



Our Stories Matter-Why We Write

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Clear Creek Elementary School

This curriculum unit is recommended for:
English Language Arts, Poetry, Grade 4

Keywords: Poetry, Islam, Muslim Americans, culture, identity, stories, tolerance, stereotypes, acceptance, assimilation

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: Why do our stories matter? This unit looks to address this question within our classrooms. Looking out upon our students, we see great diversity, filled with a tapestry of cultures. These people have stories that make up the American melting pot. However, it is important for these students as well as their teachers, to see the value in the stories that exist in their students. This unit is a companion or extension to the EL Curriculum Poetry Unit for 4th Grade. This unit delves deeper into the reasons WHY people write the poems they write. They will explore the various reasons why people write, which I proposed in the unit. With this exploration, they will begin to analyze what makes them who they are: culture, language, food, religion, holidays, celebrations, family, etc. They will use this information to help them write their poems. I hope that by making it more personal, it will give them a greater purpose and investment into this unit and into their own personal stories as well.

I plan to teach this unit during the following year to 45 students in English Language Arts, in Grade 4.

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4th Grade Language Arts

Introduction

I created this unit to satisfy two goals: a practical deep-dive into the EL Curriculum Poetry Unit for fourth grade and a cry for tolerance that we desperately need in our world today. Starting early will hopefully, make a difference in the future citizens we shape. Learning and celebrating the stories of others is in one way the epitome of what being an American is- uplifting the idea of the melting pot. However, we cannot cherry-pick the stories which we choose to tell. We must tell them all-which is why I feel taking a closer look at Muslim Americans is of great value. From the early stories of the Muslim American slave, Omar Ibn Said, brought to Fayetteville, North Carolina in the 1860s to the female Hijabi U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar elected in 2019, they are both a part of our history. This shows the value and importance of studying the Muslim American presence and contributions to our nation's legacy. Their stories are rich. Their stories are American. Their stories matter.

Demographics

I am a departmentalized fourth grade teacher of English Language Arts and Social Studies at Clear Creek Elementary in Charlotte, North Carolina. However, due to COVID-19, I am self-contained this school year and I now teach all subjects to my students. I am also the fourth grade teacher of the full remote academy for fourth grade at Clear Creek.

I have a class of thirty-three students. In my classroom, I have eleven Latinx students, two Asian students, twelve African-American students, one Indian student, and seven Caucasian students. The gender breakdown is fourteen girls and nineteen boys. I have five students who receive EC services, two students who receive speech services, six students who receive ELL services, and seven students who receive TD services.

Charlotte is a large city, however, the area near Clear Creek is suburban. Clear Creek has 515 students in attendance. The school consists of approximately 34 % Caucasian students, 30% African-American students, 31% Latinx students, and 5% Biracial/Asian/Native American. Approximately 53% of students are considered economically disadvantaged. In addition, approximately 28% of the staff at Clear Creek Elementary are Nationally Board certified.

Rationale

CMS adopted a new English-Language Arts Curriculum, called the EL Curriculum. CMS implemented the EL Curriculum in grades K-3 and 6th grade during the 2019-2020 school year. Now, 4th and 5th grade teachers will implement the EL Curriculum in the fall of 2020. The EL Curriculum is separated into four modules, with one module taught each quarter. The first quarter Module is a poetry unit, which explore why famous poets write the poems that have been celebrated over time. The students read and study these poems and then read biographical

articles and books about the poets. Then, they are to determine what has inspired these poets to write the poems they have studied. The final expectation of the unit is for the students to write their own poem and then share in an essay form, why they were inspired to write their poem.

I propose that it would be difficult for them to delve into what inspires them until they reach deeper inside of themselves to learn more about who they are. At ages nine and ten, I am not expecting them to go through a major metamorphosis and be able to expound as a philosophy major would, but reflect on what makes a person who they are can help them understand why they write. I hope that making it more personal will give them a greater purpose and investment into this unit as well.

I also want to expose my students to other poets that reflect the faces of my class. This would expand their repertoire of literature in order for them to enjoy these amazing poets as well as give them validation that there are talented writers from their own cultures and backgrounds.

Unit Goals

In regards to the EL Curriculum, the students will be able to answer the following guiding questions:

1. What makes a poem a poem?
2. What inspires writers to write poetry?

Students will read the novel by Sharon Creech, *Love That Dog*, which includes poems by various poets such as Robert Frost, William Carlos Williams, Valerie Worth, and Walter Dean Myers. They will analyze these poems, read autobiographical information about them, and determine what inspired these poets to write. For the final section of the EL Curriculum unit, the students will write their own poem and then write an essay on what inspired them to write their own poem. My unit will act as an extension of the EL Curriculum.

In my opinion, the EL Curriculum just scratches the surface of why people write the works they do. I want my students to reflect more on the lifestyle they live, the culture they celebrate, the hobbies in which they partake, and the family in which they live in order to develop a better understanding of who they are. Once they are able to create this understanding, I want them to write four pieces of writing. The first piece is a biographical sketch or story, which shows some aspect of who they are, their culture, and/or how they live. The second piece is a poem, which fulfills one of the obligations of the EL Curriculum unit. The third piece of writing is a brief essay, which explains what inspired them to write their poem. This also fulfills the second component of the EL Curriculum unit. The fourth and final piece is a research paper whose purpose is to teach the class about some part of the student's culture. The above activities will take place after the first two units of the Module. The students have already studied the four expert poets and written an essay on how one of these poets were inspired. They are now at the point where they will write their own poem and then determine what inspired them to write the poem they wrote. I want this unit to not only be self-reflective, but a way to teach others about the variety of ways of life we have in the world. I am hoping that with this teaching and educating of others, this will help to combat the prejudice and ignorance that continues to plague our nation each day, perpetuating violence and hate.

Content Research

As I write this sentence, I realize that I had to dig deeper than usual in order to determine the “why” behind my unit. In what is this work rooted? Islam would be my simple answer. This word, of course, is not simple. In this seminar, I have learned how important Muslims are to the history and progression of America. As a Muslim, I recognized through this seminar how important and at the same time, neglected the story of Muslims Americans are in our American history.

As a fourth grade teacher, I teach about the major cultural groups of people that have shaped North Carolina. Some of these groups include the African slaves, the Scot-Irish, and the Moravians. However, no place in their historical material talks of Omar Ibn Said, who came to North Carolina as an educated scholar and believer of Islam. His story is important. It matters.

It is also important to recognize that many of our students are from other countries or their parents are from other countries. They bring so much of their rich heritage to our country and we have yet to tap into their worth and their beauty as Americans. Our students’ stories are important. They matter.

How we identify as people is a huge part of what makes us who we are. For many, being a Muslim influences one’s way of everyday living; from the way one eats and dresses, to how one moves in the world. Muslims in America have multiple aspects to grapple with. Not only are they trying to fulfill their religious duties, but they are also trying to navigate their culture with the culture of Islamic living. African-American Muslims have to grapple with being Black in America as well as being a Muslim in America. Second generation Muslims, whose parents are from other countries, have to grapple with being American, Muslim, as well as maintaining and preserving their families’ values from their home country. Newly arriving immigrant Muslims have to navigate a new land, while maintaining their cultural and religious selves in a place that is starkly different from home and does not always welcome them with open arms. A difficult juggling act indeed. On top of the cultural juggling, I realize that Muslims seem to have inherited an added unspoken responsibility to explain and defend the religion, no matter where one is from or how religious one is. However, despite these many difficulties, their stories are important. They matter.

Looking at some of the stories of various Muslim Americans, I notice that there is a difference between second-generation immigrant Muslims and African-American Muslims. The immigrant Muslims are trying to find their place in their new existence as an American and maintaining their religion and culture that their parents have established. Their feelings seemed to be that they must always have to choose between the two. What seems to be even more difficult is the fact that they have been out of touch with their families’ homeland because of time, distance, or even events that prevent them from visiting such as war and travel bans. They seem to have more memories of America where they have spent the majority of their lives. In Mohja Kahf’s book, *E-Mails from Scheherezad*, the speaker in the poem, “Lateefah”, she talks of identifying more with New Jersey than the land in which she was born, Syria. In the following article, Sinno says,

Finding an in-between space is not always seamless, especially when there is a split between the position of immigrant parents, who may gravitate towards separating their private and public lives, and their US-born children, who tend to bridge the gap between their Arab and American lives. These second-generation immigrant children...often encounter resistance. Such resistance not only comes from members of the older generation in their community but also from other mainstream Americans who would much rather see them articulate a more clear-cut and readable identity: American *or* Arab.¹

Then there is the immigrant Muslim. The one who has come here newly from another land, trying to make sense of this new country and new way of living. They still have the smells in their noses, the tastes on their tongues, and the memories of a homeland left behind. They are trying to navigate a new place, trying to assimilate and survive, while keeping their past lives and their cultures alive in their consciousness. Most of the time, this new and old clashes with their sense of self and it becomes difficult to straddle the lines between both cultures, as well preserving their Muslimness. If one holds on to their culture too much, then Americans will question their ability to properly assimilate and embrace their new American lives. However, if they grasp the American culture too strongly, their immigrant parents will question if they have forgotten who they truly are. These Muslims toggle amongst these two identities, sometimes choosing to be more “American”, embarrassed of their families’ foreign ways.

In Fatimah Ashgar’s poem, entitled “Ghareeb,” she talks of visiting back home and not feeling as if she quite fits in. In the preface of the poem, she says, “Ghareeb-Meaning: stranger, one without a home and thus deserving of pity. Also: Westerner.” She talks of how her Auntie calls her a “ghareeb” and her other family calls her a “bad Muslim” because she does not pray.² Her English sticks out like a sore thumb as so much time has gone by since she has visited home. These poems allow us to experience the feelings of being an outsider in their own culture and religion.

In contrast, certain African- American Muslims we have been reading about and researching have been running toward an Arab identity. In many cases, this gave them a sense of a new identity outside of being the Negro or colored person that was disrespected and discounted during the post-slavery times of the Great Migration. This is evident in the development of the Ahmaddiya Movement and the Moorish Science Temple.

These individuals changed their American names, wore fez hats, and other clothes, which helped them to identify with Moorish identity and heritage, thus instilling pride and a new sense of self. However, some of these earlier followers were attracted to the idea of being able to worship as well as maintain sense of racial pride. They learned that the race or color of your skin did not hinder your entrance into the prayer halls. They were embraced instead, on the premise of being a follower of Al-Islam. There was even an added appeal, as Dr. Mufti Muhammad Sadiq, who helped to spread the Ahmaddiya Movement, would speak of Bilal, the African muezzin, or caller to prayer. This presence of a Black man in a role of importance in Islamic

¹ Nadine Sinno. "Dammit, Jim, I'm a Muslim Woman, Not a Klingon!: Mediating the Immigrant Body in Mohja Kahf's Poetry", MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S., Volume 42, Number 1, Spring 2017, 128.

² Fatimah Ashgar, *If They Come for Us*, (New York: One World, 2018), 71-72.

history undoubtedly provided much appeal as a religion that was blind to color and race. As Chan-Malik explained in her chapter about this movement,

Sadiq conveyed Islam as a belief system that offered an expansive network of kinship and connection both in the physical and spiritual world, specifically in the direct relationship between the individual and God that would not require Black Americans to forsake the feeling of race pride or anger at white supremacy.³

There is also a different relationship with God in Islam. In some denominations of Christianity, there is Jesus, believed to be the son of God. He acts as an intercessor for humankind to be able to reach God by praying through him and his name. During slavery, the slave masters introduced the church and the religion in an effort to show how Christians “turn the other cheek” as Jesus once did. This subtly encourage the submissiveness of the slaves to their masters. However, in Islam, there is no intercessor and one can pray directly to God, no matter your status, color, or place of origin. This empowers the believer as shown in the poem, “Take Notes,” by Sudanese poet Emtithal Mahmoud.⁴

A woman came to campus.
She told us to stand up to Allah.
My friend said we do;
Five times a day.

Prayer is a dialogue in
Which all persons have equal access
To the microphone.

In the Nation of Islam, their movement was more about celebrating and uplifting the inherent greatness of the Black man and woman that was hidden and suppressed for centuries. Joining the Nation required a transformation of body, mind, and soul. This organization was a very powerful force in spreading Islam in the U.S. Although many people went on to go towards a more orthodox Islamic path, there is no denying the influence the Nation had upon African Americans in the 20th Century in America.

In the Nation of Islam, they tended to identify more with their Asiatic-African selves, flipping the narrative of the oppressed Black man to an alternate narrative of being the chosen and divine people of God. In the book *Islam is a Foreign Country*, the anthropologist Zareena Grewal writes:

Muhammad and Fard however, reversed the categories however, by making whites rather than blacks the racially marked group. In the NOI’s alternate creation myth, a black scientist created the monster of whiteness and unleashed this evil on earth. The myth reconceptualized blacks as superior, explained how they were overtaken, and described the practical conditions necessary for the restoration of their dignity and power.⁵

³ Sylvia Chan-Malik, *Being Muslim*, (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 61.

⁴ Emtithal Mahmoud, *Sister’s Entrance*, (Missouri: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2018), 68.

⁵ Zareena Grewal, *Islam is a Foreign Country*, (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), 102.

The Nation of Islam was responsible for bringing Islam to the forefront in Black America, albeit controversial. It gave a different idea of what religion looked like and gained national attention with the great driving force of Malcolm X. He showed that anyone could be a Muslim, if these chose to live a healthy lifestyle abstaining from the sins of the streets. While practicing their religion, they could uplift their communities through education, self-sufficiency and a unit of Black brotherhood. At a time, when so many people of color were fighting for equality in America, this way of thinking and living became extremely appealing to many African-Americans across the country.

This is what truly makes the oral histories of the project “After Malcolm: Islam and the Black Freedom Struggle” most fascinating and compelling information for me personally. I love the idea of people chronicling the personal stories and histories of people who have become Muslims in America, especially in the African-American communities. There is no denying the strong influences, which the Nation of Islam had on these individuals. The organization provided them with one of their first exposures to Islam and they were attracted to the order, powerfulness, and empowerment of their people, which many had never seen before in their own communities. Although many of these stories lead to these Muslims going towards a more orthodox Islam, we cannot neglect the powerful influences the Nation had on opening many of the eyes and religious consciousness to Islam.

The stories of conversion and the paths in which these people took to accept Islam fascinates me. I think about my own Muslim community in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and I have contemplated collecting the stories of the people there as well. I even made a feeble attempt to do an interview with two of the converts in 2014, a Muslim brother and his wife, who were some of the early members in the late 70s and early 80s. As with the other stories, the Nation of Islam did have a presence in my hometown and did have some influence on the conversion stories of some the Muslims there as well. As one who is a convert to Islam, I find it so important trace these stories of our Islamic histories. Trying to balance myself as a Muslim revert in an African-American body, trying to learn what other Muslims were born with: the language, the reading of the Qur’an, the cultural nuances of the religion. At times, we stick out with our Blackness, hoping to gain acceptance as “authentic Muslims”. On the flip side of the coin, we are also trying to be accepted by our kin, even though our Muslimness sticks out. The African-American poet, Aisha Sharif explains these feelings in her poem, “Accent” in the Breakbeat Poets Anthology, *Halal if you Hear Me*.⁶

...You learned
to switch tongues
around your cousins,
...you’d always say *Bismillah*
Under your breath
As they said *Amen*
During grace at Sunday dinners.
You wonder how many times

⁶ Fatimah Ashgar and Safia Elhillo. *Halal If You Hear Me: The Break Beat Poets. Vol. 3*, (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2019), 94-95.

you've translated yourself.

Last New Year's Eve, you opened your home
to your friends, spent hours
making a playlist of 90s R&B songs
only to have your Palestinian friend
turn off your music because it was *haram*.
You wondered whether you were in your own house
or his.

Even now, sitting in line for prayer,
You avoid calling the *adhan*. You remember
What your Saudi friends said:
You can only know God in Arabic.
You remember what your voice carries-
your long drawl, your black-eyed peas
and collard greens, your parents' Christianity.
It reveals your black neck, your familial
Disconnect, your fried chicken breath.

However, the personal story is the most important aspect, which makes me want to have my own students interview their own parents and grandparents' oral histories in order to learn more about where their families have come from. Many of us need to keep these stories of our ancestors alive in our family histories.

Despite these differences of their personal paths to Islam, I believe that each Muslim is trying daily to intertwine both their Muslim selves with their American selves. O'Brien suggests that there are two different identities for Muslim Americans: their Muslim identity and their American identity. As he writes:

Why should we care about these average, nonthreatening young Muslims in America? Because, as will be shown in the pages that follow, in their daily lives and social interactions these young people are constantly working to do what some insist cannot be done: to bring about reconciliations and workable compromises between the cultural expectations of religious Islam and those of American culture. Not only do finding everyday Muslim American lives in these young people believe that it is possible to be both religiously Muslim and culturally American, but they are living out this reality in their everyday lives already, with all of its challenges, complexities, and rewards.⁷

This is why art is so important in expressing oneself. The mediums of literature, poetry, music, and art have shared beautiful stories with the world on how people navigate their culture as well as their Islamic selves. In this seminar, we have learned how influential Islam has been to hip-hop over the decades of this genre's history. The Five Percent Nation, an offshoot of the Nation of Islam, looks at women in a respectful way by calling them "earths" and the Black men

⁷ John O'Brien. *Keeping It Halal: The Everyday Lives of Muslim American Teenage Boys*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2017), Preface x-xi.

“gods.” In the song by Method Man, a famous member of the Wu-Tang Clan, he raps about how even if he is incarcerated, his “Queen” is “rockin’ three-fourths of cloth”⁸ and keeping herself covered in the world while he is away. This gives a nod to the notion of dressing modestly and not showing one’s body as a respectful female.

The arts are important, as it helps people make sense of the world around them. It is a form of self-expression, in which the art is freeing and healing for the artist as well as the reader. In addition, it takes steps to being the force responsible for educating others. This is why I choose to use this medium in my curriculum unit. I believe that it can help my students to enlighten their own cultural awareness in a world that does not always celebrate diversity as a beautiful idea.

I invite you, the reader, to delve deeper into the stories of Muslim Americans. The music, poetry, art, literature, and traditions are so rich. If you see a person that identifies as a Muslim or you have a co-worker that claims Islam as their religion, talk with them. Ask them questions. Get to know them. It is a way to build understanding and tolerance for others. Do not allow others such as the media and movies to fill in the blanks for you. Get the information and facts for yourself. They have struggles, fears, dreams, and goals as you do. They are an integral part of our American fabric. Just as your grandmother’s Christmas stories are important to pass down to your children, so are the ‘Eid stories of the African-American grandma and the Ramadan stories of the Jordanian jeddah. Their stories matter too.

Instructional Implementation

Pre-Work/Brainstorming

As I think about this brainstorming process, I think about myself. What are the things that make up me? I am a Black woman who is a Muslim. I also have a father that was born in Cuba. So although I was not raised as a Latina, it is still a part of me: the music, the cuisine, the culture. This makes me think about the Spanish and Arabic languages that are also a part of my personal fabric. I think about what is beautiful in all of these aspects of me and I write down some topics that would be interesting for me to write a poem about. I also think about how I love and celebrate family and I reminisce about my childhood and the love that surrounded me as I grew.

However, before I write, I would like to research some poets that resonate with my own sense of self like Nikki Giovanni whose poem, “Nikki-Rosa”, reminds me of my childhood in New Jersey where I spent so much time with my grandparents and extended family. This illuminates how I feel about my Blackness and about my family memories growing up as a child. Then, I read the poem, which I identified with as a Black Muslim woman, and I read the poems “Muslim Girl Preamble” by Rumsha Sajid and “Why I Can Dance a Soul-Train Line in Public and Still be Muslim” by Aisha Sharif. I can then jump to Naomi Shihab Nye’s poem entitled “My Father and the Figtree”, because it touches my sense of home and nostalgia. I hope that all of these backstories and poems will drum up emotions, memories, and thoughts, and ideas about what makes me who I am. In turn, I will create my own poem magnifying these pieces of

⁸ Method Man f. Mary J. Blige. “I’ll Be There for You/You’re All I Need to Get By”, 1994, Track 4 and 14, *Tical*, Def Jam, Polygram, 1995, Album.

myself. I want my students to get to in their own writing through the pieces they will create throughout the unit.

For the first piece of writing, which is the poetry, I would like to delve into the second guiding questions from the unit of why people write the poems they write. This would satisfy my curricular obligations, but I would also be able to go deeper than the EL Curriculum does. What inspires them? I want to propose that there are multiple reasons why writers write. The major reasons are:

- To ask questions in order to make sense of the world around them
- To celebrate their culture (religion, race, country, language, customs, etc.)
- To grapple with a difficult or traumatic experience
- To admire nature
- To advocate for the rights of others
- To immortalize memories and histories

I, however, suggest that one can read and analyze a poem and identify what the poet's inspiration for writing their poetry and sorting the reasons into the aforementioned categories above. I want to expose them to the Muslim American poets to see how vastly different they are from the poets in the unit.

The poet, Naomi Shihab Nye seems to grapple with the idea of being Palestinian and American. Should she have to choose? I think this poet will resonate with my Latinx students, as they have to live their American identity at school, but still maintain their Latinx identity at home. I also feel that Mohja Kahf can bridge her experiences with being an immigrant from Syria and forgetting the place she called home as she navigates her new home in the United States of America. In the poem, "Muslim Girlhood", Leila Chatti talks about trying to assimilate into the American culture but still maintain her identity and be obedient to her parents.

Teaching Strategies

Visualization

Students will read various poems and to visualize the images in the picture when closing their eyes.

Think, Pair, Share

Students will reflect upon a topic, get with a partner, and share their thoughts or ideas on a specific big idea or question posed to the class.

Jigsaw

Students will learn and do research on a certain topic and present the information to their small group. Then each individual member of the small group will report the information learned to the class.

Using Technology

Students will use technology to research, write, and present information.

Cooperative Learning

Students process concepts and complete activities with peer help and guidance but allows the development of social skills, along with cooperation, team building, and leadership skills. Students can benefit from exposure to the various ideas and thought processes of peers in order to assist in developing their own thought processes.

Inquiry-Based Learning

Students will choose a topic they are interested in and they will do research on the topic in order to share their knowledge with their fellow students.

Brainstorming

Students are able to think about a topic freely in order to gather their thoughts for a discussion or assignment.

Read Alouds

The teacher will use the Read Aloud strategy in order to share literature with students.

Three-Two One

Students will read about a topic. Then, they will list three facts they have learned, two things they want to learn more about or found interesting, and one question they still have after learning about the information.

Journal Writing

Students will write their responses, thoughts, and feelings to the various literature they read in this unit. This strategy will help them to process their learning.

Student Activities

Activity 1

The teacher will introduce the short story entitled “My Name” by Sandra Cisneros in which the main character talks about her name and how she wishes it were different. Then, we will read the picture book, *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi, where the main character asks her classmates to help her choose a new “American” name. Students will do a quick journal write about the stories. Then, they will break into small group and discuss the question, “Is a name important?” Why or why not?

Activity 2

Students will also read the picture books *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes and *Your Name is a Song* by Jamilah Thompkins-Bigelow. These stories discuss the different names that people have and the stories behind how they got their names. For homework, they will talk with their parents to find out the story of their names.

Activity 3

Students will begin on a journey to write their own poems. Before they write these pieces, they will begin with a brainstorming session in which they will list five to ten items answering the question, “Who am I?” I will share and model a list of my own with them to get their ideas flowing.

1. A Muslim
2. A daughter
3. A Black women
4. A Latina
5. A mother
6. A wife
7. A sister
8. A friend
9. An educator
10. A New Jerseyan

Then, they will write a second list on the next page of the writing journal. They will answer the question, “What is important to me?” Some categories are as follows: religion, language, culture, family, food, hair, skin color, place of birth, place of residence, music, traditions, etc. Again, I will share and model my own list of important things with the class.

1. My Faith
2. Family
3. Food/Cooking from around the world
4. R&B, Soul, Rap, Hip-Hop, Latin, African, Brazilian, and Jazz Music
5. Spanish and Arabic Languages
6. Books/Literature/Poetry
7. Learning of all kinds
8. People’s stories
9. Tea
10. Art
11. My plants/garden

From this activity, they will highlight at least two or three things from both lists that they are interested in exploring further in their writing.

Activity 4

Students will choose one of the three topics they highlighted in their writing journal and write a poem about the topic.

Activity 5

The teacher will read the book, *One Last Word* by Nikki Grimes in which she uses the poetry form, the Golden Shovel. In the Golden Shovel form, one will take an interesting line from an existing poem (called a striking line), and make a new poem, using the original words from the

poem one at a time, as the last word of your new poem. In her book, she introduces the original poem of poets from the Harlem Renaissance and on the next page, shows the Golden Shovel form in her newly created poem. The students will have time to experiment with this form of poetry after the teacher share.

Activity 6

The teacher will introduce the word stereotype and define it. Then, the teacher will read the picture book, *The Princess and the Pizza*. This story talks about various stereotypes that people have of princesses and how Princess Paulina ends up shattering these stereotypes. Then, the students will choose a stereotype that they live or see in their lives and they will write a poem about it, by using the stereotype as the first line. For example a first line of a poem could be:

“They think women aren’t strong.”

Then, they will complete the poem disproving this stereotype.

Activity 7

Students will ponder the question, “What would you do if a friend from a different country offers you food from their culture? Would you try the food or would you not try the food?” Students will use the “Think, Pair, Share” strategy to discuss this question. Then, we will read the picture book, *The Sandwich Swap* by Queen Rania Al Abdullah. The teacher will ask students to think of their favorite traditional meal their parents make for them at home. How would they feel if a classmate laughed at their food? Then, they would do a quick write about how they would feel and if their feelings have changed about trying new things after reading this book. What does acceptance look like?

Activity 8

The teacher will read the picture book, *Same, Same but Different* by Jenny Sue Kostecki-Shaw. Then, I will pose the idea of writing to a pen pal in a different country. They will be able to see the similarities and differences between themselves and their pen pals.

Activity 9

Students will choose a country that they are interested in studying or that they have a personal connection with (their ancestors are from this country). They will create a poster highlighting the major aspects of the country’s culture. Students will present their poster in a Jigsaw activity. Each student will report out to the rest of the class about what they learned from their group’s presentations. They will use the Three-Two-One strategy to present their information to the class.

Activity 10

Students will interview a family member (parents, grandparents, etc.) about their experiences as a child and create an oral history. They can take a video or write down the answers. Some questions the students can ask their family member are:

- Where are you from? Which country, state, or city?
- What was your childhood like?
- What types of foods did you eat?
- What music or particular songs do you remember hearing?
- Which language did you hear at home and which language did you learn to speak?
- What family traditions did you celebrate?
- Did you pray or worship? Where did you go? What did you wear?
- Did you play any special games as a child? What were your toys and games like?
- Did you have chores?
- What was your place you lived like? How were your neighbors? How were the other kids?

Activity 11

Students will write an autobiographical essay on who they are and where they come from. They will use the information from the oral history interview of their relative to create or add to their essay.

Activity 12

Students will write an informative research paper about a topic from their culture and way of life in order to teach other students about their culture. It can be a recipe, a holiday or celebration, or even a tradition. They will present their paper with props, artifacts, and/or illustrations.

Activity 13

Students will write a reflection journal entry in which they will discuss three things that they learned from others that they did not know before, which changed their thinking. Were there any stereotypes you had about a group of people that have now changed in your mind? Can you appreciate another culture more because of what you learned? Did an aspect from someone else's culture stand out to you because it was interesting? Write your thoughts in your journal and share it with a partner by turning and talking.

Appendix 1: Teaching Standards

RL4.1

Students will make inferences and quote directly from the text when they read various literature.

RL4.2

Students will write summaries about the poems and texts they will read.

RL4.2

Students will find the theme of poems.

RL4.3

Students will analyze characters and their actions, thoughts, and words in the poems they read.

RL4.4

Students will use their context clues to determine meanings of unknown words.

RL4.5

Students will determine the structural differences between poetry and prose.

L.4.5

Students will analyze and determine the meaning of various examples of figurative language.

W.4

Students will write and revise their own poetry

W4.2

Students will write an informative paper on a chosen topic

W4.3

Students will write a narrative piece talking about their lives.

Works Cited/Teacher Resources

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Ashgar leaves us with a thoughtful collection of poetry about issues of being a Pakistani immigrant, an orphan, through soulful coming-of-age stories. It touches the emotions, as one is able to step into the shoes of this talented Muslim woman.

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This book is journey of a boy named Jack who goes from despising poetry (which he thinks is for girls), to loving poetry. Jack writes journal entries to his teacher as he has new learning experiences with poetry. Throughout the book, Jack learns about several great poets and classic poems that have stood the test of time.

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Same, Same, but Different is a story of two boys who were pen pals. With one boy from the United States and one boy from India, they compare their lives and their differences, but still realizes how much they ultimately have in common.

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