intensive and it can be used across content areas. I use it most often during my reading and writing blocks.11

Classroom Activities

Day One

Purpose

The teacher will explain the unit in its entirety to the students. The teacher will briefly introduce each historical figure to the class before students browse each historical figure.
in order to make selections about their first, second, and third choices to research in depth.

*Activities*

The teacher will briefly describe each historical figure. The students will only be given surface information in order to spark their curiosity. For example, the teacher may say, as he or she holds up a book or shows a picture, “This is Duke Ellington; a musician with ties to Washington, DC. This is Mae Jemison; she was the first female, African American astronaut to go to space. The Wright Brothers invented the first airplane, which took flight in North Carolina. This is Martin Luther King, Junior; a Southern civil-rights activist, and finally, this is Romare Bearden, an artist from Charlotte, North Carolina.”

The teacher will briefly explain that the goal of this unit is to learn about the impact a historical figure had on a particular community. The community in which the historical figure impacts could be a city, country, or the world.

Students will be able to browse the books about each historical figures through a “gallery crawl” model—one historical figure per table, students will browse the books provided to scan pictures and skim the information within the text. At the end of the crawl, students will list their first, second, and third choices. The teacher will assign students to mixed-ability groups.

**Day Two**

*Purpose*

The teacher will introduce Wangari Maathai, an environmentalist from Kenya and the winner of the 2004 Nobel Peace Prize. There will be a read aloud in order to complete the class graphic organizer. See Appendix 2 for graphic organizer.

*Activities*

The teacher will read *Wangari’s Trees of Peace* aloud to the class, and then students will help the teacher fill in information on the graphic organizer. She will model a think aloud on the fifth page of text by asking a question about the text, “What happened to the trees?” Before the teacher begins reading the sixth page of text, she will notice the picture on the page, “It looks like the women are carrying wood. I think the trees have been cut down. I am going to continue reading to find out what happened.” The teacher will model how to complete the graphic organizer, noting that students may not find all of the needed information in one book, which is why students will have multiple sources.
The teacher will inform students of their groups and their group’s assigned historical figure. As students research their historical figure, they will complete a graphic organizer. The graphic organizer will coach students through specific information that will be useful to know about their historical figure as they complete each activity. It also has space that gives students the opportunity to make decisions about what information is interesting or important to know about their historical figure. The graphic organizer will be the space for students to organize and include what they have learned about their historical figure in one place, which will be helpful since they will be using multiple sources of information.

Day Three

*Purpose*

There will be a read aloud in order to complete the class graphic organizer. Students will also spend time reading books about their historical figure so they can gather more information to complete their graphic organizers.

*Activities*

The teacher will read *Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai* aloud to the class in order to gather more information about Maathai. The teacher will continue to add to the example graphic organizer with the help of the students. Students will break into their groups to continue to research their historical figure and complete their graphic organizer.

Day Four

*Purpose*

There will be a read aloud in order to complete the class graphic organizer. Students will also spend time reading books about their historical figure so they can gather more information to complete their graphic organizers. The teacher will model who to problem solve if there is not enough information to fill the graphic organizer from the internal text alone.

*Activities*

The teacher will read *Seeds of Change: Planting a Path of Peace* aloud to the class. At the end of the book, more information will be added to the graphic organizer, including her 2004 win of the Nobel Peace Prize, but there will still be blanks. None of the books address her birth or death date in the actual text. The teacher will model where other information can be found within the book (i.e. the “Author’s Note” section at the very
end). The teacher can also model safe practice and use of the Internet to find accurate information that will also help fill in any missing pieces of information.

Groups will use computers and iPads to find additional information as needed. The teacher will need to monitor Internet access if the school does not have boundaries already set up.

Day Five

*Purpose*

Students will begin to pull important information from their graphic organizers and put in the sequential order in order to create a timeline.

*Activities*

The teacher will use the class graphic organizer to create a timeline of the life of Wangari Maathai. Dates could include: April 1, 1940- when she was born in Nyeri, Kenya, 1964- the year she graduated from Mount St. Scholastica College in Kansas, 1966- the year she graduated with her Master’s degree from the University of Pittsburgh, 1971- the year she graduated with her Ph.D. from the University of Nairobi in Kenya, 2002-2007- the years she represented Tetu constituency in Kenya’s parliament, 2004- the year she won the Nobel Peace Prize, 2008- the year Marlboro Productions released a documentary about Maathai’s life called *Taking Root: the Vision of Wangari Maathai*, September 25, 2011- when Maathai died after battling ovarian cancer.¹²

Timelines are great text features that allow readers to see information in a concise, orderly, and predictable representation. Students will use their graphic organizers to create a timeline of at least five important events in their historical figure’s life. Timelines can be created on a sentence strip or on large construction paper. The teacher will need to confer with each group to make sure they are on the right track to completing their tasks.

Day Six

*Purpose*

The teacher will go back through each of the previous read alouds. The purpose of the reread will be for students to focus on the visuals in order for them to use what they learn to create visuals for their historical figure.

*Activities*
As the teacher rereads *Wangari’s Trees of Peace*, she should stop after each page to discuss the visual elements and how they are used—line, color, shape and size. It will also be important for students to notice similarities and differences between the visuals and the text. Some questions the teacher can ask are, “Do the visuals match the text?” “Do the visuals include information that the text leaves out?” “Do the visuals and image contradict each other?”

Students will be asked to go back through their timeline and include an image with each date on their timeline, which will assist them in the creation of their final product, a collage. This is the rough draft. The teacher will need to confer with each group to make sure they are on the right track to completing their tasks. The final visuals will need to be created on 8½” by 11” copy paper in order for students to be able to layer to create a collage.

Day Seven

*Purpose*

The teacher will go back through each of the previous read alouds. The purpose of the reread will be for students to focus on the visuals in order for them to use what they learn to create visuals for their historical figure.

*Activities*

The teacher will reread *Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai* to the class. Students will once again focus on the visuals. The teacher should once again stop after each page to discuss the visual elements and how they are used—line, color, shape and size. It will also be important for students to notice similarities and differences between the visuals and the text. Some questions the teacher can ask are, “Do the visuals match the text?” “Do the visuals include information that the text leaves out?” “Do the visuals and image contradict each other?” (This is the same activity from Day Six using a different text.)

When students complete their timelines, they will be encouraged to decide which illustrations they want to highlight before they make their final copies of their visuals on copy paper. The teacher will need to confer with each group to make sure they are on the right track to completing their tasks. Students should not yet begin their final visuals. Day Nine will include another lesson about showing importance by altering the sizes of the objects on the page together.

Day Eight

*Purpose*
The teacher will go back through each of the previous read alouds. The purpose of the reread will be for students to focus on the visuals in order for them to use what they learn to create visuals for their historical figure.

Activities

The teacher will reread Seeds of Change: Planting a Path to Peace to the class. Students will once again focus on the visuals. The teacher should once again stop after each page to discuss the visual elements and how they are used- line, color, shape and size. It will also be important for students to notice similarities and differences between the visuals and the text. Some questions the teacher can ask are, “Do the visuals match the text?” “Do the visuals include information that the text leaves out?” “Do the visuals and image contradict each other?” (This is the same activity from Days Six and Seven using the third text.)

The teacher and students will begin brainstorming the most important events in Maathai’s life. The teacher will create a list in order of importance. She will use the think aloud strategy during this time to explain why she is making certain choices. The class will brainstorm ideas for visuals to be included in Maathai’s collage.

Day Nine

Purpose

Students will begin their final copies of their visuals after listening to a read aloud and helping the teacher create ideas and possibly some visuals for the collage about Maathai’s life.

Activities

The teacher will read aloud The Important Book to encourage students to think about the most significant events in their historical figure’s life order to make choices about what visuals to include in their collages.

Before the teacher sends students off to continue working, she needs to be sure she has directly spoken about the impact size has on an object when it is not the only object in the page. Students will begin creating final copies of their visuals that best represent their historical figure’s life.

Day Ten

Purpose
Groups will finalize their collages and assign tasks for their presentation.

*Activities*

The final product will be a collage of visuals that represent the lives of each historical figure. Groups will need to complete their collages as well as practice their presentations. Depending on how the class in progressing, the teacher may need to continue Day Ten tasks over two days.

**Day Eleven**

*Purpose*

Groups will present their timelines and collages to the class. See Appendix 3 for rubric.

*Activities*

Groups will take turns presenting their historical figure to the class. Each group will present their timelines and collages.
Appendix 1 – Implementing Teaching Standards

Common Core State Standards for Third Grade

Speaking and Listening

Standard One

Students will engage in collaborative discussions with their groups and their teacher throughout the unit. The time students utilize this standard with their group will be great practice for presenting their group’s work to the class. Students will also be conferring with the teacher throughout the unit to be sure each group is on the path to completion.

Standard Four

Groups will present their timeline and collage to the class. Students will need to report about their historical figure and talk the class through the process of moving from the timeline to the collage.

Standard Five

Groups will narrate their collages as they present the information they learned about their historical figure to the class.

North Carolina Essential Standards for Third Grade

History

Standard One

Students will understand how their historical figure influenced the history of a particular community. Students will also analyze the impact of their historical figure. Students will complete these tasks by researching their historical figure and completing a graphic organizer, timeline, and collage.
Appendix 2 – Graphic Organizer for Researching Historical Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name ______________________</th>
<th>Historical Figure ______________________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date &amp; Location of Birth</td>
<td>Date &amp; Location of Death</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Information (Parents, siblings, spouse, children, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important Dates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accomplishments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun Facts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3 – Presentation Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SL.3.4 Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace</th>
<th>_____ clear relevant facts</th>
<th>_____ facts are mostly relevant</th>
<th>_____ some relevant facts</th>
<th>_____ little to no relevant facts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>_____ very descriptive details</td>
<td>_____ details are mostly descriptive</td>
<td>_____ some descriptive details</td>
<td>_____ little to no details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>_____ speaks in clear, understandable pace</td>
<td>_____ speaks in understandable pace most of the time</td>
<td>_____ rushes or speaks unclearly most of the time</td>
<td>_____ hard to understand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Score: _____/ 12 points

| 4 points | 3 points | 2 points | 1 point |
Materials for Classroom Use

Brown, Margaret Wise. The Important Book. New York: Harper, 1999. This picture book plays on words with rhymes, but it also encourages its readers to determine what is important about particular topics.


Reading List for Students

Romare Bearden


Hartfield, Claire, and Jerome Lagarrigue. Me and Uncle Romie: A Story Inspired by the Life and Art of Romare Bearden. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 2002. This picture book is a narrative about a boy in New York City visiting his
uncle (Romare Bearden). The book includes a short biography of Bearden.


**Duke Ellington**


**Mae Jemison**

Black, Sonia. *Mae Jemison*. New York: Mondo, 2000. This text is a summary of the life of Mae Jemison. It recounts her numerous interests and hobbies, including her most significant role as the first African American woman to go to space with NASA.


is a brief biography of Mae Jemison.


**Martin Luther King, Junior**


Haskins, James, and Martin Luther King. *I Have a Dream the Life and Words of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Brookfield, Connecticut: Millbrook Press, 1992. This book not only gives information about Martin Luther King, Junior’s life, but also uses his own speeches and words to recount events.


**The Wright Brothers**


2003. This book summarizes the lives of Wilbur and Orville Wright as they work to create the first airplane.


Bibliography for Teachers


Davey, Beth. “Think-Aloud: Modeling the Cognitive Processes of Reading Comprehension.” Journal of Reading 27, no. 1 (1983): 44-47. This journal introduces what a think aloud is and how it can be used in the classroom.


children’s picture book.

Notes

2 Ibid
3 Ibid., 6.
4 Ibid., 2.
5 Ibid., 4.