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READING CRITICALLY THROUGH GLOBAL INQUIRY

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Reading Critically through Global Inquiry

WOW Stories: Connections from the Classroom *is a regular on-line publication of WOW containing vignettes written by classroom educators about children's experiences reading and responding to literature in the classroom setting.*

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Introduction: Reading Critically through Global Inquiry

Reading literature to think about and transform oneself and the world involves reading to inquire into issues in children's life experiences and in the broader society. These experiences support children in becoming critical and knowledgeable readers and thinkers. Readers are encouraged to engage deeply with the story world of a text and then to step back to share their personal connections and to reflect critically with others about the text and their responses. They engage in shared thinking about ideas based on critical inquiries that matter in their lives and world. This process of thinking is the focus of Van Horne Elementary School, which has a school-wide emphasis on global inquiry. Teachers and students work together in critically considering the world and their roles and responsibilities as global citizens.

Children at the school engage intensely with fiction, picture books and novels, to think deeply and critically, lingering longer in these texts to consider multiple layers of meaning and ideas. They also engage with nonfiction literature and read critically to compare information and issues across texts and learn facts about the topics as well as to consider conceptual issues. Literature is a tool for understanding the world and considering broader social and scientific issues as well as a means of facilitating children's interest in a topic.

Critical literacy focuses on issues of power and oppression. Readers are challenged to critique and question "what is" and "who benefits" as well as to hope and consider possibility by asking "what if"

and taking action for social change (Freire, 1970). Through critical literacy, children learn to problematize and develop a critical consciousness—to question the everyday world, to consider multiple perspectives, to examine power relationships within soiopolitical issues, and to consider actions to promote social justice (Lewison, Flint, & Sluys, 2002). This issue of *WOW Stories* is focused around these four dimensions of critical literacy.

The first section contains vignettes that highlight the ways that teachers support children's thinking about literature and literacy to encourage them to question their "everyday" experiences through new lenses and to consider multiple perspectives. These vignettes include response strategies that teachers use to challenge children to think more deeply about literature and the kinds of tools, such as flowcharts, that facilitate children's thinking. Other vignettes in this section share the engagements teachers use to immerse students in multiple perspectives through using a range of texts and a study of world languages, as well as through a focus on inquiry.

The second section contains vignettes that highlight ways of engaging children as conceptual thinkers about difficult sociopolitical issues. Teachers write about the instructional engagements they use to encourage students to think conceptually, in this case about power, hunger and poverty, and in making local and global connections to these issues. The third section contains vignettes in which teachers reflect on how they build on students' conceptual thinking about difficult issues to move into taking action to promote social justice. Students first need to understand the issues and uncover the causes of difficult social issues before they are able to take action in a thoughtful manner.

The vignettes in this issue show teachers' struggles to support students in global inquiry as well as the tranformations in student thinking and their deep engagement in these inquries and global literature. The thread that runs across all of the vignettes is the belief that readers have the social responsibility to negotiate personal and cultural meanings from literature that create the possibility for social change in both their immediate and global communities.

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Kathy G. Short, Editor

Thinking About Thinking with Young Children

by Kathryn Bolasky, Kindergarten Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

When I moved from teaching third grade to kindergarten, I had to develop a whole new set of

expectations for the ways in which young children think about and respond to literature. Now, as I look back over my first year of teaching kindergarten, I am impressed with the progress my students made in their ability to think. Every child walked into my classroom with the innate ability to think and make sense of their world, but they left my room at the end of the year able to think about their thinking and to use literacy to create meaning. When I reflect on how this development occurred, there are several key instructional experiences that supported this shift. Throughout the year I wanted students to engage in reading as a meaning-making process that went beyond learning how to read, the typical focus of kindergarten classrooms. I wanted my students to experience reading as a process of constructing meaning for purposes significant to the reader (Goodman, 1996). In order to accomplish this, I worked to create a literacy rich environment where we learned to read, but also used reading to learn about our world. My students engaged in consistent instructional experiences that allowed them to talk about their thinking and to facilitate their thinking through sketching.

The particular experiences in this vignette occurred in Learning Lab, where I am able to observe and take notes of students' responses and where I have someone to think with to make sense of their understandings. The Learning Lab is a place of learning and inquiry for us as teachers. We each take our students to the lab once a week for specific instructional engagements and then meet in a teacher study group every other week to analyze student work and think about where we will go next in our inquiry. The Learning Lab is facilitated by Lisa Thomas, our instructional coach, and the work in the lab is determined by our professional learning focus as a school. In this case, we were looking at issues of power through literature.

The first instructional experience with my students was unforgettable -- for the wrong reasons. My students gathered on the story floor and Lisa explained that she was going to read a book and then ask questions. In an attempt to have students explore the concept of power, she read aloud the picture book *Fred Stays with Me!*, by Nancy Coffelt (2007). My students squirmed, giggled and commented on the illustrations during the read aloud. When Lisa finished the story, we discussed the choices that the character in the story had the power to make and the choices her parents had the power to determine. The students were then posed with the question "Who has the power over your choices at school?" The discussion led to their determination that some choices are made by students and some choices are made for them by others. Lisa supported the discussion by asking questions such as, "Who decides what you do at free choice time?" The students were able to distinguish between a choice they made for themselves and a choice that was made for them.

After the discussion, the class responded to the story on a large graffiti board. They moved to a large piece of butcher paper on the floor that had markers scattered in the middle, arranging themselves around the paper. They were asked to draw something from the story. I was elated that at one point all of my students had a marker in their hands and were drawing images on the paper.

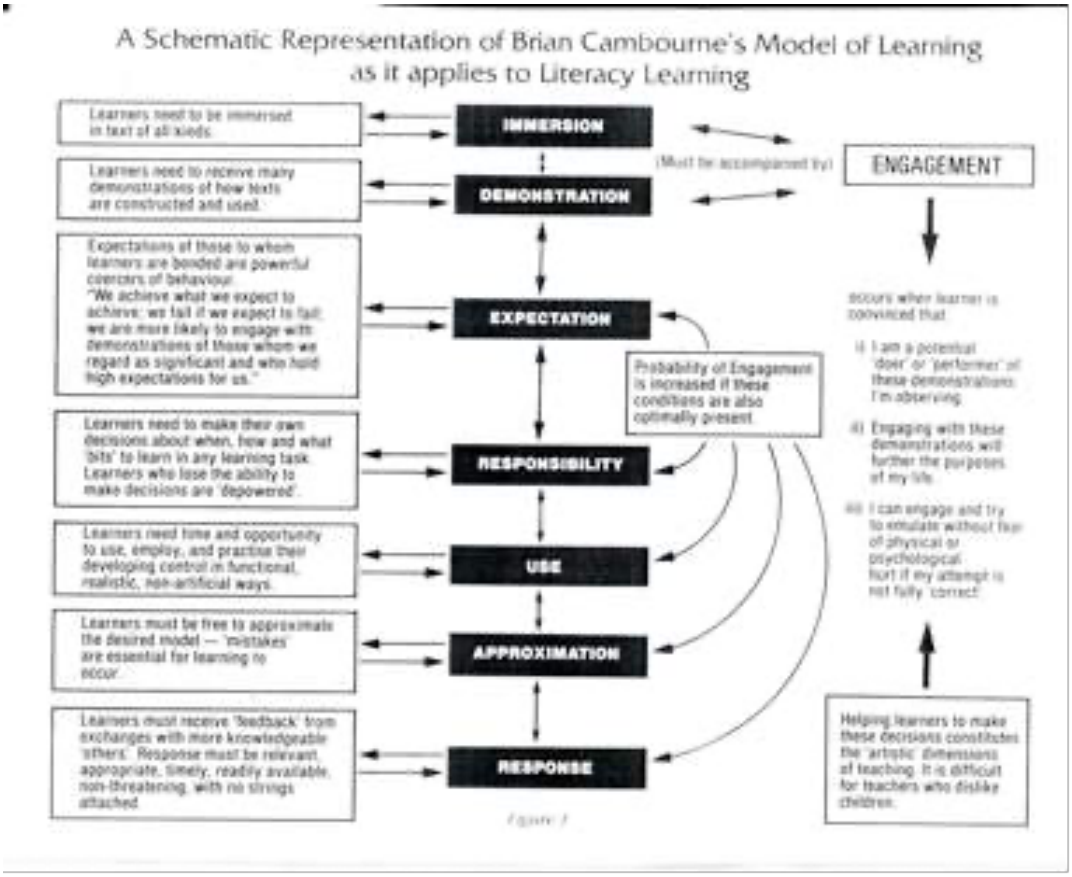
As the students drew, Lisa and I took dictation from them about what they were thinking. It was not long before markers began to fly and large scribbles appeared on the graffiti board. It was clear that our first instructional experience was coming to an end.

Each week we spent time reading a text, talking about it, and responding through drawing. Although the individual sessions were centered on different ideas about power through the read alouds, the structure of the instructional experiences stayed the same. This was significant because the routine assisted in developing their thinking. Students could anticipate what they were going to be asked to do and so could focus on their thinking instead of the procedures. Dictations changed from "I liked the silly part" to retelling key points in the story. Initially, we were just happy if they stayed with the task and responded to the book instead of wandering off, but gradually we noticed that students were engaging with the story and going beyond retellings or telling what they liked about the story.

After several months of reading, discussing, and drawing, there was a visible shift in students' abilities to think about and respond to literature. At the end of March we were exploring the concept of hunger and the power of food. When looking at how weather affects food sources, Lisa read aloud *Peach Heaven*, by Yangsook Choi (2005) in which farmers lose their crop when a huge rain brings peaches down the mountain to the town below where children eagerly eat the expensive treat. After the read aloud we had a discussion and I remember thinking for the first time that we had moved past discussing what they liked about the story into thinking about the important events from the story. I was excited to see this change. The sketches that the students produced were also beginning to reflect their thinking about the stories we were reading.

As I reflected on these changes in my students as thinkers, I found that Brian Cambourne's Model of Learning (1988) was useful in understanding why these experiences were valuable. Cambourne's model identifies the natural environmental factors that contribute to a learner's success in attaining oral literacy and how these might be applied to written literacy. In my classroom these environmental factors were present in our quest to develop the ability to think about our thinking, particularly in response to literature. In the model there are eight concepts or conditions that are imperative for the learner's development: Immersion, Demonstration, Engagement, Expectation, Responsibility, Use, Approximation, and Response. These eight factors helped me explore the academic experiences of my students and consider their role in helping students begin to think

about their thinking. Cambourne (1988) represents his model in this diagram:



Immersion, Demonstration, and Engagement

Exposure to new learning experiences is a constant factor in kindergarten. As Lisa and I created new learning experiences for students, it was clear that immersion, demonstration, and engagement were vital components that needed to be addressed to assure success. When trying to develop student thinking, immersion does involve flooding them with books but must also include access to engagements that challenge students to think and respond. Susan Kempton (2007) argues that "Kindergarteners, especially early in the year, can understand much more complex texts than they can read" (p.104). To honor that notion my students were immersed in experiences to develop their thinking from the very beginning of the year. I wanted them to have a full picture of school as a place to push their thinking.

Often kindergarten teachers believe that they should start with simple routines and expectations and hold off reading complex books and asking students to respond and talk about books until much later in the year. Each week Lisa and I set aside time to read a selected book and gave my class a chance to interact with the text. We started this from the beginning of the year and did not wait until they were older because I wanted my students to become accustomed to the expectation that they are thinkers. Even if their initial responses were a few retellings and "I like" statements, we were creating the expectation of thinking and talking about literature.

Careful consideration went into selecting a text to read aloud to students. A key aspect of immersion is to create quality experiences that expand their life experiences. My students came with a wealth of knowledge and I wanted to give them the chance to use what they already knew in order to gain more insight about their world. One way that we accomplished this was by creating sustained immersion experiences. Lisa would read a text with a complex issue and then give students the chance to talk about the book. After the discussion, students responded on paper using sketching to continue their thinking about the story. Students were involved with a single text for close to fifty minutes during these instructional experiences. That is a major feat with five-year-olds, especially my class of 17 boys and seven girls.

Spending time every week on these experiences not only gave students the opportunity to be immersed in literature-rich experiences, but the time spent also served as a demonstration of the thinking process. This demonstration came in many forms. According to Cambourne (1988), demonstrations can be "actions or they can be artifacts" (p. 34). The first demonstration the students experienced was the teacher language and dialogue that was facilitating their talk. Lisa and I did not speak to or treat my students like they were little kids; instead we referred to them as thinkers. We shared our thinking about a story as a demonstration for them, but were careful not to lead them to believe that our thinking was what they should be thinking. We diligently fostered an open dialogue that accepted all thoughts so students felt safe to share their ideas without fear of judgment.

Immersion and demonstrations are only successful if the students are actively engaged in what they are doing. Cambourne (1988) argues that while learners are subjected to thousands of demonstrations, "a high proportion of these demonstrations merely wash over them and are ignored" (p. 34). To keep the students engaged, time spent during these literacy experiences was completely focused on the students and their thinking. Apart from the read aloud, the experiences were student driven. Students voiced their opinions and connections during discussions and recorded and developed their thinking in artistic responses. Of the 50 minutes that we spent in these experiences, 35 of them were devoted to active participation by students. The experiences were structured to give ample time for them to talk and explain their thinking. It was important for students to discover their thoughts and not for Lisa or I to lead them where we wanted them to think.

Expectation and Responsibility

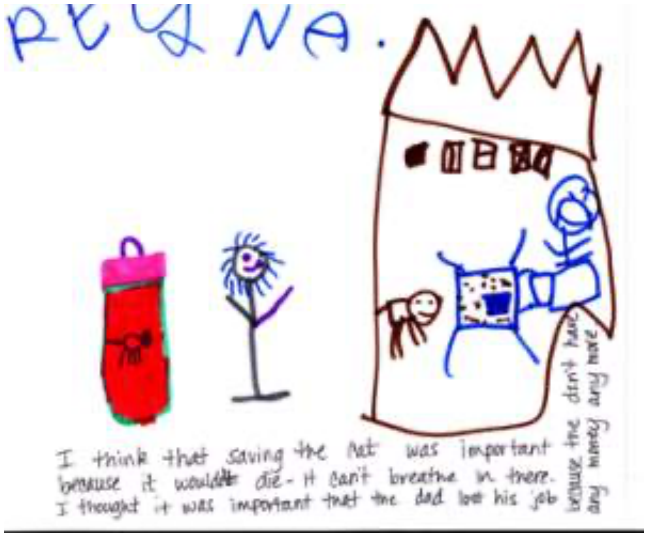
The high level of engagement that my class exhibited during these experiences was closely related to the expectations I had for my students. Brian Cambourne (1988) explains that "expectations are subtle and powerful coercers of behavior" and that through these expectations "young learners receive clear indications that they are expected to learn … and that they are capable of doing it" (p.

35). Simply setting aside time in our week to engage in literature experiences was a significant aspect of developing the expectations I had for my students, and a strong signal that I valued this thinking time. I demonstrated to my students that what we were doing was important enough to spend a significant amount of time doing it week after week. Each time my class engaged in a literature experience, they understood that what they were being asked to do was meaningful and, more significantly, attainable. By routinely engaging in literature experiences, my students were able to build a sense of confidence about their abilities as thinkers. During these experiences, my students knew that they were going to be responsible to share their thoughts, and knowing they had something to share validated their thoughts.

Use

These weekly experiences also gave students ample time to use their thinking. Cambourne (1988) argues that "learners need time and opportunity to use, employ, and practice their developing control in functional, realistic, non-artificial ways" (p. 33). Each week students had the opportunity to hear a text and engage in meaningful response strategies that enabled them to make meaning. One response strategy that was particularly effective for my students was graffiti boards. This response strategy is a flexible and so was easily adjustable to fit the needs of my students. At the beginning of the year Lisa and I had my class respond together on a large piece of butcher paper on the floor. By having a single board we were able to keep them in close proximity as they explored using markers to record and facilitate their thinking about a story through sketches, words, and dictation. As the year progressed the graffiti boards changed from being one large piece of paper to small group boards and eventually to individual pieces of paper. As my students started to gain ownership of their thinking it was important to support them by giving them more individualized way to respond.

In January, students responded to *Tight Times* (Hazen, 1983), a picture book about a young boy who is not allowed to have a dog because times are tight, but who brings home a starving kitten he finds in a trash can on the same day that his father loses his job.



Approximation and Response

Graffiti boards were successful throughout the year not only because they were flexible response strategies, but because there was not a targeted answer. From the beginning of the year Lisa and I accepted any response the students gave as meaningful. Of course the responses that were given at the beginning of the year were simple when compared to the more complex responses at the end of the year, but that was to be expected. Lisa and I made it a point from the beginning of the year to

value students' understandings and resisted the desire to talk them into a thought.

Lisa and I wanted to understand the ideas we were exploring in literature through their eyes. We achieved this by accepting and celebrating their work and ideas, even at the first when their responses were short statements and retellings and it would have been easy to be discouraged. Their early responses were approximations of responses to literature, but we responded to them as meaning-makers who were working to make sense of text. Cambourne (1988) discusses approximation as related to children who are learning how to speak, stating that "there is no expectation that fully developed 'correct' (fully conventional) adult forms will be produced. He points out that adults expect baby talk from young children and it is "warmly received and treated as legitimate, relevant, and meaningful" (p. 37). The students' responses on the initial graffiti board were, of course, raw and simplistic, but they were still representations of their thinking. It was important initially to accept these responses as they were in order to promote their confidence for the next time they were asked to respond. By validating their thinking, I sent my students a strong clear message that they were thinkers and they had the skills to engage and be successful in these literacy experiences. This was the most important teacher response I could have given.

Conclusion

Looking back on the school year through the frame of Cambourne's work, my actions as a kindergarten teacher seem purposeful and effective. At the time, however, Lisa and I were both struggling and often questioned ourselves on how to most effectively invite students to respond to literature and to be aware of themselves as thinkers. What we did not want to do was to give up or wait until later to signal that we expected them to engage meaningfully in our work around literature. Out of desperation, we developed a routine of read alouds followed by talk and response and kept that routine, no matter how discouraged we were after a particular session. I realize now that it was this consistency of engagement and expectation of thoughtfulness that created an effective learning context for all of us.

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Retellings as a Valuable Response to Literature

by Kathryn Bolasky, Kindergarten Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

Retellings are the most common way in which kindergarten students respond to a text, often by excitedly sharing their favorite part of the story. Educators and researchers view retelling as a beginning, or less sophisticated response, at the bottom of the hierarchy of types of responses. Retellings are seen as reflecting only surface level understandings of a text through fairly literal recountings of what students have read (Miller, 2002, p. 163). When looking at my students' responses to text across the year, I realized that retellings served a wider range of purposes for my students and were a meaningful response that was pivotal in developing their thinking skills. In examining their retellings, I found six different categories of the kinds of thinking that my students engaged in through their retellings. Each type of retelling provided different insights on how the students were making meaning of the texts in which they were engaged.

Recounting Individual Plot Events

Many of my students responded to stories by recounting an event from the story. These retellings were straightforward and literal. The events that the students depicted were not events that were not necessarily central to the story plot. They were details of the story that they remembered. For example, after hearing *Tight Times*, by Barbara Shook Hazen (1979), about a family experiencing difficult financial struggles, Matthew drew a picture of the cat eating lima beans and the mother in the story giving the son a candy bar when his father is upset. He dictated, "This is the cat eating lima beans. The mom is giving the boy a candy bar because the Dad is sad." Cherise responded similarly to *Smoky Night*, by Eve Bunting (1997), about riots in Los Angeles. Cherise drew a picture of a house burning and the church that served as a shelter. When I asked her what she was drawing she said, "This is the fire on the house. This is the church that the people slept at."

Although these retellings might not appear to reflect deeper understandings of the books, they do provide insights into what the students attended to or remembered from the story. Students were not able to tell why they chose these details, and so I still wonder whether these details might be connected to deeper understandings than initially appears evident.

Enjoying Humorous Plot Elements

Retellings can sometimes demonstrate parts of the story that the students thought were funny or humorous. After hearing *The Book of Mean People* by Toni and Slade Morrison (2002), Nicholas responded to the part of the story when the character, a bunny, takes off his clothes. When asked about his drawing, he said, “I liked the part where he took off his clothes and stretched because it was funny.” Similarly, after the read aloud of *Tight Times* (Hazen, 1979), Anton responded by depicting a humorous part of the story. He drew a cat eating lima beans and dictated, “This is the part when the cat likes lima beans.”

Neither Nicholas nor Anton responded to a central part of the story or in a way that related to the overall theme, but they were able to communicate their enjoyment of the story. They were able to share events in the story that they felt were funny, which in turn helped me to better understand what they enjoy as readers. I was able to use this information in my planning and in book selection.

Connecting to Personally Significant Plot Elements

Many of the retellings that my students created depicted parts of the stories that they found personally significant. Students produced responses that indicated what they saw as the most important part of the story. More often than not the students' opinions of what was important were events that adults might easily dismiss or overlook. Their responses provide a lens to understand what my students were thinking about the story. *Tight Times* (Hazen, 1979) was a particularly significant text in changing the way that I viewed my students' responses. Many of the students created responses around the part of the story where a woman helps the young boy rescue a stray cat from a garbage can. This event was not the most significant event in relation to the theme of the story, a family dealing with job loss and tough economic times, but it was significant for the children. When Ricky and Hayden decided to draw a picture depicting the woman helping the boy, they were demonstrating their connection to this event. They understood that the cat needed help and that it was both the woman and the little boy's responsibility to provide that help. Ricky said, "The girl helped the cat get out. It was nice to do that." Hayden said, "The lady is getting the cat out of the trash can. It's important because it's nice."

These responses might be easily dismissed as simple retellings of an event from the story, but I feel they are powerful. Although the students did not relate to the problem of tight economic times, they did connect to another type of problem, providing help to someone in need. Both boys demonstrated an understanding of a problem to which they could personally connect. I believe that they responded to this event, and not the father losing his job, because they could easily see themselves helping an abandoned cat, but not helping their fathers find a new job. The father being laid off was an abstract concept, but helping an abandoned cat was concrete for the boys. Given our school focus on kids taking action for a better world, focusing on a child taking action in their retelling takes on even more significance.

Highlighting a Turning Point or Important Plot Elements

As the year progressed, I noticed a shift in the students' retellings. Students began to identify major turning points in the plot development in their responses. This was an important step in their thinking in the sense that it showed me that they were able to identify important parts of the story, even though they were not able to explain why the event was important. Reyna's shift in thinking occurred after listening to *Smoky Night* by Eve Bunting (1994). She responded by not only drawing

an important event from the beginning of the story, but also one from the end. Her paper was divided by a fold vertically down the middle. On the left side she drew a picture of the people rioting and stealing from the houses and businesses. She dictated, “They are taking a door and a TV.” On the right side of the paper she drew a picture of firefighters returning the cats to the young boy and his neighbor. Her dictation for this picture was, “This is when the fireman brought their cats back.” Reyna’s ability to depict two important events from one story showed me that she was beginning to think about the read alouds more deeply. She was not just thinking about which part she liked or thought was important. She was thinking about what was happening in the story and what parts were important to the central focus of the story.

Anton created a significant response to *Smoky Night* by drawing a multi-color picture of the two cats. When asked what he was drawing he responded by saying, “This is a picture of the cats getting to know each other.” As I was reviewing this response, I realized that his comment was not an actual event from the story. Anton understood that the event at the end of the story when the cats are friendly was significant. He took that event and his own experiences of getting to know someone and created an implied event in his response. He was able to think about the process of becoming friends and use it to think about the cats getting to know each other. This was significant in the sense that the cats becoming friends reflects the main theme of the story. By responding to this important event, Anton demonstrated his understanding of the big idea of the story, not judging others before you take the time to get to know them, without putting the idea into those exact words.

Narrating the Main Points of the Story

In some cases responses that are retellings can be narratives of the main point of the story. LaFon Phillips (1999) argues that students can create retellings through narratives and storytelling (p. 368). In many cases the dictations I was taking from students were narratives that they created to explain their thinking about the story. Not all of the narratives were long and involved; they ranged from one to three sentences. For example, after reading *The Book of Mean People*, Sarah drew a picture of a sad boy. She dictated the following sentences that narrated her understanding of the story, "This is a picture of the boy being sad. Someone was mean to him." These simple sentences tell the main point of the story. Another example of a narrative retelling is Zachary's response to *Peach Heaven* (Choi, 2005). He drew a picture of the girl standing with peaches and said, "The girl was smiling because she was kind of happy. She was kind of happy because it was raining peaches and she was sad because the farmers worked so hard." Zachary demonstrated a sound understanding of the big idea of the story through his retelling as well as comments on both the villagers' and the farmers' perspectives.

Garrett used retelling to explain his understanding of malnutrition. After hearing *Tight Times*, Garrett responded to the popular part of the story, the cat rescue, but he took it one step further. Like many of his classmates, Garrett drew a picture of the cat in the trash can and the boy and the woman helping get it out. Garrett's dictation demonstrates his understanding when he says, "The boy found the cat. If he didn't find it, it would be lost forever and never get found. It could get very sick if it doesn't get any food." Garrett was able to get past just saving the cat because it was a nice thing to do. He explained that the cat was in danger of starving or getting sick if left in the trash can. This retelling connected not only to the story but to the concept of hunger which we were studying at the time.

Exploring Cause and Effect through Retellings

A few of my students were able to show cause and effect relationships between events in the story

through retellings. Cause and effect relationships are not easily identified by kindergarteners, making these responses significant. After hearing *Smoky Nights*, Hayden, Abdoul, and Damon responded by showing the cause and effect between events from the story. Hayden divided his paper in half vertically and showed the cause and effect of the rioting. On the left side, he drew a picture of a person and dictated, “This is the bad guy who took the money.” On the right side, he drew a dark wall and a door and explained, “This is an empty house after the bad guy took everything.” Hayden was able to understand that “the bad guy” caused the house to be empty. Abdoul depicted the house burning and the people having to escape, saying, “The house is on fire. These are the people running scared and hurt.” This response was powerful and significant for Abdoul in the sense that he is an English language learner and rarely completed responses to read alouds. He demonstrated that he understood that the fire was what caused the people to leave their houses. Damon also responded to the burning buildings and explained his drawing by saying, “These people broke the house and put it on fire. They got a lighter and burned it. These are the people escaping.” Both Abdoul and Hayden were able to show that they understood that other people, the rioters, caused innocent people harm. Identifying cause and effect relationships is a difficult skill to learn, yet through these retellings I am able to see evidence that a few of my students understand the concept.

Conclusion

For my students, retelling was more than just repeating lines or parts of the story, it was a way to make meaning of the text that we were reading. Responding through retelling allowed my students to demonstrate what they thought and learned from each story. As a teacher, it was important for me to return to each book as a context for reviewing and understanding their retellings. Without thinking about the big ideas from the story or the reason for using a text, the retellings can be easily confused as basic summaries. I realized that there are a tremendous range of types of retellings and that closely examining each retelling provides insights into how my students are thinking about and connecting to literature. Each type of retelling served as a valuable planning tool due to the insights I gained into their thinking.

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Exploring Flow Charts as a Tool for Thinking

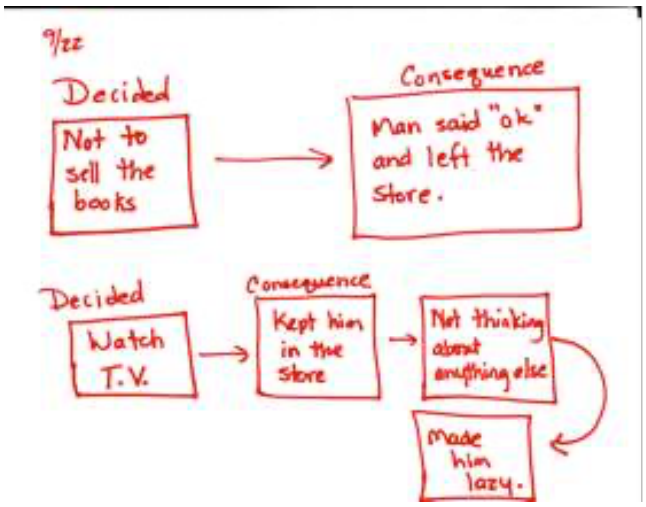
by Jaquetta Alexander & Jennifer Griffith, First/Second Grade Teachers, Van Horne Elementary School

We consider ourselves fortunate to teach at a small urban elementary school because our staff of

eight teachers allows for a high degree of collaboration. Our school year begins with a retreat in which we work together to establish a school-wide concept that every grade level uses as a framework for the school year. We decided on "power" as our concept because of the relevancy to our curriculum and student interest in issues of power the previous year. Within that framework we strive to challenge student thinking and find meaningful ways for them to respond to literature to deepen their understandings.

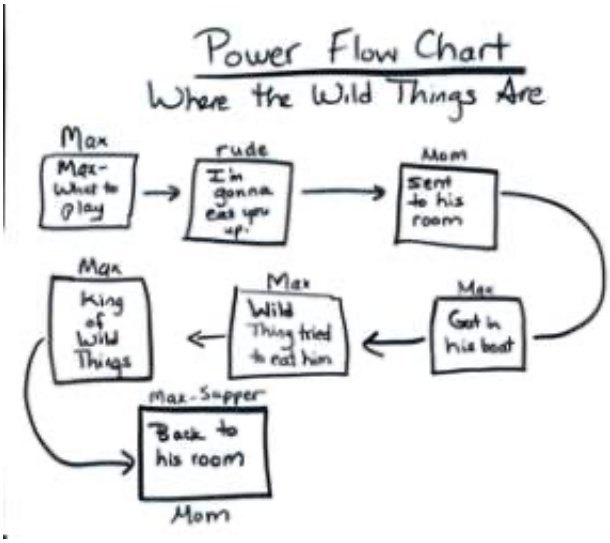
In our teacher study group, we discussed our observation that first and second graders could identify the beginnings and end points of story plots and character actions, but sometimes missed the events in between that influenced those plots and actions. We identified the need to enable students to see sequences and the relationships between cause and effect. Moline (1995) argues that flow diagrams are useful to show change, growth/development, and cause and effect. Once we made the connection between our desired outcome and Moline's work, we began using flowcharts with students.

Our Learning Lab teacher, Lisa Thomas, introduced the students to flowcharts after reading *The Pink Refrigerator* by Tim Egan (2007). During this lab session we focused on the power of consequences. Bailey portrays her understandings by stating, "I noticed that he made the choice to do what was on the refrigerator, but then he didn't know what to do when the last note was there so he learned to do things by himself." When the students were asked to think about everything that happened in the book, Lisa depicted their thinking in a simple flowchart that reflected Dodsworth's decisions and the consequences that resulted. The simple diagram shows how one idea connects to another and creates a chain reaction. This diagram allowed the students to explore cause and effect by stating the decision and the consequence.



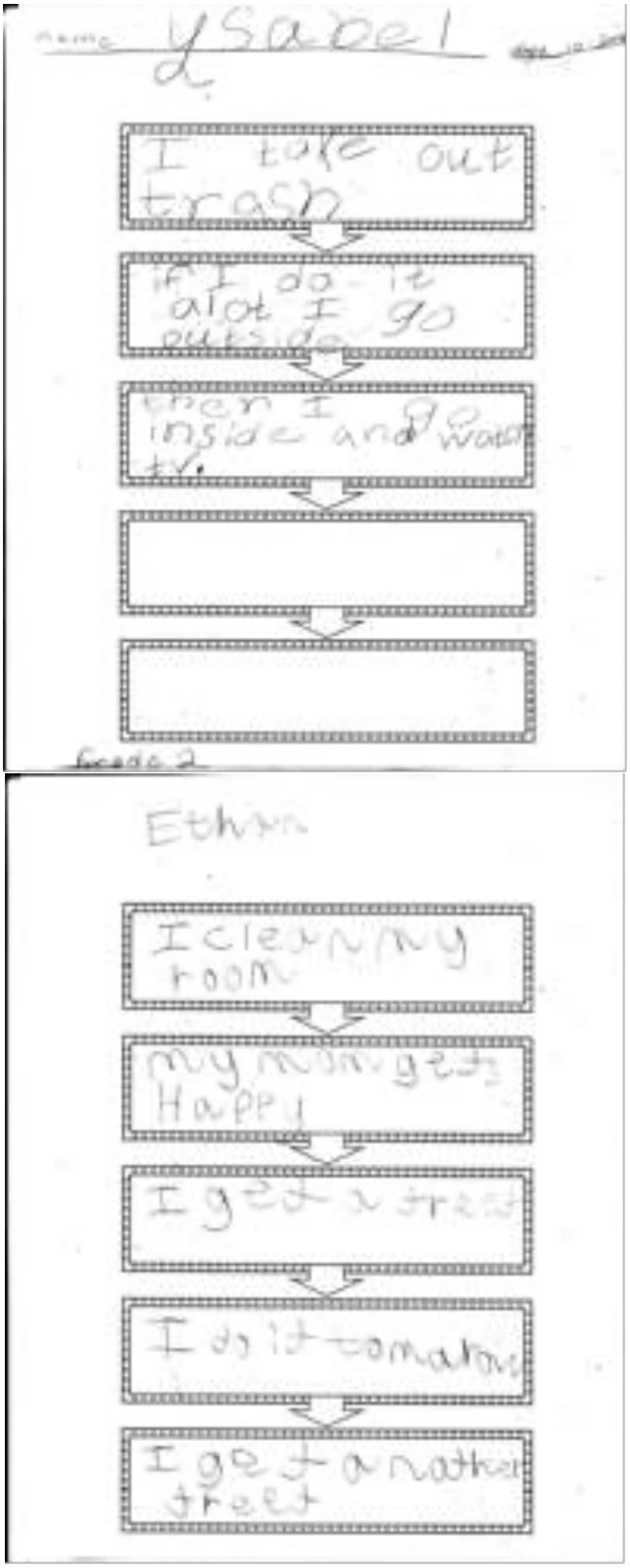
In our next lab session Lisa read *The Wild Things* by Maurice Sendak (1963) and we focused on the power we have over other people and the power they have over us. The impact of our previous discussion about decisions and consequences was apparent in the literature discussion. Morgan

stated, “They are mad and for a consequence they showed their teeth.” Carah said, “Max had power over the monsters –- he told the wild things what to do.” The class created a flowchart together depicting the elements of power in the story. The students easily identified the shifts in who had power at this point, which are represented in the writing above the cells in the flowchart.



The Learning Lab is often a catalyst for our teaching in the classroom. With their knowledge of flowcharts and seeing where the kids were at with their understandings of power, we knew it was time to move our thinking into our classroom. Knowing that kids like to look for beginnings and endpoints, we chose to use a simple version of a flowchart that allowed kids to chronicle the important events from a book. This type of visual organizer allows kids to think about the sequencing of a story and focus on the causes and effects of decisions made by the characters. We used stories from our reading series, both fiction and non-fiction. With second grade we read the story *Helping Out* by George Ancona (1985), a photo essay about young children helping out adults at home, at school, and in the community, and the rewards of helpfulness. We created a class flowchart on ‘what do we do at school to help out.’ The kids were able to take their thinking about flowcharts from the learning lab and our discussions to create a flowchart about how they help out at school. Moline (1995) states that the use of flow diagrams allows kids to organize information in meaningful sequences. Because we were focused on cause and effect relationships, their simple idea of “We help out by listening” grew to be as complex as, “We could help out by making the world better if other schools were like ours.”

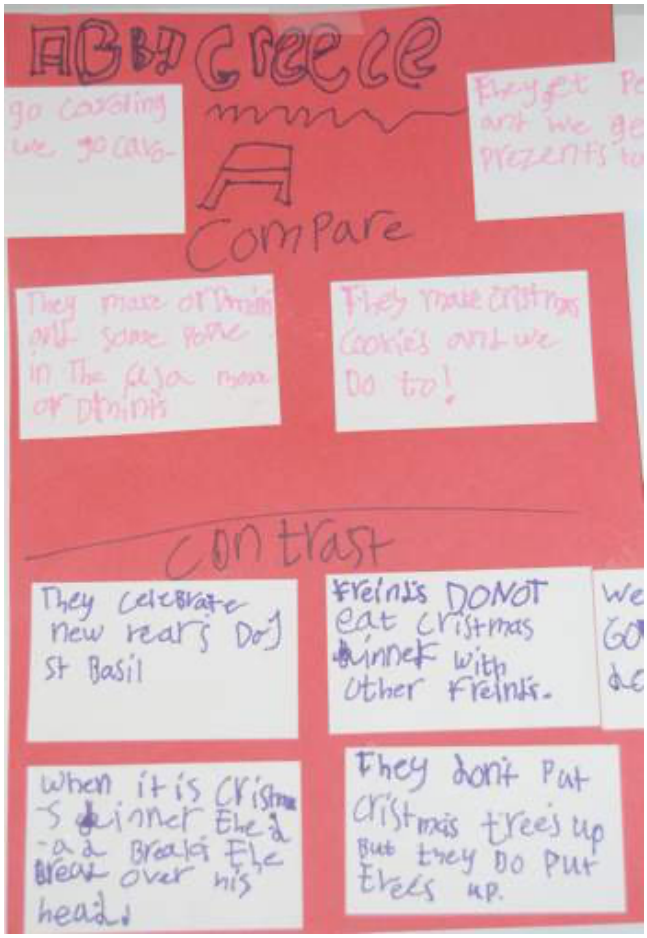
It was obvious that using the response strategy of flowcharts was starting to make sense and deepen their understanding. We felt that we were providing them with a tool for their thinking. With each new discussion, we were constantly connecting to our concept of power. When asked who had the power to help out our school their response was, “We do!” It was exciting for us to see their thinking begin to evolve, however, the flowcharts that we asked the students to create independently were not as successful. After we completed the class flowchart of helping out we asked the students to complete a flowchart showing cause and effect by selecting a chore that is completed at home. They were asked to show the consequences of their helpfulness. These flowcharts were evidence that they were on the edge of grasping the strategy, but still needed guidance and practice.



After using simple forms of visual organizers with various stories from our reading series, we knew we needed to challenge their thinking in regards to responding using this tool. As the winter holidays approached we struggled with an inquiry to undertake that would support our work in the Learning Lab with our concept of power and use of flowcharts. We value inquiry as a stance on the significance of how we learn, not only because this stance influences student learning of content, but also because it influences who learners become as human beings (Short, 2009). Our

collaborative efforts with our students led them to decide on a country inquiry about Greece and India. We delved into understanding the holiday traditions of each of these countries through guest speakers, read alouds, songs and non-fiction texts.

We referred back to Moline (1995) to review the types of visual organizers for an idea of where we wanted to head with flowcharts and organizers. We knew the kids were learning about the similarities and differences between the Greek and Indian cultures so finding an organizer that supported that thinking was challenging. We wanted kids to develop the recognition that other cultures are similar and different to their own and have a respect for others' stories. We also wanted children to have choice in their learning and offered them two varieties of organizers. One was an organizer to compare and contrast a country's holiday traditions to their own traditions. Flowcharts tend to illustrate a flow or sequence of a story and in this case, kids needed to think about comparing and contrasting and so using a comparison organizer seemed the perfect tool to support their thinking. After searching for the right one we decided to create our own version of a comparison chart, one that helped organize their thoughts in a way they were familiar with after working with flowcharts. The result was for them to split their paper in two with the labels of compare and contrast and on note cards write their comparisons and contrasts of the country they chose. The note cards limited their space and forced them to write concise statements similar to the boxes they had grown used to in the flowcharts we had worked with over the last months. We were impressed that kids took their time and wrote insightful similarities and differences. Introducing the comparison chart was a great tool for supporting their understanding of comparisons and contrasts. Abby chose to create a visual organizer of comparisons for Greece.



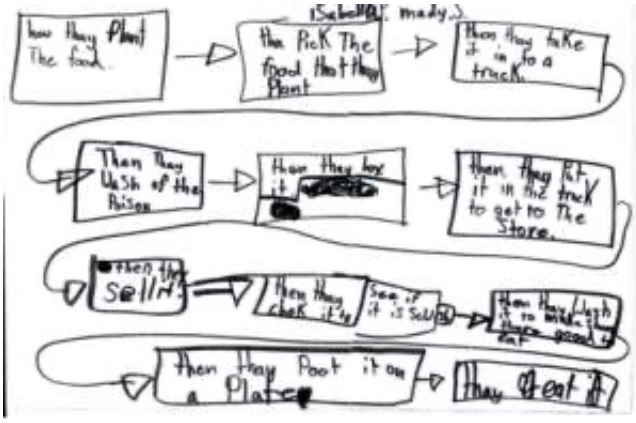
The second type of organizer we offered as a choice was a familiar type of flowchart -- a linear chart that sequenced the significant events in a story. To support our inquiry study of Greece and India we read international literature that gave the kids a glimpse of life in those countries as well as non-fiction texts. Kids who were drawn to a particular story had the option of chronicling the events from the story into a linear flowchart. Linear charts help kids organize their thinking in a sequential manner, allowing them to go from the beginning to the end of a story. Often, young children need a tool that supports this thinking, allowing them to visually see the whole story. Riley chose to create a linear flowchart on a story from Greece, *I Have an Olive Tree* by Eve Bunting (1999). She carefully chose the important events to chronicle on her flowchart. Once again, the use of note cards limited the kids' space so they had to select their words carefully, a skill that can be challenging for young kids.

Kids need to have freedom when choosing their tools for responding so that they have ownership and take pride in their work. All the students took their time and really thought about what they were writing. When kids chose to create a flowchart in response to a read aloud, they thought about the significant events and chronicled them in their own words. It was at this moment that we saw how powerful flowcharts were in providing kids with an organizational tool for their thinking about a book. Instead of merely summarizing what happened, they were supported in focusing on the relationships of cause and effect and sequencing. In their early experiences with flowcharts, a lot of our time was focused on the procedure of how to create the chart and kids' questions of what to do. Their work with these charts indicated that our students had officially moved from focusing on the procedure of flowcharts to becoming fluent with their understanding of them. They could now use them as a tool for understanding.

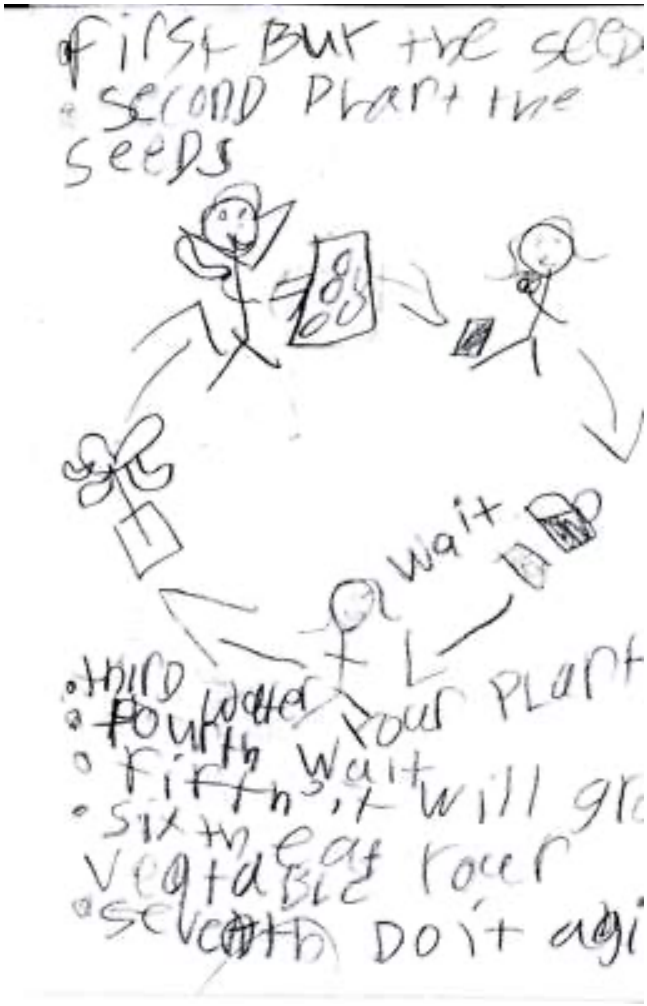
After winter break we decided to continue with flowcharts. We knew from experience and research that kids learn best when they are able to focus on the same response strategy over time so they really come to understand the potentials of that strategy and can use it flexibly as a tool. Our work with flowcharts was having an impact on their thinking and their ability to organize ideas, events, and processes in the literature and inquiries we were exploring. The more we offer them the opportunity to work with a particular type of response strategy, the more fluent and flexible they become in using this strategy. Our goal was for kids to acquire enough experiences with visual organizers to use them independently by the end of the school year.

After the fall our school-wide concept shifted to thinking about the power of food for the spring semester and our kids became excited about gardening and the life cycle of plants. The classroom became inundated with texts and posters illustrating the life cycle of plants and the importance of gardening. We had a guest speaker teach us about the proper way to garden in the desert; the kids were engaged and eager to plant their vegetables. Upon doing this we decided that we needed to bring in flowcharts that would help them illustrate their learning. In the Learning Lab the kids had been studying the process food goes through to get from the farm to the table, using charts that were similar to the ones we had been exploring in class -- simple flow diagrams that illustrated the process of how food gets to your table. Although these flowcharts were effective in supporting

sequencing, we knew it was time to introduce more complex organizers to build their repertoire of different types of flowcharts.

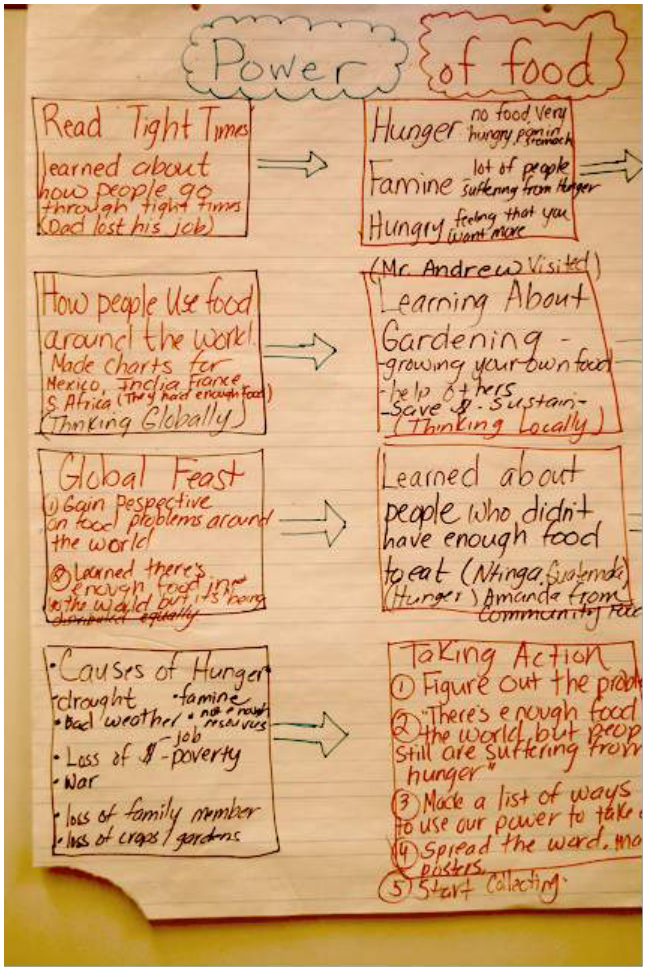


It seemed natural then that we push out kids to expand their use of flowcharts within our study of the cycle of plants. We referred back to Steve Moline (1995) where he talks about cyclical flow diagrams and how they are best used in describing continuous processes such as cycles. This was a flowchart we hadn't experimented with yet and it seemed to fit perfectly into our inquiry of gardening. We challenged our students to think about what we had been learning about the planting process and how they could represent that in a flowchart. After engaging in a conversation, we decided to create a flowchart of our learning as a class. The process helped the kids see the cycle visually and they seemed to grasp the concept quickly.



Our understandings about gardening enhanced our conceptual understanding of the power of food. It was that time in the school year to take action based on our learning. Our Learning Lab experiences were filled with stretching our thinking about the concept of taking action. We had finally moved into more complex flowcharts according to Moline (1995). We decided to use concept webs, a tool used to make connections between concepts, when discussing the meaning of taking action. In the Learning Lab Lisa had the kids stretch their thinking out of their comfort zone of cyclical and linear flowcharts to creating a concept web on taking action. This type of web encourage them to think about what taking action is, what it looks like and what it means to them. Their ideas are surrounded by the center concept of taking action. Webs were not something new to our students, but using them in the context of flowcharts as a concept web was new. The kids were able to come up with several ideas that fit into the web.

Our exploration of power had taken us on quite a journey; a journey we knew needed to be recapped in order for our taking action piece to be meaningful. It was important to us as teachers for our kids to revisit our process of taking action related to the power of food. We were hoping to integrate a visual organizer into our discussion but knew that the kids needed to lead and that we should not set it up for them. We came together as a class, asking them to think about what they learned about the power of food. It was natural for them to start with the story *Tight Times* (Hazen, 1983), that had been read in lab to begin our thinking about the power of food. Once they decided to start with this story, the class decided to create a flowchart of our learning for the semester. We were excited to see our kids naturally drawn to creating a linear flowchart, a sequencing of our significant moments in learning about the power of food.



After reflecting on the different flowcharts that we had created across the year, it was exciting to see the evolution of the kids' thinking and understanding related to this response strategy. Flowcharts is a strategy that allowed our kids to see the whole picture when reflecting on a piece of literature, concept, or process. Their evolution began with a simple format where they summarized a story or event in chronological order, moved to writing their thinking in concise statements and comparing and contrasting, and finally creating cyclical diagrams and concept webs. The one area where we wished we had spent more time was in having kids independently create flowcharts so that this strategy became a natural part of what they did on their own as inquirers to make sense of ideas.

We saw two main areas of learning for our students. One was the use of flow charts and other visual organizers as a tool for thinking about relationships, such as sequencing and cause and effect. These visual organizers provided them with a way to sort out and show how ideas or events relate to each other in some kind of order or chronology. The second was that they identified conceptual patterns to look for in other engagements and texts. They were beginning to understand, for example, that cause and effect and the way that decisions lead to consequences is a pattern they can look for as they read or engage in activities in order to make sense of those experiences.

Often, students are introduced to a response strategy and then quickly moved to another one without having the opportunity to really explore that strategy in meaningful ways and in enough depth that they develop flexible understandings of its potentials. We have learned as educators that children need time to explore and become fluent with a response strategy. Otherwise, their focus remains on the procedures of how to do the strategy, rather than on using the strategy as a tool for thinking. Our goal is for students to view our classroom as a place for thinking and for life work, not just for completing tasks and school work.

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Creating a Context for Understanding in Literature Circles
by Amy Edwards, Fifth Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

My mother always told me that knowledge is power. As a fifth-grade teacher I want my students to gain as much knowledge as possible before they move on to middle school and forget everything as the hormones take over, however, I don't want them to be dependent on me for that knowledge. As a teacher I prefer the role of "guide on the side" rather than the "sage on the stage." In recent years I have made great efforts to move from a teacher-centered classroom to student-centered strategies. Probably the thing I most want kids to take from my year with them is a love of literature and to value the experience of reading. Rosenblatt (1938) states that students acquire experience as well as knowledge through reading. Literature provides the experience of "living through," not just knowledge about, the story world and lives they enter in a book. Reading thus allows students to gain both literary and social perspective. This is what I envision for my students while participating in literature circles. They are immersed in a range of text experiences to build knowledge and understanding that they then hopefully will use to connect to their own problems and needs.

My intention was to start the year by teaching about global issues, since Van Horne's focus is to effectively engage children with international literature to build intercultural understandings.

Through the world of books, students are invited to gain insights into how people around the world think, feel, and live (Short, 2008). I decided to start with literature circles of books that were set in China because the Beijing Olympics had just ended as our school year began. I assumed that with the television coverage, at least some of the students had been exposed to Chinese culture. My expectations didn't match their experience and this mismatch led to tension throughout our inquiry.

I started the literature circles by reviewing the guidelines for literature discussion since students had participated in them during the previous years. Since this would be their first time discussing literature together with a new group of kids, I knew this step would make the discussion groups go a bit smoother. We had a whole group discussion of a picture book, *Ruby's Wish* (Yim, 2002), a book about a little girl in historical China who wanted to go to school. Afterward we debriefed as to how the discussion went and came up with a list of guidelines for literature circle discussions. This list was similar to the guidelines my class used last year, however, I felt it was important for this group to create their own guidelines for discussion so that they had ownership in the process.

The books we read were *The Diary of Ma Yan* (Yan, 2002), *Red Scarf Girl* (Jiang, 1997), *Chu Ju's House* (Whelan, 2004), and Dragonwings (Yep, 1975). In introducing a new set of books, I always tell students about the authors for each novel so they get a feel for their perspectives. It is important to know the backgrounds of authors and whether they are an insider or an outsider to the culture. I had cut out a few news articles about Beijing; few were about the culture and most focused on the games and how the Americans were performing. I also had a range of books about China, both fiction and non fiction, available for independent reading. Other than that, there was little background building before reading to teach students about the culture.

Each week the students participated in literature circles using several discussion strategies. Some of the strategies for facilitating discussion were Graffiti Boards, Save the Last Word for Me, and Consensus Boards (Short & Harste, 1996). Graffiti Board are where students in a small group respond to literature using pictures or words written randomly on a large piece of brainstorming paper much like graffiti on a wall. Graffiti boards let students respond to a story before and during their discussion. As the discussion unfolds, the events of the story take a back seat to the issues, tensions, and problems that students connect to within a book. I like this strategy because it allows even the most reluctant students to share their thoughts on the paper for all to see.

Figure 1: Graffiti Board of Red Scarf Girl

While listening to the discussions of *Red Scarf Girl*, I noticed that there was a great deal of confusion about the Cultural Revolution in China. The time period was a bit of a mystery to my students. In the forward, the author explains that the Cultural Revolution started in China in 1966 but that 17 years earlier, in 1949, the revolutionary leader Mao Ze-dong led the communist party to power as the new leaders in China. This important information was missed by some students because they skipped the forward, thinking it was not important to the story. I quickly realized that I needed to sit down with this group and talk about the difference between democracy, which we were learning about in social studies, and China's government, communism, which they were unfamiliar with. What I didn't realize at that time was the extent of their confusion about historical China as compared to contemporary China. I also noticed that students were spending so much time puzzling through what was happening in the book that they were not as engaged with the issues and ideas as I had expected.

After responding to the story by adding to their graffiti boards several times as they continued reading chapters, they looked for issues they saw as significant in the books. They identified these on a consensus board. On a large piece of paper with sections for each, they individually listed the issues that they felt were important in the text. They then had to come to consensus about what they all thought were the main issues in the book and list those in the center of the consensus board.

After the groups completed this discussion, we charted the issues found by each group as a class. The issues that students identified across the novels about China were:

- gender preference
- population-one child limit
- adult/child relationships
- lack of resources for families: $ and time
- sick parents

• child abuse
• lack of political freedom
• drug abuse/violence
• equal education opportunities for girls and boys
• care of elderly
• racism
• hunger

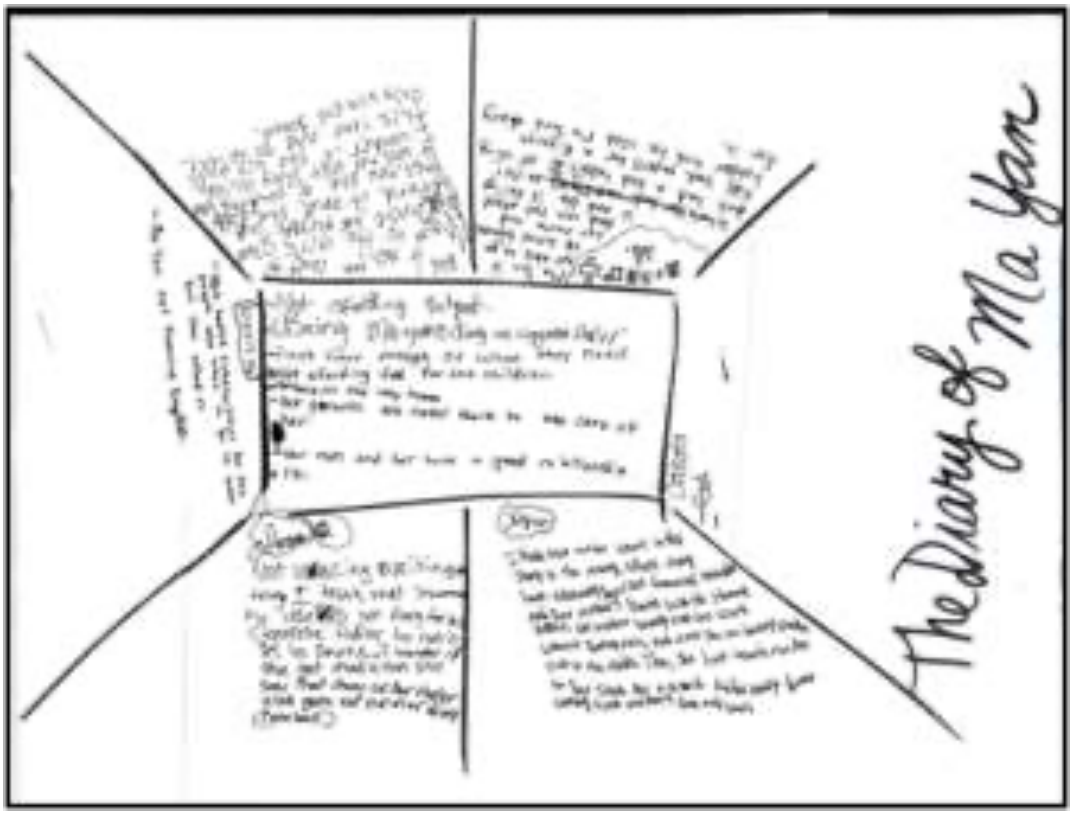
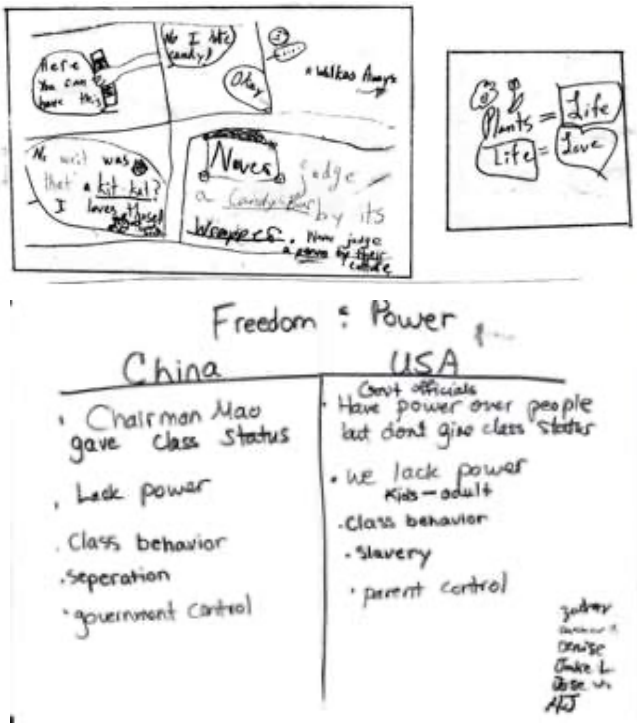


Figure 2. Fifth Grade Consensus Board of The Diary of Ma Yan

As I read through their list of issues from the books about China I became worried that the students thought China was a terrible place. I didn't want to demonize Chinese culture because of misperceptions brought about by reading these historical novels. I wanted the students to realize that at least some of these problems existed in our country historically as well and so asked them to look at the same issues in the United States. In small discussion groups, students chose one issue and created T-charts listing the problems related to this issue and whether or not these issues were exclusive to China or also appeared in the U.S., either now or historically. We then shared in a whole group setting. Through this experience, students realized that these problems were found in the U.S. as well as China. The issues the four groups chose to compare with the U.S. were:

• hunger
• homelessness
• violence

• freedom and power



A common problem with international studies is that students assume that the target country still exists in the past. It is difficult to find current, up-to-date, contemporary texts on many cultures and countries. This was true throughout this study. There were a lot of misconceptions about contemporary culture in China. Students were discussing events as if nothing had changed in China since the 1960s and the Cultural Revolution. Students needed to realize that much had changed in both the U.S. and China since 1966. For instance, one of the issues that came up in several of the novels was that children were disciplined using corporal punishment. Students couldn't believe that kids were hit by adults as a means to teach them how to behave. We discussed how children at our school are currently disciplined and that sometimes they are asked to take a time out or "Think Time" in a special location in the room, an adjoining room, or the office. I explained to the students that in my school years, small slaps were administered by adults to children who misbehaved. Robert confirmed this practice because his dad had shared that if you were swatted at school, usually the parents followed up with the same discipline at home just to make sure you got the point. We talked about the fact that what is considered appropriate changes over time in all societies throughout the world and that we no longer consider it appropriate to slap or swat a child in school. Since most of our books were historical, this practice could have changed in China as well. Robert pointed out that maybe someday in the future sending kids to other rooms for "time out" won't be considered a good thing to do to kids.

The issue of hitting children also came up in the *Diary of Ma Yan*, a contemporary story about China. This story takes place in rural China as does *Chu Ju's House* where children who are living in an orphanage are hit as a form of discipline. In thinking things through, students realized that

changes in attitudes sometimes take place slower in rural areas than in cities.

To challenge some of their misperceptions about contemporary China, I invited a Chinese doctoral student from the University of Arizona, Ke Huang, to visit our classroom to discuss the present day culture. I wanted the students to be able to interview an insider to Chinese culture to counter some of the stereotypes I was afraid they were developing. The students asked many questions especially about her experiences with school and childhood in China. They asked about some of the issues they were seeing in the literature and she was forthright in answering tough questions about population control, corporal punishment, and governmental philosophies. She knew about the time period of the Cultural Revolution, but was too young to remember it. This was a valuable addition to the unit and Ke was an amazing resource.

Near the end of the literature study I searched for articles on contemporary China through the Scholastic web site. I found some interesting pieces appropriate for fifth graders on issues such as population control, China's need for hydro-electric power and the resulting damage to the environment, governmental shifts from communism to free trade, and gender issues. Students read and discussed these short pieces in small groups and shared the big ideas and information with the whole class. This experience gave students a much better understanding of Chinese culture, both in the historical setting of the novels and in contemporary times. In fact, students were fascinated with understanding communism and it became a topic of interest throughout the school year. Some of the students even went snooping to the end of the Social Studies textbook in chapters on the Cold War and Vietnam. They did this again and again and found other texts that mentioned communism on my nonfiction shelves. They had created a context for the ideas behind communism and wanted to know more.

In reflecting on this experience, I felt positively about the ways in which these engagements challenged the misconceptions and stereotypes my students were developing through their discussions in the literature circles. I felt tension, however, about the need to counter their misconceptions and wondered what I could have done differently in setting up this inquiry.

Many times I pull sets of related texts, maps, newspaper articles and other artifacts related to the critical issues or the geographic area of study to enhance the experience for the students. I hope these artifacts will spark an interest in some aspect of the culture. I don't want to pre-teach the concepts, but build experiences and knowledge so the students can puzzle through the text while building their own meanings and understandings. Rosenblatt (1938) states that background materials often receive too much attention and can become an end to a means. She feels that background knowledge has value only when students feel the need for it and when it is assimilated into a student's experience with a certain piece of literature.

It had not crossed my mind that I needed to immerse this new group of students into texts about China and the Cultural Revolution before reading these novels. All but one student had been at Van Horne and had worked with concepts of internationalism and culture for two years. I made the mistake of thinking these new kids had the background, experience, and connections that my previous class had left with in May. I felt they didn't need the additional information and that their experience with the novels could be damaged by giving away too much before reading. I wanted them to glean the information about China and the Cultural Revolution from reading, not be spoon fed the ideas from the teacher. Looking back I realize I could have helped them understand better if I myself had known more about the topic before getting started. In other words, I could have done my homework a bit more thoroughly.

Sylvia Edgerton is a teacher who believes that the more she knows about a topic the more her students will learn (Smith, Diaz, & Edgerton, 2008). Before she starts an inquiry unit she reads newspaper articles, views video clips from the internet, watches the nightly news to increase her awareness of state and federal legislation that might be related to the topic, and interviews anyone who might be knowledgeable about the topic that are getting ready to study. During the study she deliberately plans reflective activities so students can have opportunities to revisit texts and make connections between and among them.

The problems encountered during our literature circles on China taught me firsthand to consider the experiences with a range of texts that students might need both ahead of time and during the study. In this case, they needed ways to more effectively build a context within which they could construct meaning and explore issues from novels. Smith, Diaz, and Edgerton (2008) believe exposure to multiple texts helps build connections and deeper intertextual understandings. They describe intertextuality as the ways that texts -- whether written, visual, or spoken -- are interpreted, one in light of the other. Intertextuality is more than trying to find a personal link while reading or connecting one text to another. It is a cognitive strategy that, linked with intentional thinking, can progressively transform readers and their understandings. They believe this collection of texts should be explored both at the beginning and throughout an inquiry-based study. As students explore multiple texts in multiple settings they spin a web of understanding. Connections are then made from student to student and text to text, creating layers of meaning and new understandings.

After working through the struggles that students had with the concepts and issues in the books relating to China, I am now considering when to prepare kids ahead of time for reading a particular set of novels and when to just immerse them in the novels and let them figure them out the confusions on their own. I now know that I need to continuously struggle with the balance between supplying experiences and texts before literature circles and letting students make their own meaning during the study with intertextual materials that facilitate connections gained through

dialogue with other students and between texts. Clearly, there is no one right way to approach this balance and I need to know the literature and my students to make these decisions with each new set of literature discussions.

Our first literature experience of the year wasn't a failure from a teaching and learning standpoint because I learned a few things about my students and my teaching. It was a learning experience I didn't expect but nonetheless was still very valid. Students learned that they can't judge another place by its history and realized they needed to challenge their assumptions and recognize that other countries are not still operating in the past. One of the most valuable things they learned was how to sustain themselves as readers even when they don't understand the content. They may not have engaged in the in-depth discussions of issues that I had hoped would emerge from these novels, but they learned to puzzle through and develop valuable understandings and knowledge from confusing texts. I know that the knowledge they gained was powerful for them because of this struggle. Tension provided a generative point of learning, both for me and for my students, even though that learning was not what any of us had originally intended.

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Integrating Fiction and NonFiction Texts to Build Deep Understanding

by Lisa Thomas, Project Specialist, Van Horne Elementary School, and Kathy G. Short, Professor, University of Arizona.

Howard Gardner (1991) argues that the purpose of education is to enhance understanding. This straightforward statement challenges the current emphasis on testing and standards in schools and the resulting focus on the acquisition of knowledge and skills at the expense of understanding. This loss of focus on understanding is particularly problematic since understanding involves "making connections among and between things, about deep and not surface knowledge, and about great complexity, not simplicity" (Perrone, 1994, p. 13). These beliefs about the value of deep and complex understandings lie at the heart of our work at Van Horne, with a particular focus on developing conceptual understandings about culture and global issues.

We rely heavily on fiction to help students develop global perspectives and intercultural understanding. Stories that are authentic representations of cultures allow students to live through the characters and go beyond superficial understandings of culture. Literature can help children see how people within that culture actually think and believe and how they view their world. They can see how their own lives and needs for belonging and safety connect in fundamental ways with children in another part of the world as well as what makes those children's lives and ways of thinking unique and distinctive. When we identify confusions or misperceptions in students' understandings, we almost automatically search for a piece of fiction that we think will push their thinking.

Our inquiry into global issues of hunger began, like most of our work, with fiction. We knew that that students needed to develop a deep understanding of the causes of hunger to recognize possible solutions and take thoughtful action. Without a deep understanding of the complexity of the causes, social action often ends up taking the form of charity -- giving handouts to the "poor" to meet immediate needs without addressing the larger societal factors that produce the need or supporting the individuals involved in taking action for themselves (Cowhey, 2006). We consulted a range of resources, particularly a teacher resource handbook, *Finding Solutions to Hunger* (Kempf, 2005), to help us think about the causes that needed to be considered, and gathered picture books and novels that included food or hunger in some way within the plot.

As we discussed the causes of hunger and looked at the books, we realized that we would need to access a broader range of texts to support students in developing a depth of understanding about hunger. In particular, we needed to move from our dependency on fiction to more nonfiction and multimedia texts. We had only located a few fiction books that addressed hunger, but more importantly, we realized that students needed access to a range of resources if they were to really understand the different reasons for hunger.

Story provides a single point of view, one family or character, but our students needed a broader range of texts in order to develop an understanding of the extent of the problem in our world. Nonfiction would provide students with definitions, terminology, and facts to make the issues real;

not just an interesting story, but something actually happening in the world. Through story, students come to understand the human emotions and struggles related to issues, but not necessarily the broader world context of those issues. Students needed to explore the extent of the problem of hunger in the world, especially since most had not experienced hunger themselves. Hunger affects many people in the world and the results are dire, going far beyond the stomach rumblings that our students associated with being hungry. We had also noticed that the characters in fiction usually found solutions to hunger that did not reflect the realities of ongoing chronic hunger.

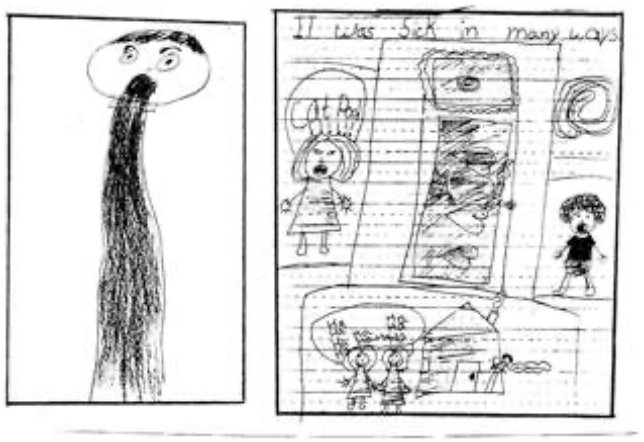
Our professional inquiry as teachers focused on the roles and use of different types of nonfiction and fiction texts within the children's inquiry into hunger. We saw nonfiction as helping students develop an understanding of the extent and severity of the problem and the lack of easy solutions, along with a recognition that the problem exists in their own community as well as in other places around the world. We believed that story humanizes numbers, but recognized that students needed the numbers in this inquiry -- they needed to know the facts. Through story, they might come to feel empathy and sympathy for those who go hungry, but still not feel the need to get involved or be socially responsible without also understanding the extent and causes of the problem.

Locating accessible nonfiction texts remained a difficult issue throughout the inquiry. The majority of nonfiction texts on the causes and experiences of hunger are written for middle school and high school students, which we took as an indication that many have underestimated the ability of young children to consider complex social issues. We found some nonfiction; mostly series books that provide information but are not particularly well written. We also found it interesting that most of these books were written and published first in the U.K., not the U.S., another indication of how American society underestimates the ability of children to consider and understand complex issues. We also located other types of texts, many of them real world materials, such as newspaper articles and brochures from agencies as well as films and guest speakers.

One source of information on causes of hunger is the nonfiction series books that are available in libraries to support students in researching a topic. These books are not well-written powerful nonfiction literature -- they are written to inform rather than to engage and so the writing is fairly pedestrian. Even so, these texts do provide access to a range of information and photographs. We used excerpts from these series books because they were the only nonfiction books that we could locate that we thought were accessible reading materials for students.

One series book that was particularly useful was *Famine: The World Reacts* (Bennett, 1998), which is organized around major aspects of hunger and famine around the world. Each section briefly introduces the facts related to that aspect of hunger, followed by a specific example from some part of the world. We made multiple copies of the sections that addressed the causes of hunger, such as

poverty, natural disasters, war, foreign debts, cash crops, and inequality in food distribution. Students worked in small groups of four with each group reading a different section. We encouraged students to discuss the reading in their group and decide together what was most important for other students to know. The groups then each created posters to illustrate and present the important points of their section. These posters were shared in a gallery walk where students moved from table to table to examine what the other groups had learned. Through this process students were introduced to a broad range of issues on hunger as well as to the language that we would explore in depth throughout our study.

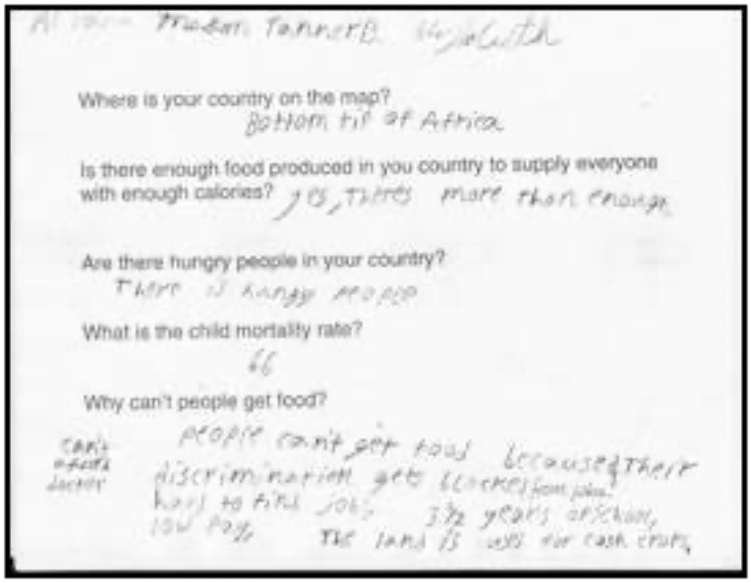


Another nonfiction text were fact cards used to support students in understanding that hunger is world wide and that food scarcity is not the primary cause of hunger. The most common myth about hunger is that people starve because there are too many mouths to feed and not enough food in the world. The reality is that there is more than enough food produced around the world to feed everyone; the issue is not the production of food but sharing that food more fairly. We borrowed and adapted an engagement from *Finding Solutions to Hunger* (Kempf, 2005). Students were introduced to the child mortality rate as a means of measuring the extent of the problem of hunger within countries around the world. The child mortality rate is the number of children out of 1000 who die of hunger and hunger-related diseases before the age of five. We showed students a chart of child mortality rates in ten countries and talked about what those differences meant.

Child Mortality Rate			
Somalia	225	Cambodia	140
Bolivia	66	Mozambique	158
China	37	Guatemala	47
Afghanistan	257	Japan	4
Iraq	125	Israel	6
Sweden	3	USA	8

Students then worked in small groups, each focusing on a fact card from a specific country. They had to determine if enough food could be produced by the country to support its population, how significant the hunger problem was within that country, and why people were going hungry. They read and discussed the fact card together and recorded their thinking about these three questions. Each group shared their findings with the class so that students could then compare issues across countries. Students were surprised to find that even in countries that they had seen as impoverished, such as India and Rwanda, enough food could be grown to feed everyone but that the land instead was used for cash crops like coffee or tobacco or the food was not equally

distributed among the people of that country. They also realized that people can work hard but not be paid enough to buy the food they need and that some governments sell their food to other countries, even though that means their own people go hungry.



Where is your country on the map?
Bottom tip of Africa

Is there enough food produced in you country to supply everyone with enough calories? yes, there's more than enough

Are there hungry people in your country?
There is hungry people

What is the child mortality rate?
66

Why can't people get food?
People can't get food because their discrimination gets blocked from jobs. hard to find jobs. 3 1/2 years of school, low pay. The land is used for cash crops.

Group #2

SOUTH AFRICA
Child Mortality Rate – 66

You live in the most highly developed country on the African continent. Enough grain is grown in South Africa to provide every person with at least 3,000 calories a day. That's a lot of grain! Many people, including you and your family, cannot afford to buy that food. Your skin is black and your country has had a long history of apartheid. You earn only 1/5 what white workers earn and this is not enough to live a healthy life. When you become sick it is nearly impossible to find a doctor who will care for you. Half the black children in your country suffer stunted growth because they cannot get enough food.

Many of your friends are having difficulty finding jobs. There just aren't enough to go around. Seasonal work can be found in the fields of large, wealthy landowners who grow tobacco, cotton, sugarcane or grapes (for wine). These cash crops are shipped to other countries. This work is hard and the pay is not enough to support a family. You would like to see more of the land that is used to grow cash crops used instead to grow food for hungry people.

It is unlikely that your friends or you will find work. There are few jobs available and there is little chance of being trained for a better job. The average South African receives only 3 1/2 years of schooling over a lifetime.

Is there enough food?

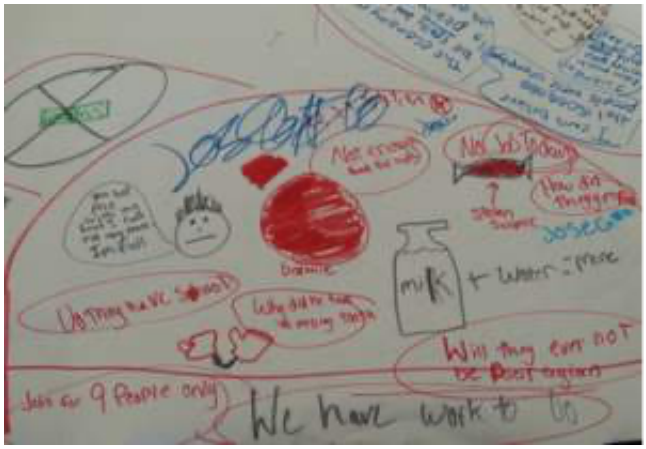
Are there hungry people in South Africa?

Why can't hungry people get food?

Another key engagement was creating a drama text where students took on roles within a global banquet. Students were assigned to three groups and given food at the banquet that reflected the world's population -- those who have more food than what they need (15%), those who have just enough food (60%), and those who never get enough and are always hungry (25%). The 25 students who received only one small bowl of rice to share watched as 12 students each received a large pizza and another 60 sat in small groups with their own bowls of rice and beans. This drama text provided students with a concrete visualization and experience to understand that enough food does exist in the world but is unequally distributed.

These engagements provided students with information that challenged their misconceptions related to hunger and with facts about the many different reasons for chronic hunger. They helped kids understand that chronic hunger over long periods of time was the major issue, not famine and starvation. We wanted kids to do more than know that there was a hunger problem -- we wanted them to care that people are hungry in our world. We knew we needed to return to story as a way to humanize hunger.

We had not found any strong picture books with stories focused around hunger and so looked for other types of texts that might humanize hunger; specifically we looked for movies that would offer a glimpse into the life of an individual or family struggling with hunger. We decided to use excerpts from the movie *Cinderella Man* — the story of a boxer who loses his job during the Great Depression in the U.S. and goes from great wealth to devastating poverty. We showed three short clips from the movie. In the first, the students watched as the mother added water to the milk to make it stretch further and the father gave his share of breakfast to his daughter because she was still hungry after finishing her portion. The second clip showed the father walking past a homeless camp to a factory gate where he waits in a crowd of other men all hoping to be chosen for a day's work. The last was a scene where the father is angry with his son for stealing salami from the butcher until the boy admits that he stole to try and keep the family together. His fear was that the father would send the children away to a farm family. Following each clip we asked the students to show their thinking through words and pictures on a large graffiti board at each table. The movie clips were a powerful text because the actors and story line drew the children into the situation. They empathized with the struggles of this family and the deep silence that filled the room after each short excerpt as children quickly wrote and drew was an indication of their emotional involvement.



After the third excerpt and response on the graffiti board, we talked together about their observations. Students' comments focused on the father's desire to work but inability to find a job to feed his family. They stated that he was not lazy and condemned the business owner who only hired nine workers when there were so many crowded at the gate. Other students pointed out that if the owner hired everyone, his own family would go hungry. They noted that the family didn't have enough food; they had just enough to get by but were still hungry. One group of students had a major debate about stealing and whether it is better to steal than to die from hunger. The full extent of the impact of this movie became clear as they continued to refer to the events from the movie months after viewing the clips. They *felt* the family's pain and hunger in ways that they could not put into words but that stayed with them throughout our inquiry.

Another nonfiction text was an oral story related to food distribution and food safety. This story was told through the use of visual picture cards similar to Kamishibai and a flow chart that focused on the steps involved in growing tomatoes and taking them through the food system to eventually getting them to someone's dinner table.

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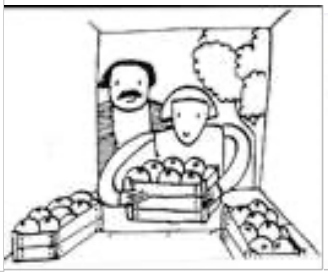

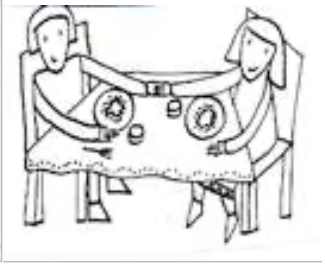

The students then broke into five small groups with each small group discussing on what had to happen and what could go wrong in the five stages of food distribution -- getting ready to grow food, growing the food, moving the food from the field, processing and selling the food, and buying, preparing and eating the food.

Students had been collecting newspaper articles about food or hunger and posting them on a bulletin board in the hallway. They examined a number of the articles to think about what aspect of the food distribution process was breaking down -- drought that was affecting a country's ability to grow food, salmonella in peanut butter processing factories, farm foreclosures, and truckers unable to afford gas to transport food.

We continued to use fiction texts throughout the study in a variety of ways. We read and discussed stories in whole group that addressed specific issues that might cause hunger, such as *Tight Times* (Hazen, 1983) about a family experiencing job loss and economic difficulty and *Sami and the Time of Troubles* (Heide & Gilliland, 1992) about a family involved in war and conflict. We gathered a text set of picture books about families facing tight times. Students read across the texts and recorded their thinking. As a group, they then created a continuum of wants and needs to show which families were doing without things that they wanted (new shoes, a pet, or a favorite food) and which were doing without needs (food, shelter).

Another text set of picture books supported students in exploring how war can be a cause of hunger for many people in our world. While many of these stories didn't address hunger specifically, they gave students a sense of the disruption caused by war. Students sketched or wrote their thoughts about these books on graffiti boards as they read and we then talked as a whole group about how this disruption could result in hunger.

We also scheduled guest speakers to address issues of hunger. We invited Abraham, who was a lost boy of Sudan to share his story of fleeing the war in his native country. The students had read books about this event but having Abraham talk to them in person made the experience more real. Amanda, a volunteer from the Community Food Bank, talked with the children about food security and food insecurity. She provided information about who depends on the food bank and how it works to support community members in finding food security. The children particularly noted that the food bank met immediate needs through emergency food boxes, but also provided more long-term solutions through a low cost grocery store and a food production program where people learned to help themselves through growing food in gardens.

Abraham provided a story that was compelling for the students while Amanda provided information that connected children to the problem of hunger in their community. These two guests contrasted the compelling nature of "living fiction," a personal narrative story, with the effectiveness of "living nonfiction," information about hunger and need. Together, these two types of texts/guest speakers gave students different perspectives on the extent of the problem and ways

of taking action.

When it was time for students to make decisions about how they might take action to address hunger in our world, we turned to the internet. Using links to websites from a range of organizations, students discovered that some organizations addressed only the surface issue of money to buy food to meet an immediate need. The organizations they found compelling were those that focused on children and involved donations to purchase seeds for gardens or animals like goats and chickens as ongoing sources of food and income for families to provide for themselves.

This experience demonstrated for us the importance of using more nonfiction and multimedia texts as a way to connect the classroom with real life -- to make the context of global issues real for students and to provide the information they need to understand the causes of those issues. We also recognized that an overemphasis on fiction can cause other problems for students as readers and inquirers. Stephanie Harvey (2002) points out that 80-90% of the reading we do as adults is nonfiction -- newspapers, magazines, memos, manuals, directions, and informational books -- while elementary classrooms typically have over 80% of their reading as fiction. She argues that kids need more time to read nonfiction in classrooms to learn how to read it and make sense from it as well as to feed their curiosity, passion, and engagement with the world.

The use of such a wide range of types of texts, including drama, visual images, film clips, fact cards, guest speakers, nonfiction excerpts, and picture books provided students with multiple perspectives on the causes of hunger. This range of texts supported more diversity in the types of engagements with these texts and the use of tools to organize information, such as flow charts and T-charts. More significantly, the integration of fiction and nonfiction created a powerful context for students to build deep understanding and knowledge. They were able to connect emotion and reason, the heart and the mind.

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Exploring World Languages in an After School Language Club
by Lisa Thomas, Project Specialist, Van Horne Elementary School

Language is at the heart of the human experience. We know that understanding language is an important part of understanding cultural identity because the way that people view and interpret their world is reflected in their language (Banks, 2001). For three years we have worked at Van Horne to develop intercultural understandings using children's literature. As we gather books to support our inquiries into other cultures, we intentionally include texts in the languages of those cultures. We learned early in this work that students find the world languages represented in these books compelling and return to them over and over to try to make sense of the symbols and structures and to compare the new language to what they know about English.

Our students' interest in world languages has caused us to inquire into language study practices in other elementary schools and to consider expanding our curriculum to include language study. We found several models that schools use to engage students in world language study, choosing the one that best matches their resources, beliefs, and goals. One model is Language Immersion which provides content area instruction in specific target languages. Students are taught math or science in a target world language for between 50 and 80 percent of their school day. A second model is a FLES program where language is taught as a separate subject. World language classes in FLES programs are typically taught for about 30 minutes a day, three to five days a week. A third model is a FLEX program which focuses on exploring target language/s through a collection of group engagements and independent activities. Many proponents of foreign language instruction dismiss FLEX programs, arguing that Immersion and FLES result in greater language fluency. While we agree that students won't become fluent speakers of a new language through a FLEX program, the after school FLEX classes at our school are valuable learning opportunities because they compliment and enrich our cultural studies and generate an interest in studying a range of languages.

We decided to begin our world language exploration at Van Horne by creating an after school language club. Holding the club after school was less disruptive to classroom schedules but meant that we had to create, structure, and plan engagements that were appropriate for children who had already been in class all day. Our students work and study hard during the school day and we believe that, because they are children, their after school time should be playful. Participation in the Language Club was a choice and so we hoped that children would want to join us and look

forward to attending each week. We intentionally planned experiences that children would find interesting and fun.

Our focus in the club was on language exploration within a cultural context. We envisioned a club where children were invited to sample a range of languages across multiple aspects and across multiple cultures. Their experiences in the club would be broad and varied; an opportunity to consider and compare. We knew that the language club experiences would only touch the surface of culture, but would compliment the deep explorations of culture that our students experience as part of our regular school curriculum.

We also didn't expect that students would become fluent speakers of a new language during the club. Our goal was to promote interest in world languages through games, cooking, songs, story and drama. Our hope was that this interest would result in a more focused study of a world language in the future. We saw the language club as the school's first step toward more comprehensive language study opportunities in the future.

Jenny, arts integration specialist, and Lisa, librarian, organized and facilitated the Language Club. We are both native English speakers so we needed guest experts who were native speakers of world languages. We employed the help of international students from the College of Education at the University of Arizona. Three graduate students expressed an interest: Ke, from China, was our Mandarin expert, Junko, from Japan, taught Japanese, and Dan, who moved to the U.S. from South Korea as a teenager, taught Korean. It was significant that our students had the opportunity to work with and learn from these specialists over time. In school settings guests typically visit for one day. This can result in the sense that they are on display and leave students feeling as if these international visitors are exotic. Working with the language specialists over time gave our students the rare opportunity to develop relationships with people from other countries and cultures.

In introducing herself at a conference, Korean-American author, Linda Sue Park, said, “My parents are from Korea. It is near China and Japan but it is NOT China or Japan.” This point of view resonates for us as we work to help our students understand that countries that are close to each other geographically may share some physical and cultural characteristics but each is distinct. Outsiders to those cultures tend to generalize and stereotype all people from Asia as one group. In the beginning stages of our planning we thought that it would be effective to have language specialists from different parts of the world. It was a happy accident that the graduate students who first showed an interest all came from different countries in Asia. As our students developed relationships with Ke, Junko, and Dan, they began to see the connections and distinctions between the peoples and cultures of China, South Korea, and Japan. Later, when another university student from Taiwan visited the club, they realized that there are differences within Chinese cultures.

Students in first through fifth grade were invited to participate in the Language Club. We limited participation to 50 students and the spots filled up quickly. The tuition was fifty dollars for ten weeks but we were able to offer scholarships to families that needed them so no one was turned away because of their inability to pay the tuition. The club met on Wednesday afternoons for 90 minutes. Each meeting included a story time, language lesson, and centers.

We began each club meeting with a snack and whole group story time. We selected literature written in the native languages of our specialists. Dan, Ke, and Junko helped us locate books that were originally published in China, Japan, or South Korea with stories that authentically represented the cultures within these countries. Some of the books had been translated into English, some were in the original language, and some were bilingual. The students enjoyed listening to the stories in their original language, relying on the illustrations to make sense of the story. At times we read the book in both the world language and English. The children were curious about the patterns and repetitions that they heard as the specialists read and they asked many questions, trying to make sense of the structures and sounds within the language. It was evident that they were connecting the new language experiences to what they knew about English.

The students were divided into three smaller groups for language lessons. Each group was taught by a different specialist. Ke, Junko, and Dan planned lessons that introduced specific types of vocabulary or engaged students in a more focused look at some aspect of their native language. During the first three weeks of language club students rotated through all of the languages get a taste of each and to allow them to see the distinctions between these three different, but connected, languages. After this introduction we asked the students to choose the language that they most wanted to study for the remainder of the club. This gave our specialists a chance to connect one week's lesson to the next and provided more focus and continuity for the children.

During language lessons, Junko, Ke, and Dan taught the words for family members using family tree diagrams, introduced games that required students to combine number words with words for facial features and body parts, taught word patterns that are used for large numbers, and shared the origins of the written symbols, encouraging students to form the word with their bodies. Students learned songs that the specialists had sung as children, practiced writing their names in the languages, wrote words that are commonly used at school, and read simple phrases, stories and poetry in the new languages.

After the language lessons we invited students to choose from a range of small group language centers. This was a chance to explore across the languages and cultures represented by our language specialists through art, games, music, movement, technology and cooking. Each individual center emphasized one of the three languages or an engagement from one of the countries and students were free to go to the centers that they found most intriguing. We relied on our specialists to plan center engagements that were culturally relevant and tried to choose experiences that encouraged students to speak or write a new language in some way. Each language specialist worked at one of the centers, while Jenny and I facilitated the other choices.

During center time the children were invited to learn about the Chinese art of cut paper with Ke. They dressed in traditional Korean clothing with Dan. They learned to use chopsticks with Junko. Students played games from each country, surfed websites, prepared sushi, mandu and egg drop soup, created a range of folded paper art, wrote using bamboo brushes and ink, and created watercolors inspired by music and images from all three countries.

Many of the center engagements came from the childhood experiences of our language specialists, making them more than fun activities from a strange land for the children. The songs, games and projects were an authentic part of the identities of our specialists and a reflection of what was important in their lives. The personal stories they told around the projects that the students did at each center deepened the cultural significance. Using chopsticks is a part of Junko's identity, so learning to use them from Junko gave students insight into her as a cultural being. As Dan helped the students try on his own children's traditional Koran clothing, they came to understand how Korean traditions play a role in his life as a Korean American father. Using short video clips from YouTube of Chinese students doing morning exercises, Ke shared her experiences as a young school girl in Beijing. Students associated the center engagements with the identity of the language specialists rather than seeing them as exotic, isolated practices from another part of the world.

Our students didn't become fluent speakers of any of the languages that they explored during the Language Club and we didn't expect that they would. (They did learn and use more words in each language than the Jenny and I!) But, this introduction into the language and culture of these three countries accomplished what we hoped -- our students recognized similarities and distinctions across the cultures. They had the opportunity to meet and develop a relationship with people from other parts of the world. Finally, students developed an awareness of and interest in a world language that might lead to deeper language study in the future.

The parents in our community were pleased that their children had this opportunity to explore

Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. Many have asked us to offer the after school language program again. We are interested in finding languages specialists from other parts of the world to expand our students' experiences with world languages.

The success of our brief exploration of language inspired our staff to look closely at ways to develop second language fluency in students at Van Horne and we began reading professional literature about world language instruction. We learned that in addition to opening the door to other cultures and helping a child to understand and appreciate people from global cultures, becoming bilingual and biliterate would benefit our students in a number of significant ways. Cognitive research shows that second language learning has a positive effect on intellectual growth and enhances a child's mental development. Students who learn a second language develop flexibility in thinking, greater sensitivity to new language learning, and a better ear for listening. Students who study a second language in elementary school have improved overall school performance and superior problem-solving skills (Suarez-Orozco & Sattin, 2007).

Technology and economic interdependence have made the world a smaller place. Never before have so many people from different countries been able to come together to share knowledge and do business (Stewart, 2007). We want the students at our school to be able to interact successfully in this interconnected world and we believe that the ability to speak more than one language will help them achieve this success.

We are in the process of securing the resources necessary to offer Spanish and Mandarin language immersion programs at Van Horne so that our students will have the opportunity to become fluent in a second language. In the meantime, we will continue to offer our afterschool language program and give our students a chance to play with a wide range of languages taught by people from around the world. This experience will broaden students' experiences and open their minds to the world.

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Understanding by Looking Below the Surface
by Kathryn Tompkins, Third/Fourth Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

By my eighth year of teaching elementary school, I assumed that I had pretty much figured out

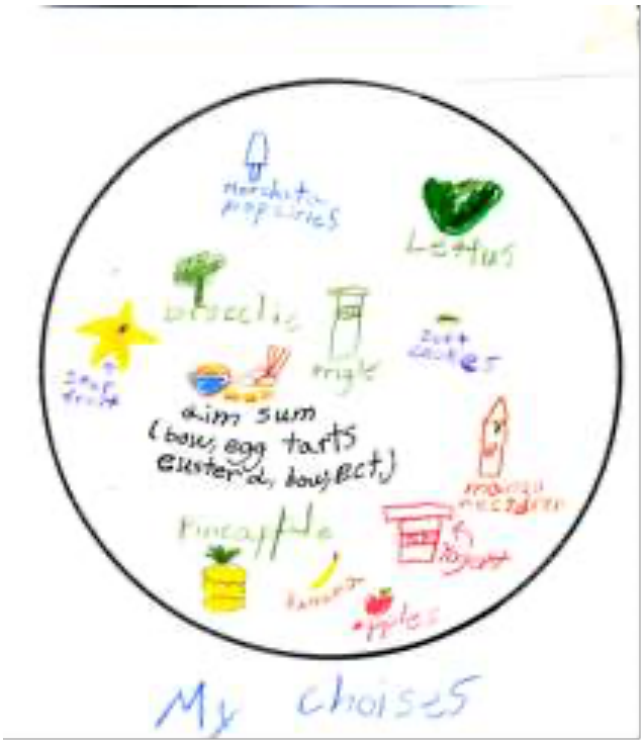
children by the end of the first day of school. With Elise, I learned how wrong my initial impressions could be. Elise not only taught me the importance of carefully observing a child in multiple contexts, but also the significance of curriculum that really engages children as thinkers. I think we often underestimate children, particularly children who are quiet or unpredictable in their responses. This experience forced me to be a "kidwatcher" as I got to know Elise in as many contexts as possible and came to see her as a unique and valued person (Goodman, 1978).

Elise started out as quiet, almost withdrawn. She was the type of child who disappeared in a large group of students, especially my classroom which was dominated by a group of boys who were highly verbal and loved to hear themselves talk, whether or not they had anything to contribute. She was probably also somewhat intimidated by the fact that she was a third grader in a third/fourth combination classroom and so younger than many other students. Elise was not a typical quiet child, because she would fly off the handle at things that seemed minor -- someone knocking her paper off her desk or brushing by her too closely. She would yell and dissolve into tears, asking to be left alone. It was almost as if she allowed her resentment to build up inside like a pressure valve that would suddenly blow over something relatively minor. I was worried how I would work with this young lady for nine months.

When we started to look at the world through literature, a different side of Elise began to emerge. I recognized a sense of compassion like none I had ever seen in a child. Elise sees the bigger picture in life. I would describe her as someone who "gets it" in the sense that she understands how the world works and the larger social issues that influence our actions and thinking. She thinks about the "why" behind actions, not just what is happening and that's unusual at this age level. As sensitive and bright as she was, she still held back in class discussions. She would make one or two comments that would blow me away, but never monopolized a discussion with her thoughts. Her connections were always to the bigger issues in a story, not the details, and she often took a stance that was in opposition to the popular view being expressed by other class members.

For example, after listening to *Tight Times* (Hazen, 1983), about a family where the father loses his job and tells his son that they cannot afford a pet, many children focused on the cat the boy found in a garbage can or the family's lack of money in their sketch to stretch responses. Elise's sketch highlighted the economic system and how the closure of stores affects people in losing their jobs and therefore not having enough money for food. She also noted that while people can lose their jobs, animals never do.

Even in relatively straightforward projects, Elise's thinking stood out. When class members drew two plates with their choices of food on one plate and what their parents would choose for them on the other plate, most drew hamburgers, pizzas, sodas, and ice cream. Elise's plate held broccoli, dim sum, mango nectarine. Horchata popsicles, and yogurt.



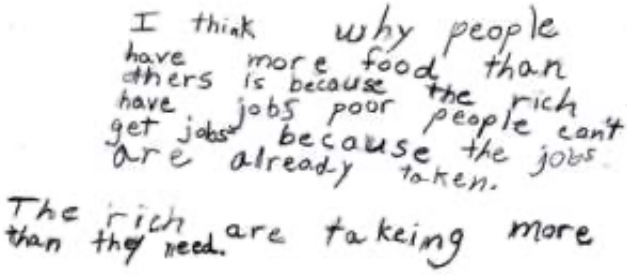
I began to see her as a child who was constantly engaged in deep, complex thinking and who could see the underlying interconnections between events and people. She thought about how people thought and why they took particular actions, but she had also learned, for a range of reasons, to only occasionally share that thinking with others. Elise seemed to think and feel deeply but to suppress much of those feelings and thoughts within her, only occasionally letting them emerge; the problem was they did not always emerge in socially appropriate ways. She was often overlooked by other children in the classroom because she so rarely took initiative. All of that changed at our global banquet.

For our school's global banquet we decided to have the students separate into three different groups to represent the world's population. There was the very small blue group that represented the wealthy. They each received a large pizza to eat. The largest group was the yellow group and they had bowls of rice and beans. The red group represented the 25% of the population in the world that never gets enough to eat. They had one small bowl of rice to share among 25 children.

Elise was a member of the red group. The red group, consisting of first through fifth graders, sat on the floor in a circle around a tarp. They watched as the other two groups got their food, eagerly awaiting their portion. When the small bowl of rice was set in the middle of their circle, they were very disappointed. Several of the older students edged their way to the outside of the group, staring longingly at the pizza being devoured by the blue group.

One of the dominant fourth grade boys from my classroom grabbed the bowl for himself and another friend, turning their backs on the group and stuffing the rice in their mouths. Most of the students just stared in shock. They weren't about to say anything, but. Elise wasn't like most students. With her emotions raging, Elise jumped up, grabbed the bowl out of his hands and carefully began passing the rice out to each member of her group, making sure that each got a handful. She stood up for what she thought was right, is a rarity among elementary-school aged girls.

At the end of the banquet, the students were asked to each write a reflection before leaving to go back to their classrooms. Elise's reflection indicated her understanding of the interdependence among different groups of people and the problem of the "haves" getting more and more so that the "have nots" continue to get less and less.


I think why people have more food than others is because the rich have jobs poor people can't get jobs because the jobs are already taken.

The rich are takeing more than they need.

Back in the classroom, we talked about what students would like to do to help fight hunger. Elise said that it was important to take action because "it helps people in need and makes the world a better place." She also thought it was important to learn and tell people about it in order to "form a group" to work together.

At the end of the school year, the students each created a sketch to stretch using visual symbols to show the meaning of taking action. Elise told us that her sketch focused on the need to help the hungry and that everyone in the world, whether from the yellow, blue or red group, has to help. The light bulb signified the need to know about hunger and what causes hunger to figure out how to help others, and the heart signified that people have to want to do it by caring and making a

choice to help. This sketch reflected her understanding of the complexity of the issues involved in taking action on the global problem of hunger. Her understandings of the need to connect the heart and mind and to hold everyone responsible for action are impressive, especially given that she was only nine years old at the time. Elise sees the bigger picture in life and wants to work with others to make positive changes in the world.

What I found interesting was that this experience seemed to help Elise find her voice in the classroom. I noticed that she spoke up more frequently in whole class meetings and was more likely to express her perspective. She was willing to publicly take unpopular positions in discussions and to explain her thinking. When the dominant boys tried to override her voice, she asserted herself to make sure her perspective was heard. Taking such a public stand against greed and inequity in the global feast seemed to have given her a sense of personal empowerment and she continued to act on her own sense of power. The tears and outbursts almost completely disappeared as she expressed her thinking rather than holding it inside her.

I believe that our classroom learning environment played a key role in supporting Elise in developing this sense of empowerment. In a more traditional setting, I think she would have remained silenced, keeping her thoughts and feelings inside. Elise flourished in a classroom where her thinking was challenged and where she could engage with critical and complex issues about the world. Another essential aspect of this environment was that we valued multiple perspectives, never settling for one "right" answer or response. We always for a range of perspectives on any issue or piece of literature and this supported Elise in being willing to make her ideas public. We were inquirers, more focused on creating new understandings and asking new questions about complex issues, than on finding a simple answer. In more than one way, Elise taught me to look below the surface -- of both children and ideas.

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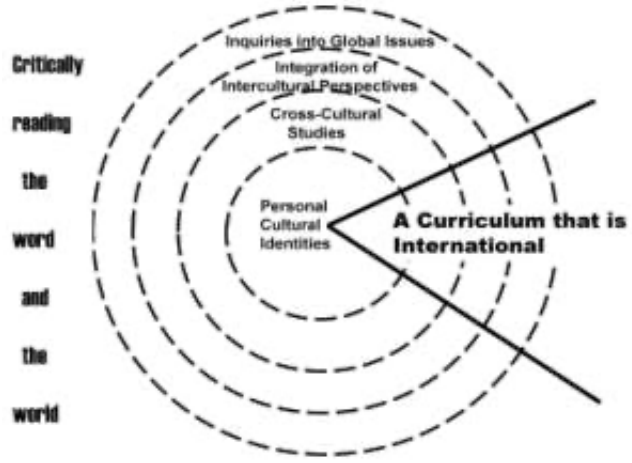
Using the Inquiry Cycle with Young Children: A Global Study of Fairy Tales
by Jennifer Griffith, First Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

We met as a staff in January for our annual winter retreat to reflect on the fall and decide where we want to head with our kids related to our school-wide concept. In the fall we chose the broad concept of power and at our winter retreat we saw the need to bring our concept back to the forefront. We were familiar with utilizing inquiry studies, a philosophy of building a curriculum with kids, and were excited about exploring this option in both the Learning Lab and our classrooms. First we knew it was important to define inquiry for us to have an understanding of where to go with our students. Kathy Short (2009) defines inquiry as a collaborative process of connecting to and reaching beyond current understanding to explore tensions significant to the learner. Inquiry is natural to how we learn, based on connection, problem-posing and problem-solving, conceptual understanding, and collaboration within a community of learners.

Jaquetta Alexander and I had been team-teaching first and second grades and we knew moving into an inquiry study with 60 students was going to be a challenge but we were up for it. We had recently been to NCTE in San Antonio where we listened to Brian Edmiston talk about dramatic inquiry with fairy tales and young students. We were intrigued and excited about bringing fairy tales and inquiry into our classroom. We knew we needed a framework, something to provide a bigger picture for our work, and in our study group we were re-introduced to the inquiry cycle, an authoring process where learners engage in authoring or constructing meaning about themselves and the world (Short, 2009). It was this framework that set up our work with fairy tales.

The Inquiry Cycle

Not only was the inquiry cycle a focus for us, but Van Horne Elementary had been involved in working with Kathy Short from the University of Arizona for three years, focusing on international literature and weaving it into the curriculum so this piece of our study was just as important. She has created a framework that supports a curriculum that is international and we referred back to this model to help us set up the international piece of our inquiry.



A Curriculum that is International (Short, 2008)

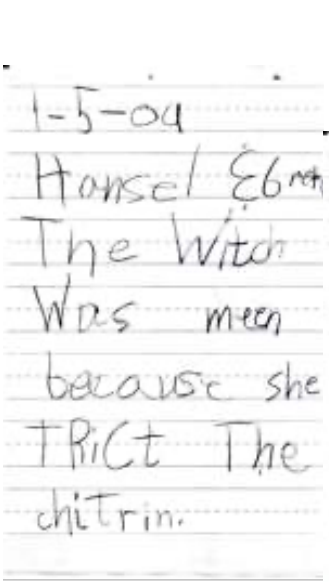
Using international literature with young children can often be challenging to find the "just right" book for their level but international fairy tales were easily accessible. We were excited to work at the integration of international perspectives, where cultural views are woven into an inquiry. According to Short (2008) integrating international perspectives encourages more complexity in the issues kids consider. They are challenged to move past their own cultural perspective into more of a world view.

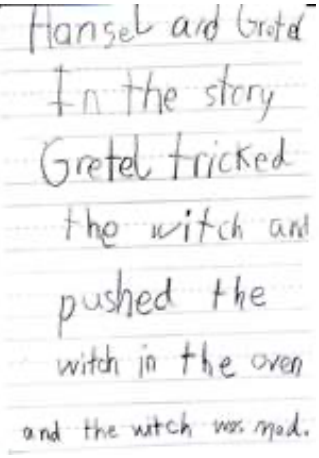
Our inquiry of international fairy tales began by using the inquiry cycle as our framework. There is a beginning point to the inquiry process and that is connections to children's lives. According to Short (2009) connection helps kids get at the why rather than the what of a unit. Our goal was to immerse students in engagements with fairy tales so they could explore their current understandings. Our students had a background with fairy tales so we chose to spend the first week by exploring a variety of familiar fairy tales. We began our inquiry in early January, by reading Hansel and Gretel as our first fairy tale. Jaquetta and I were eager to bring in dramatic inquiry, an inquiry that invites kids to use drama to engage with a piece of literature by taking on the roles of the characters and engaging in problem solving. Edmiston (1993) argues that, "Drama enables students to respond thoughtfully and insightfully to literature" (p.250). We decided to focus on the emotions of the characters to get the kids connecting to the characters.

After every read aloud Jaquetta and I gave kids an opportunity to process and buddy buzz, a strategy that has kids turning to a partner to share their thoughts about the story -- what they noticed, connections and wonderings. After a few minutes of buddy buzz, students shared their

thinking with the class. As a group we discussed the emotions the characters showed and how that might look in drama to connect with a story. Kids were engaged with this activity, always wanting to show the emotion and what it would look like. To connect to their own life experiences, we asked them to connect the emotion of the character to a time they had experienced that same emotion. We created an emotional word wall that the emotions we found that first week in our introduction to fairy tales.

Not only did we discuss the read aloud as a class but we felt it was important for kids to have an opportunity to self-reflect on the story and make connections and noticings. We introduced them to their response logs, a place for them to do their own thinking and writing about the fairy tales. Abby wrote about how Gretel was sad when her mom and dad were gone and then went on to explain why they were gone. We had been pushing the kids to explain their thinking in order to go beyond what they thought and explain the why. It was encouraging to see the kids attempt this. Not only did Abby take the challenge but Cory did too when he talked about how Gretel tricked the witch and pushed her in the oven and because of that the witch was mad. Abbey A. used the important "because" to describe why the witch was mean. We knew we were headed in the right direction and continued to focus on giving the kids time to reflect and connect to the fairy tales we were exploring.


1-5-04
Hansel & Gret
The Witch
Was meen
because she
TRiCt The
chitrin.


Hansel and Gretel
In the story
Gretel tricked
the witch and
pushed the
witch in the oven
and the witch was mad.


Hansel&Gretel
Gretel was sad
when her Mom
and Dad wer
gone they wer
gone becuse her
Mom didnt want...
both Hansel and
Gretel out of
The house.

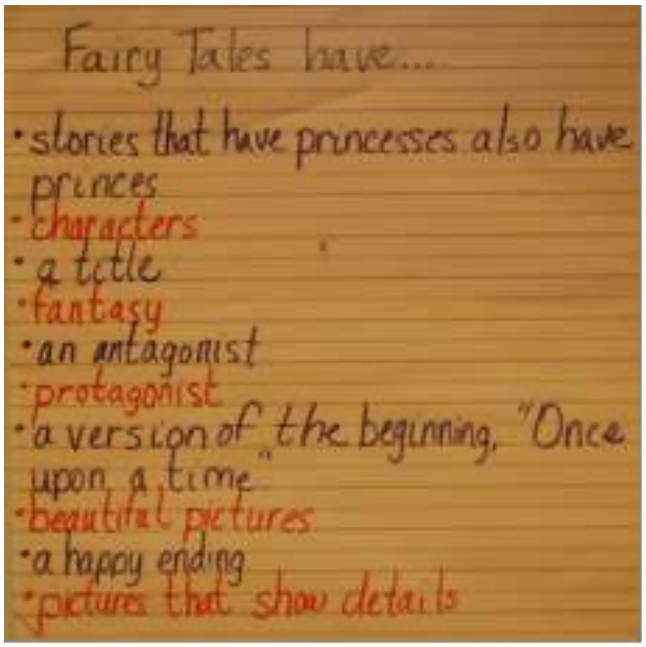
We looked at Cinderella, The Three Pigs, Rapunzel, and Jack and the Beanstalk in our first week of the study. We wanted to give kids a good background on the traditional European versions of these fairy tales and have them connect with the characters through emotions and their thinking about the stories. Cory demonstrated why Cinderella was sad when he explained that it was because her step-sisters wouldn't let her go to the ball. Abby made the same comment and added that they were mean to Cinderella because she wore dirty clothes but Cinderella thought she was fine. The kids were not only able to explain their thinking but added additional details like Abby's comment on

what Cinderella thought about her step-sisters being mean to her.

After being introduced to the five fairy tales we felt it was important for the kids to define a fairy tale so they could refer back to their definition throughout our study. We made a chart of the things they had learned about fairy tales and what they noticed as characteristics across them. They shared that fairy tales have:

• princesses and princes
• characters
• a title
• fantasy
• an antagonist and protagonist
• a version of the beginning, “once upon a time…”
• a happy ending

Through this first week of connections we wanted to provide the children with the structure of a fairy tale and so Jaquetta and I had used the terminology of antagonist, protagonist and genre in talking with the kids. As a group we put our thinking together and came up with a definition of a fairy tale -- “A fairytale is a make believe story that has a protagonist that tricks the antagonist in the end.” We referred back to this definition throughout our study to see if it still held true.

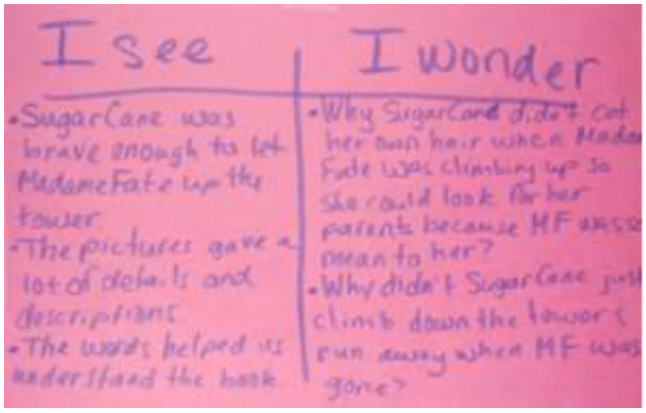


We knew after a week the kids were ready to move into invitation within the inquiry cycle. Short (2009) defines invitations as an opportunity for kids to expand their knowledge, experiences and perspectives in order to push their thinking beyond their current understandings. As teachers, Jaquetta and I knew it was our job to immerse our students in meaningful invitations to support this part of the cycle. We chose to narrow our fairy tale inquiry down to three popular fairy tales

and pull in as many international variants as we could to help us develop in-depth invitations and support our international focus. We chose to study variants of Cinderella, Rapunzel, and Little Red Riding Hood.

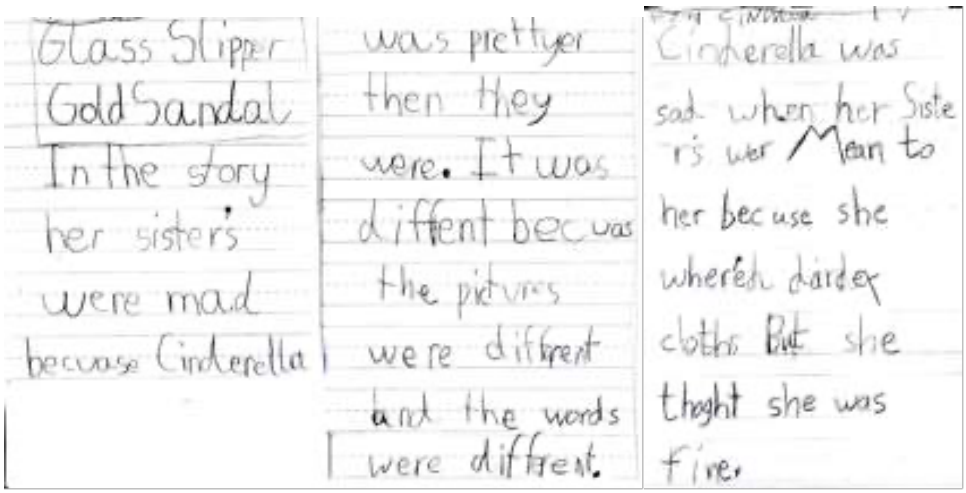
Our 60 kids were divided into the three groups. Jaquetta focused on Rapunzel, I focused on Little Red Riding Hood and our classroom aides, Jill and Anna, focused on Cinderella. The kids spent roughly a week studying variants of each fairy tale. According to Short (2009), invitations should provide engagements that expand their knowledge to build new understandings and raise tension. With that in mind we chose to read a different variant each day, have a literature discussion, chart their "I wonder's" and "I see's" and then conclude with some self-reflection time focusing on perspective and emotion. After kids were done with responding we encouraged them to browse through several titles of fairy tales that we had put together in bins for them to do wide reading to engage with other variants of the fairy tale they were working with each bin holding 15-20 titles. We utilized our literacy block which was roughly ninety minutes.

In our study group, Kathy had mentioned how a teacher in the younger grades had used a t-chart to support kids' thinking about what they saw in a story and what left them wondering. Jaquetta and I thought this sounded simple enough for our kids but we also wanted to invite them to think thoughtfully about the story. Kids naturally would come up with an "I See" and automatically share an "I wonder" that was closely related to what they saw. An example can be seen in Jaquetta's groups chart for *Sugarcane* (Storace, 2007) where a student shared that Sugarcane was brave to let Madame Fate climb up the tower. But on the flip side the kids wondered why Sugarcane didn't cut her own hair instead of letting Madame Fate climb up the tower.



In conjunction with thinking and recording what they saw and wondered about the fairy tale the kids were also reflecting in their response logs on what they thought about the story. The use of response logs were used throughout our study. Abby began in the Rapunzel group and wrote about why Rapunzel was sad, giving details and using that important word "because." Cory was in the Cinderella group to begin with and his responses were awesome -- he was not only talking about why the stepsisters were mad at Cinderella but he compared the Cinderella we had heard during

our first week, a European variation, to the one Jill read to them, an international variant goes across cultures, *Glass Slipper Gold Sandal* (Fleishman, 2007).



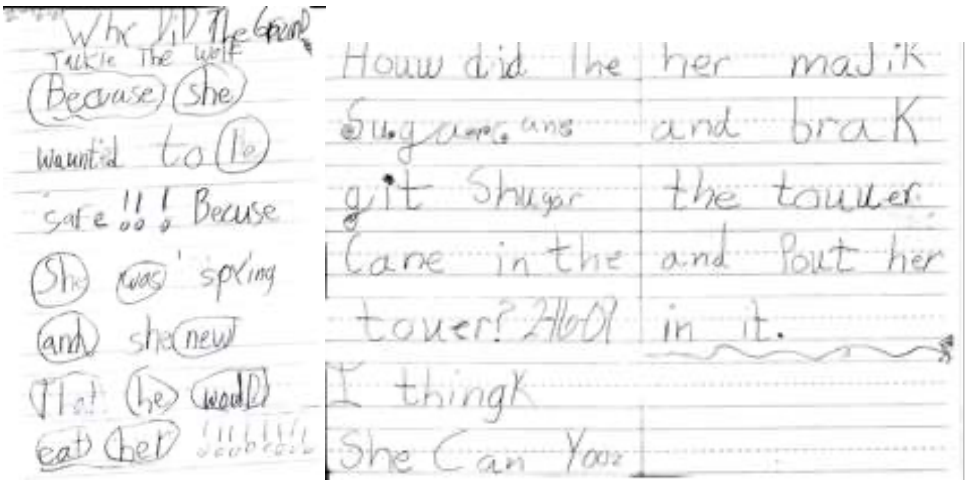
As we met and discussed our kids' thinking and wonderings about the variants we were reading in each group we felt we had hit a wall. The kids were producing these great wonderings but we weren't offering the opportunity for them to explore these ideas. We went back to Kathy's chapter on inquiry, and, sure enough, tension comes after invitation, where there is a shift from teacher-guided inquiry to student-driven inquiry. It was obvious our kids had questions that needed to be answered and it was our job to encourage them to investigate their wonderings.

We provided students with time to do investigations through opportunities to problem-solve and explore their wonderings in more depth. At the end of the week, we asked the kids to review their wonderings and choose one that resonated with them and that they wanted to explore further. We offered several possibilities to give them an idea about what we meant by choosing something to explore. In the group I worked with, we created a chart of their wonderings from which they could choose an investigation. Some international variants of Red Riding that we read don't depict her as having parents and many kids were intrigued by this. Others wondered why the setting was always the same. They were also interested in the different emotions of the wolf. We left the projects open ended, but did introduce several different mediums and processes they could use. Some possibilities for the first projects included drawing your wonderings, using drama to express your interpretations or blocks to build your thinking, and writing letters to the author asking them why they made particular choices.

When the projects were complete, Jaquetta and I came together to discuss the results of the projects and realized they were not what we were hoping for. We felt the kids didn't engage thoroughly with their wonderings the way we were hoping, so we decided to rework the investigation part of the inquiry cycle by bringing in more demonstrations. We noticed that the kids hadn't actually delved into the investigation portion of the cycle but instead focused on the

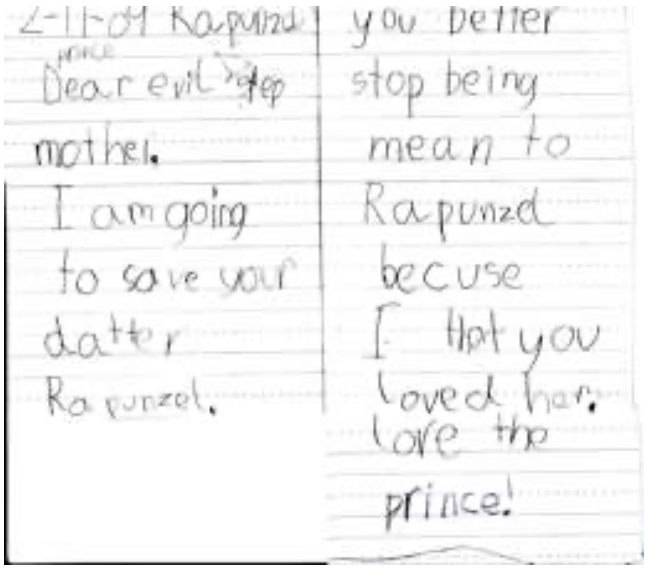
representation first. Many students heard about the mediums they could use and began their projects with a focus on what they could do, instead of engaging in a dialogue about the ideas in their investigation. Jaquetta and I knew that we may have begun this process too early and that we should have given them more guidance and time to investigate their questions before introducing the projects which were actually the representation portion of the inquiry cycle. Therefore our investigations were unsuccessful the first time around.

Demonstration is the part of the cycle where teachers offer support in the students' investigations and this was the area we knew we had to revise for the kids to get the most out of their investigations. The following week we had a new group of kids exploring a new set of fairy tales but, as teachers, we each stayed with the same fairy tale to help strengthen our skills and knowledge of the stories. Doing it this way allowed us to compare and contrast the students' engagements and wonderings in each group. After working with these stories for a week, we put the kids together and talked about what they noticed that all the stories had in common. We also asked them to think about questions they might investigate further. This seemed to make it easier for the kids to think about the stories and choose a question to explore. While thinking about the Little Red Riding Hood stories, Abby was intrigued with *Little Red Riding Hood: A Newfangled Prairie Tale* (Ernst, 1995) and explored the question, "Why did the Grandma tackle the wolf?" by using her background knowledge and inferences. Her interpretation was that grandma simply wanted to be safe and so was spying on the wolf and knew that he would eat her. Abbey A. was curious to know how Sugarcane got in the tower and explored that question using her knowledge and inferences as well. She thought that the sorceress, Madame Fate, used her magic to break the tower and put her in it. Giving them adequate time to engage in dialogue helped them think about their investigations with more depth. Jaquetta and I felt that having the opportunity to reflect on what the stories had in common and choosing a question to investigate produced more thoughtful, meaningful representations.

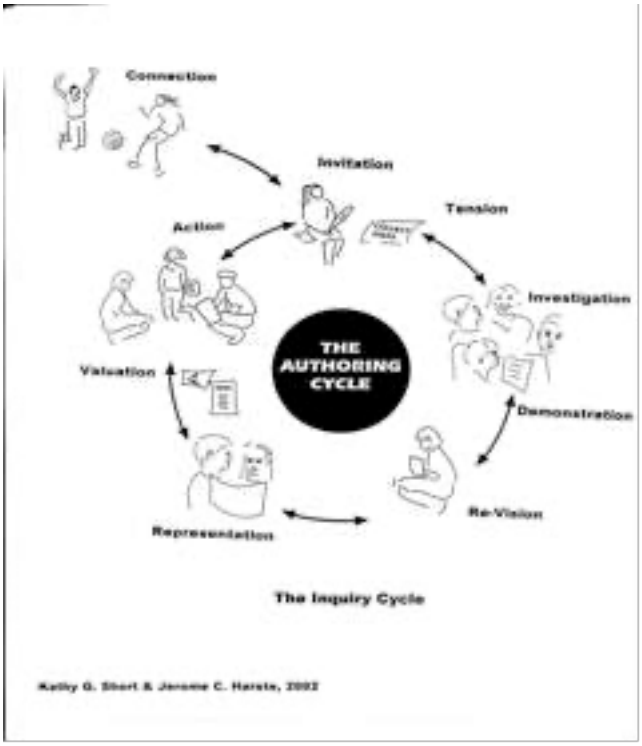


Throughout the study we continued to think about emotions the characters took on in the stories

and really delved into perspectives as a way to think about others. Our response logs gave the kids that needed opportunity to pull back and reflect on their learning. It is these opportunities that fill the re-vision part of the inquiry cycle. We introduced our kids to letter writing and challenged them to push themselves in their self-reflection time by taking on the role of a character and writing a letter to another character using emotion. It was at this point in our study that we saw the kids become engaged and transfer their thinking to other content areas. The kids showed such emotion and conviction in their letters. Cory took on the role of the prince and wrote to the Evil Stepmother in Rapunzel telling her he was going to save her daughter Rapunzel and she better stop being mean to her because he thought she loved her.

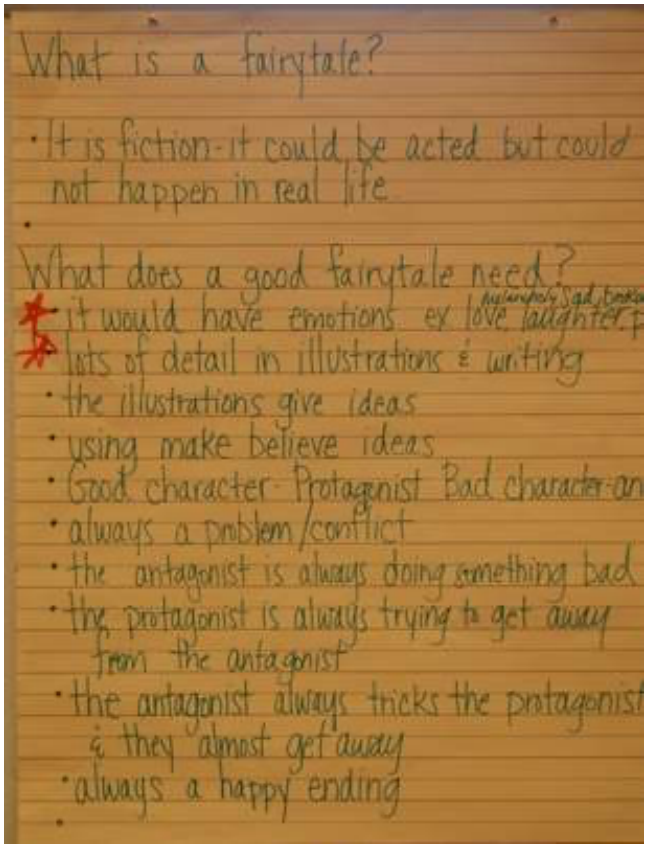


We finished the next four weeks so that every kid got to experience all three fairy tales, take on the roles of characters, and investigate their questions. When each child completed studying Rapunzel, Cinderella, and Little Red Riding Hood, we felt something was missing and knew we hadn't completed the inquiry cycle. We had encouraged kids to connect with fairy tales and use their background knowledge to further their understanding, we had invited students to expand their knowledge through responding and creating class charts on what they saw and wondered, we gave them time to ask and investigate their questions, a chance to represent their thinking and pull back and reflect in their logs. We were missing valuation and action and so again put our heads together to think about where to head next so our kids saw our inquiry all the way through.



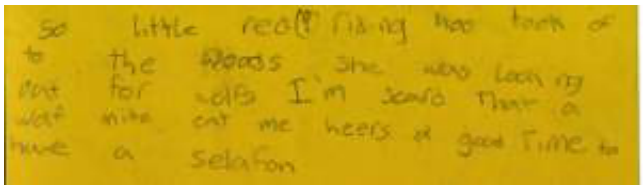
At about this time our staff presented at the IRA conference in Phoenix and we sat in on a session about Kamishibai, a Japanese storytelling method used with young kids. We went through the process as a group of creating our own Kamishibai of The Three Little Pigs. Jaquetta and I both looked at each other with the same thought -- this would be perfect for a culminating project to finish our inquiry on fairy tales. We were thrilled to get back to school and take on this new endeavor to support our inquiry.

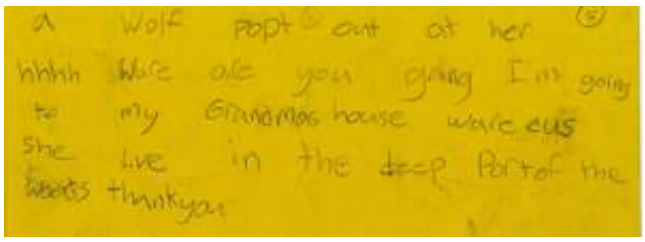
Valuation was where we were on the cycle, a place for the kids to step back and think about what is of value from our inquiry thus far. Short (2009) argues that valuation allows learners to reposition themselves differently in the world. So Kamishibai seemed perfect, a new storytelling method to tie into our fairy tales. Demonstrating for the kids what Kamishibai was and looked like was imperative, so we purchased several and used these to model how they worked. We created a chart of what we noticed about the Kamishibais, how they are structured, and how they differ from a book. The kids were engaged in the structure of Kamishibai and we knew they would enjoy using them in our final work with fairy tales. We reviewed what makes a fairytale by creating a chart to be used during our work with Kamishibai.



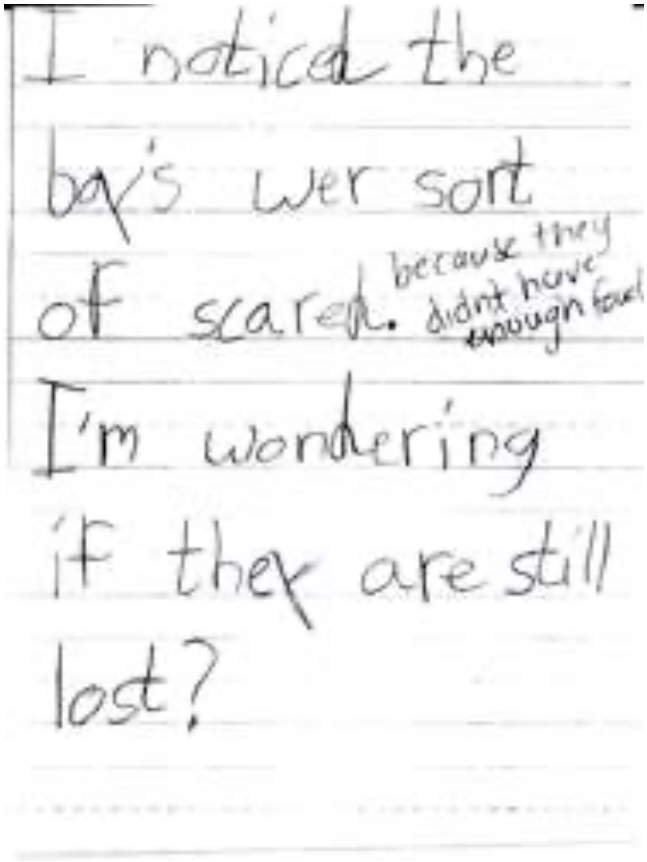
Although the valuation piece of the cycle does not necessarily mean having to do a large summative assessment that consists of a time consuming project, we felt that allowing the kids to create their own variation of one of the fairy tales through Kamishibai would be valuable. Taking on this project encouraged the kids to pull from their work and experiences with the fairy tales. In creating their Kamishibai, they were using what we had learned about emotions to express their characters' feelings and perspectives and the characteristics of a fairy tale to help them understand and create their stories -- all within the structure of a Kamishibai. All of these components were used when working on this project. Some students chose to re-create a variant of a fairy tale they'd studied and others chose to take what they knew about fairy tales and created their own variant of Cinderella, Red Riding Hood or Rapunzel.

Part of valuation is presenting what students have learned to an audience. We had a Kamishibai party where the kids were put in small groups and parents were able to listen to what their children had learned about the process and fairy tales. It was impressive to watch these kids talk to their parents about their learning and understanding of both the Japanese storytelling method and fairy tales.





The final part of the inquiry cycle is action where we address the "so what?" of the project and think about how this will apply to our lives. It was obvious that the use of perspective and emotion were two components that kids engaged in and where we saw the transfer to other areas such as the playground and other content areas. Throughout the year the kids were able to see others' perspectives and be compassionate to emotions of characters. We particularly saw evidence of this in their literature discussions and responses as we moved into our conceptual thinking about the power of food after we completed the fairy tales inquiry. In April, when we were discussing the Lost Boys of Sudan, Abby talked about how she noticed the boys were sort of scared because they didn't have enough food and she was wondering if they still were lost today. So when I reflect on the last piece of the cycle it's easy for me to see that the action part integrated into students' thinking as they connected what they had learned about perspective, emotion and questioning from our inquiry on fairy tales into new inquiries.



Short (2009) argues that inquiry is not merely a new set of instructional practices, but a theoretical shift in how we view curriculum, students, learning, and teaching. We want to remember this as we go through the inquiry cycle, which can be daunting. Surprisingly enough, we found that as we moved through an inquiry with our students, that it was natural to progress from invitation to tension, investigation, demonstration, re-vision, representation, valuation, and action. Taking inquiry as a stance is a powerful way to move through the curriculum with students, providing the opportunity to engage in meaningful, thoughtful invitations together and to take action in their thinking and lives.

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Making Personal Connections: Conceptual Thinking in Kindergarten
by Kathryn Bolasky, Kindergarten Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

Being able to connect various pieces of information to a larger concept is a critical skill that students need to make meaning out of what they are learning. Concepts are mental constructs, organizing ideas that categorize a variety of examples or facts (Erickson, 2002). Conceptual thinking about big ideas is typically developed in intermediate grades. This does not mean that young children are not capable of making meaning of what they are learning and thinking about ideas -- it just looks different.

At our elementary school, we have a school-wide focus on using international literature to teach our students about the world through inquiry studies. Students, kindergarten through fifth grade, participate in instructional experiences that challenge them to think critically about different concepts and topics that are important in our world. Our school has a unique learning environment that engages all of our students at their level. Many of these engagements take place in our schools Learning Lab that is conducted by our school's project specialist, Lisa Thomas. We are also lucky enough to consult with Kathy Short from the University of Arizona. I have had the pleasure of teaching third grade and kindergarten at Van Horne, which has allowed me to experience our research from two distinctly different vantage points.

During my year as a third grade teacher I was amazed by the advanced thinking the students were able to engage in. I remember looking back and being in awe of the way students conceptualized major life issues, like embarking on forced journeys. We had spent time looking at refugee experiences. My students wrote essays synthesizing their thinking (see http://wowlit.org/on-line-publications/stories/storiesi2/?page=11). One essay in particular stands out in my mind, written by Andy who had been dealing with his parents divorce throughout the year. He used his personal experience to make sense of the feeling of loss that refugees experience. His thesis statement was, "When you move, you leave things behind." In his essay he argues, "Life will not fit in a suitcase. When my mom had to move she had to leave pictures of me as a kid. She was really sad because she wanted them. Refugees have to leave their homes, toys, and pets behind." At eight years old he understand the concept of loss and value of belongings. Moments like these are precious and this year I learned quickly that they are not ones that happen in kindergarten!

While kindergarteners do not typically make conceptual statements like “Life will not fit in a suitcase,” it is important not to underestimate what they can think and say. As I look back at the statements my kindergarteners made, I am pleased and excited to see that they too are able to think conceptually. Each time my class visited the Learning Lab, we read a story aloud, discussed it, and drew about it in some way. Lisa and I took dictation during the drawing engagements to record their thinking. These drawing and dictations allowed me to see a major shift in my kindergarteners thinking over the year. My students started the year by retelling events of the stories and then moved into connecting the stories to their own lives to make meaning of the story.

Retellings

At the beginning of the year, my students were still adjusting to their new school setting. A simple drawing engagement was a way for them to explore not only using markers, but drawing what they thought about the story. Drawings and dictation at the beginning of the year were basic retellings of the stories that were being read aloud. For example the very first time that we went to lab, Lisa read aloud *Fred Stays with Me!*, by Nancy Coffelt (2007). Our focus was on the power of choice and the decisions students feel they are able to make in their lives. My students discussed this concept on a very surface level. When asked to draw about the story, they created images that were retellings of the story. Reyna responded by drawing a picture of the part in the story when the dog, Fred, is stealing socks. Micaela responded by drawing a similar picture depicting the same part of the story and in her dictation she says, “I think the story is pretty good and I like it. The dog eats socks.” Both Reyna and Micaela responded to an event from the story, but it was not a significant part of the story. They did not make connections to the bigger concept of the power of choice.

Figure 1. Graffiti response to Fred Stays with Me! Reyna: This is a picture of the dog taking the socks. Micaela: I think the story is pretty good and I like it. The dog eats the socks.

Making Personal Connections

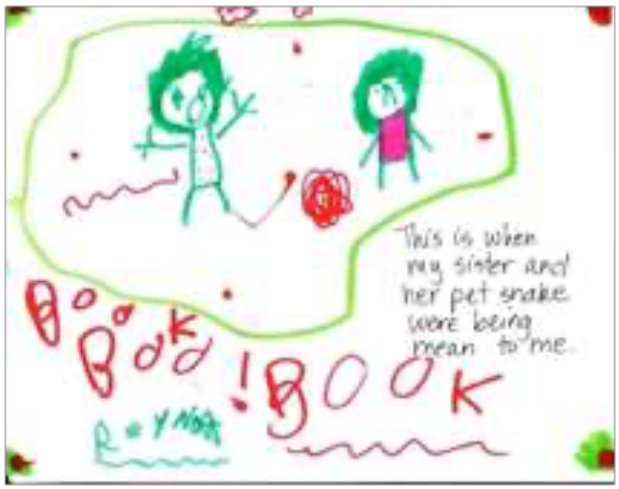
During our next session in lab the drawing responses started to change from retellings to making self-to-text connections. I was amazed at how fast the shift in thinking was starting to happen. The graffiti board that was created after reading and talking about *I Will Never, Not Ever Eat a Tomato*, by Lauren Child (2000), contained many responses that made personal connections to the story along with retellings of story events. The students' personal connections were topical in nature. For example, Sarah drew a picture of a tomato and fish sticks and said, "I like tomatoes. Fish Sticks are yummy." Sarah connected personal preferences to a minor detail in the story. Although this is not a connection to the story's main theme about the influence of others on one's diet, the move from retelling to connections of topics is a significant step in thinking conceptually.

Figure 2. Graffiti Board response to I Will Never, Not Ever Eat a Tomato

Students continued to make topical connections in the next few sessions of Learning Lab. Seth responded using both a retelling and a personal connection to a topic. He drew a picture of the part of *Please Louise!* by Frieda Wishinsky and Marie-Louise Gay where the character, Jake, finds the dog and the dog licks his face. Seth drew Jake and the dog and said, "I am drawing a dog jumping on the face because it was funny and I have a dog." Again Seth connected the fact that there was a dog in the story to the fact that he has a dog at home. This connection is not one that shows Seth understood the main concept of sibling influence, but it does show that Seth was beginning to use his personal experience to make sense of the text. During the same session in Lab, Isaac made a connection that did move into conceptual thinking. After hearing the story, Isaac shared in our discussion that he too has an older brother who is sometimes mean to him. He said, "My brother does not let me battle with him with Pokemon cards." This comment demonstrated to me that Isaac did understand the big idea of the story because he connected his life to the concept that older siblings have influence over you.

Figure 3. Response to Please Louise.

One particular session in Learning Lab involved a majority of the students making significant gains in their ability to talk about conceptual connections. We were exploring our understandings of power using *The Book of Mean People* by Toni and Slade Morrison (2002). The students had a lot to say in the discussion that followed the read aloud, making connections from their lives where people were mean to them. For example, Ricky connected the story to a time that his sister was mean to him. He said, "My sister kept changing the channel on the TV when I was watching it." This connection demonstrates his understanding of the concept that other people and their attitudes and action have power over your life. These connections appeared in their individual responses. This session showed Lisa and I that a majority of the class in fact understood big concepts. While they did not put these big ideas in abstract comments, they evidenced their exploration of these ideas by sharing more conceptual connections that linked to significant themes in the books. We were able to then start planning sessions and engagements that focused on more abstract concepts.



The most significant example of students' conceptual thinking came during our investigation into the difference between hunger and hungry as part of our study of the causes of hunger in our world. Students gathered with Lisa on the story floor and were asked, "What are the differences between Hunger and Hungry?" Lisa recorded their thinking on a T-chart. The class came up with clear distinctions based on their personal experiences of being hungry and knowledge they had learned about hunger from previous lab sessions. After we completed the T-chart the class was asked to choose either hunger or being hungry and draw a picture to represent that concept. The responses were throughtful and evidenced conceptual thinking. Ricky used a personal experience to explain being hungry, explaining that his "stomach feels hurt, tired, and mixed up" when he is hungry. Matthew depicted hunger by drawing a picture of a stick figure standing behind an empty table. He dictated that "Hunger means you are starving." Seth clearly showed his understanding of malnutrition as a result of hunger when he drew a picture of a stick-thin person and said, "He's going to turn into this [pointing at the figure] because he won't get food to eat." The hunger is an abstract concept that not many kindergarteners experience, but many students showed their understanding of hunger by making conceptual comments.

Figure 6. Ricky's explanation of what it feels like to be hungry.

Strategies That Supported Developing Conceptual Understandings

As I look back over the shift that occurred in my students' thinking I clearly see that there are two instructional strategies that Lisa and I used to foster their thinking. One of the most important aspects of Learning Lab was creating engagements that built on each other. During our bi-weekly

study group meetings, we reviewed the student work and thought carefully about the logical next step for our students' learning in the lab. By being conscious that our students were engaged in a process, we were careful not to create isolated engagements. This created a context for our students to use in their thinking. They were able to use the information or ideas that they learned from the previous session to help them make sense of what they were currently engaged in learning. We developed instruction from careful assessment of student thinking and learning.

Book selection was one of the most important instructional decisions and truly promoted my students' ability to make personal connections. When I look at the responses that my students created over the year I see a commonality across the most thoughtful ones -- they are all responses to books that the students easily related to. Texts like *Please Louise!* and *I Will Never Not Ever Eat a Tomato* gleaned significant responses based on the fact that they deal with sibling interactions, which is easily relatable to my students' life experiences. I was amazed at the influence that book choice can have on the quality of responses that are produced. As I reviewed my students' responses chronologically across the year, I was surprised by two sets of responses that were vastly different in significance, yet they happened only a week apart. The first set of responses was from *The Book of Mean People* where students made strong personal connections to the main themes of the story. I then moved on to look at the following week's responses and was surprised at the simplicity and lack of connection. I was sure that students would continue the connections they had made the previous week, but I was wrong. Lisa read aloud *Clancy the Courageous Cow* by Lachie Hume (2006) to discuss the issue of power in relationships and shifting power. My students clearly did not relate to this story based on their responses. The students all responded by creating retellings or making a personal connection to a topic from the story. Not one student made a conceptual connection. I was left confused by the vast difference in the responses.

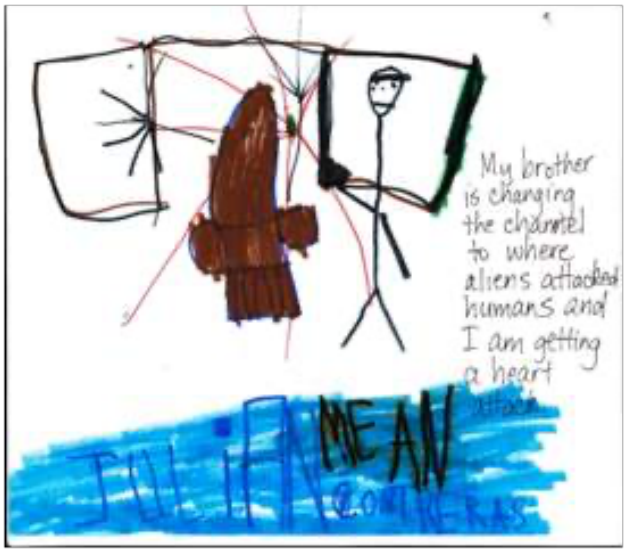


Figure 7. Julian's Response to The Book of Mean People- a conceptual connection.

As I compared the two sets of responses, I realized that it was the books that played a significant role in how the students responded. *Clancy* was a very entertaining read aloud for my class, but not one where they could easily make an immediate connection to their lives. I found the texts that successfully elicited meaningful responses were the ones in which the students could easily find a connection to their own life and that were challenging in content or subject manner. It was imperative that the students relate with the text because it allowed them to make connections to their life in order to make sense out of the ideas we were exploring.

By honoring the notion that kindergarteners can think conceptually, Lisa and I were created learning experiences where students could think about more than just the literary elements of a story during read alouds. My students were able to use their own life experiences to help them make sense of complex issues, like power and hunger. Their statements about these personal connections were not abstract conceptual statements, but evidence of their understandings of large concepts.

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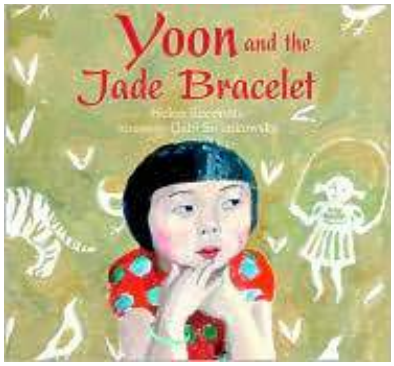
The Power of Power in Responding to Literature

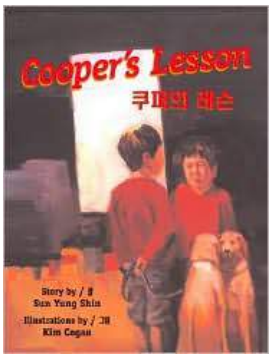
by Kathryn Tompkins, Third/Fourth Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

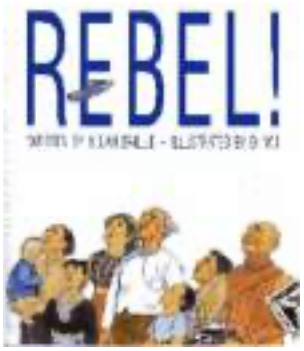
As the end of the school year approached, Lisa Thomas, our project specialist, sat down with my third/fourth grade class to discuss what they had learned that year. She told them that each class in the school was writing an article for the school newspaper on a topic that they knew a lot about and that had been significant for them. She reviewed the various inquiries and engagements from across the year and then asked them to list what they saw as important insights from those experiences. We heard loud and clear that they wanted to write about power. Initially their focus surprised me, but as I reflected on the year with these students, their choice made sense.

We have been using a broad concept each year to frame our work with global inquiry at our school. Using concepts, such as change or journey, across classrooms and subject areas supports students in making connections across the different parts of their day and encourages them to develop conceptual thinking. They don't just learn facts and procedures but connect these details to bigger ideas and to their own lives outside of school (Ericksen, 2002). We decided to use power as our concept because we had noticed students' interest in issues related to power the previous year and it made sense that power was an issue children struggled with on a continuous basis in their interactions with adults and peers in school and at home.

The teachers participating in our study of power had long discussions about power and decided to define it as the capacity to influence outcomes. We used this definition to help us in our planning of engagements and in gathering resources. We did not impose our definition on students, but immersed them in experiences so they could develop their own definitions and understandings. We began by reading books and inviting discussion about the issues in these books as a way to encourage students to identify the types of power and issues related to power.



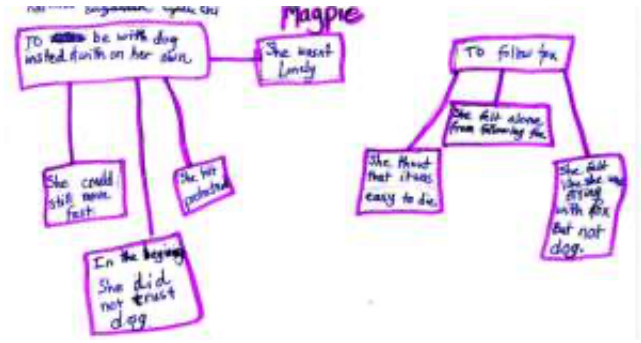




There were several read alouds over the first few weeks of school that were significant for students. Yoon and the Jade Bracelet (Recorvits, 2008) invited students to think about the power to stand up for yourself. Yoon ends up finding self-power to get her bracelet back from another girl at her school. There was also the power of knowing one's identity in Cooper's Lesson (Shin, 2004) as Cooper found power in being both Korean and American. There was even the power of standing up against a "power" to not be bullied in Rebel (Baillie, 1994). The students took different perpsectives on power from each story and discussed the books in ways that helped us understand their thinking. Through these various experiences, students built more complex conceptual understandings of power that could then be used as a frame for other engagements. What I did not expect was that students, without prompting, would continue to find examples of power woven through literature all year long.

Our early discussions focused on the power in making decisions, particularly the kinds of decisions that children get to make and the ones adults make for them. The class decided they had power over things like their attitudes or who to be friends with but they did not have the power to make decisions about many things at school, such as how to do a fire drill or when they had to stop playing at recess.

Once the students had explored the power in making decisions, we moved into a discussion of the consequences that come from making those decisions. We read aloud Fox (Wild, 2001), the story of a fox who lures Magpie away from his friend, the dog, and then abandons him far off in the desert. The book was read aloud to the whole group and then they went to tables to complete flow charts showing the consequences of a decision made by one of the characters in the book. The students discussed how the bird had the power to leave the dog and faced some sad consequences when the fox abandoned her in the desert. They realized that everyone has power but some have more power than others.

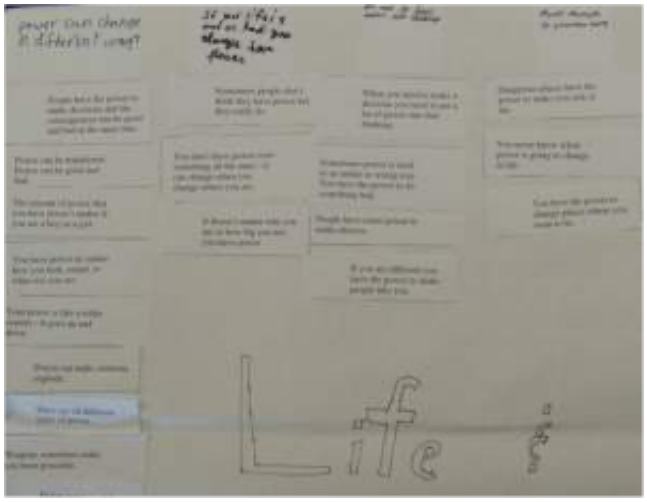


After each read aloud discussion and response, Lisa took a few minutes to record students' big ideas about power on an ongoing chart. To challenge students to pull together these insights into larger categories and ideas, the power statements from the chart were typed and cut into strips that small groups then worked together to sort into larger categories. Each group determined their own categories and labels for those categories. This process was clearly a difficult one that students found intellectually stimulating even as they struggled with the categories and with negotiating in their groups. They had to consider power in more complex and in-depth ways and look for connections across ideas that were just lists for them. Their categories reflected the ways in which they were thinking about power. I was excited to see that each group had the same set of power statements on paper strips but grouped them in different ways, reflecting their thinking as a group. The large categories developed by each group included:

- Power can change in different ways, you always have power whether your life is good or bad, you need to have power into thinking, and power changes in different places.
- You can have power to choose and get a consequence, sharing power, some people think they have power but they don't, when power backfires, and losing power.
- Power changes as you grow, the consequences of power, how power changes, choosing power, and unfair/mean power.
- Bad power, good and bad power, people power, choices that other people make for you, and power that we don't know.
- Learning sequences, choices, everything is not your way, standing up for yourself, and what's right and wrong.
- Thinking, bad things with power, change, and you have power.
- Power can be used in bad ways, changing power, different kinds and types of power, and

power that doesn't matter who you are.

- Different kinds of power, bad power, power that changes, and people having power.



After this expereince, I noticed that the concept of power was embedded in my students' thinking and they brought this idea into many of our literature discussions in class without any prompting from me. As the students read books about hunger, such as Nory Ryan's Song (Giff, 2000), they talked about power as a root cause of hunger. They noticed that some people had power over land, such as the English who were ruling Ireland. They had power over the streams and didn't allow the native Irish to fish. They also had power over the land because they collected rent and kicked people out of their homes if they were unable to pay the rent. They even had power over the possessions of others because they took livestock if someone was late on rent. The livestock provided food, such as eggs, and so this action caused even more hunger. The students felt that having power went hand-in-hand with having food.

The story of a young Indian widow in Keeping Corner (Sheth, 2007) again brought up a discussion of power. Twelve-year-old Leela is a young Brahman girl who has a comfortable life. She is spoiled by her mother and loves her glass bangles and pretty saris. She is preparing to move in with her husband as they have already had their marriage ceremony. Everything in her life changes when he is bitten by a snake and dies. She is forced to "keep corner" which means she must strip herself of her precious jewelry, shave her head, and wear only dark colors. In addition, she can't leave her house for one year, except to go to her husband's funeral. The students were outraged at the power adults had over this young girl, and their concerns led to a discussion of having power because of one's gender. Leela notices that if a man is widowed, he is free to go on living his life as he chooses and to remarry, but a woman's life

must, in a sense, come to an end and she is forever shunned as a widow and, therefore, considered unlucky. The students felt that there was great power in being male in this culture. The men make decisions for Leela and she must listen to them. When Leela's brother comes home from college to try and convince his father and uncle to allow Leela to live her life and not be shut up in the house, he is unable to convince them to change their minds and go against tradition. In researching India, students found that often men get to eat more food than women because they go out into the workplace to earn money for the family. Many students decided that the story showed that not only was there great power in being male, but there was also power in cultural customs and the beliefs that had to be followed, no matter what the consequences or the inequity.

Students also found issues of power in picture books and novels about World War II, mainly from books about the Holocaust and the Japanese Internment camps. They were baffled at how someone like Adolf Hitler could gain power over a nation, and yet as they read more about him and about that time period, they realized that there is great power in fear. Instilling fear in others is one way of gaining power over them. Hitler was able to begin his conquest by convincing the German people to fear the Jews for taking their jobs and for being "different." Hitler then turned this fear toward anyone who was different because he could blame them for any problems that the nation was facing. The students also felt that even when people realized that what was happening was wrong, they were unable to take action because they feared Hitler and what he would do to them. A book that was particularly significant was *The Terrible Things* (Bunting, 1989). This book helped them realize that sometimes we don't question power because it doesn't affect us, but if we stand silent then we aren't claiming our own power. They felt that power could be taken away from people like Hitler, but only if others take action.

The concept of power was even evident in writing workshop. Joey wrote that he was very upset about how some people tried to exert power over others and control them. He was particularly incensed about leaders like Hitler who needed to control others and the English who ruled Ireland in *Nory Ryan's Song*. Joey could spend an entire writing session listing what upset him and the root always seemed to be issues of power.

When students began to work on their article about power for the school newspaper, I could see why these ideas flowed so easily for them. In reflecting back over the year, they decided that power means "you have control over people, land, decisions, or food." Power comes from having money and people want power. Their ending thought was that power should be used to "benefit everyone in the world." They understood that power is not inherently evil or bad and can be used in positive ways.

As I read their article in the newspaper, I was struck by how their understandings of power had changed throughout the year and become more complex, reflecting multiple perspectives and

encouraging them to question their everyday experiences. They recognized that power is embedded in every situation, every story. They were aware that power weaves through literature and life and that each encounter provided a chance to develop new understandings and questions. By weaving this concept across the year, not only did students see connections across our different inquiries and read alouds, but they also were able to gradually build increasingly complex understandings of the issues and ideas.

A new understanding for me was the significance of staying with a sustained idea or concept over time so that students are able to move to deep understanding. So much of school involves jumping from topic to topic to "cover" the curriculum, resulting in surface-level understandings and a focus on information. My students did learn information but, more importantly, they also examined the "why" behind that information and considered the larger forces influencing their lives and the world. As they move through life, the information they learn in school will soon become outdated and replaced, but conceptual understandings about the functioning of society and people will continue to be relevant and to provide a frame for asking difficult questions instead of being satisfied to skim the surface of life.

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Getting Past the Social Drama to Engage Fifth Graders with Power
by Amy Edwards, Fifth Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

Our class began the year looking at the concept of power in the Learning Lab. The idea of power had come up the previous year as a strong connection for our kids and so we chose to explore it more deeply as our conceptual frame for the school year. The Learning Lab is a special place where our kids experience focused lessons around a big idea that is carried over into the classroom curriculum. The work is international in focus and inquiry based. Our goal is to teach about global issues through the world of books. Through story worlds students are invited to gain insights into how people live, feel, and think in their own culture as well as those of global cultures (Short,

2008). Teachers involved in the lab are also a part of an after school study group to explore themes, big ideas, and the wonderings of our students. We are joined each week by a University of Arizona researcher, Kathy Short, who is interested in how kids learn about interculturalism. Kathy collaborates with the teachers involved with the project and is an invaluable resource and an expert in international children's literature. Lisa Thomas, our project specialist, facilitates the lab where our work is guided by the inquiry of students. Students are really pushed to think in new ways in the lab and it is a favorite part of their week.

Fifth graders are a special variety of elementary student. They feel deeply, exude confidence due to their being the oldest kids in school, and are often looked up to by their younger peers, even though there are moments when they revert to being little kids themselves. They know about power. They also have the art of being cool down pretty well out of constant concern about impressing their peers. When you think they are just about to make a breakthrough on thinking about ideas metaphorically or conceptually, they will act like they could care less. After all, they are fifth graders.

Reading and discussing literature in small groups is important because it allows students to position themselves differently in relation to peers, teacher, and text. In every literary practice there are social codes that are manipulated by both teacher and students (Lewis, 2001). Just as context shapes performance, ongoing performances continually shape and reshape classroom context. The meanings of social and interpretive competence are constantly co-constructed by the teacher and students resulting in expectations for appropriate action and interaction. Many times these negotiations for social position occur without teacher surveillance in peer groups. The set of norms within which students have learned to work in the lab often challenge their existing social positions by asking them to work and think deeply with each other. The students are expected to think critically, conceptually, and make connections. The social drama occurring with these kids, however, sometimes interfers with their willingness to engage in thinking with each other in our learning lab experiences.

Traditionally, reading is viewed as a set of psychological skills used to gain meaning from text, thus successful reading is a technical matter that results from skilled teaching and talented students. Recently, reading and writing have been defined differently, as social and cultural practices (Bloome & Katz, 1997). When people are involved in reading or writing, they are creating two sets of social relationships. The first social relationships being established are between themselves as readers and the authors of the books, and secondly among the people present in the reading event itself. According to Bloome and Katz, this second set of relationships is called participant social relationships. These social and cultural practices were interesting to watch with this group as they worked through conceptualizing power. Anyone who witnessed their literature circles and class discussions in the lab would unmistakably see these dynamics at work. Even though students made

significant connections to the concept of power, it wasn't until the end of the study that they were able to work beyond the social positions and roles created by themselves, their peers, and the adults. We noted that particular engagements allowed them to get beyond their participant social relationships into working as members of equal standing on a team because they were so engaged in thinking together about ideas.

In our first day in the Learning Lab, Lisa started our discussion by reminding students about our study of journey the previous year. She reminded them that we started off talking about journeys in the literal sense and then began to think more broadly and in symbolic ways. She talked about the importance of big ideas and that the understandings they developed through our study of journey helped us connect to broader concepts. This year, she explained, we wanted to think about power. She asked them to think about power in their lives, particularly about decisions they make in school and how those related to their lives. Students were clearly interested in thinking about these ideas.

Lisa started off by reading *Big Plans* (Shea, 2008) in which a boy who is in trouble at school is sitting in the corner after filling the chalkboard with "I will not…." sentences as punishment. He is angry about being in time out and makes plans to take over the world. "I have plans," he says, "big plans." The kids listened quietly, chuckling occasionally, and then responded to the book:

Robert: He wants more power in the class. He's the "underkid" in the class.
Robbie: Everything he talks about is in the picture.
Kyra: It says in the story that the President is bossy.
Dakota: He is moving up. He starts out as the kid and then becomes powerful -- the president.
Kyra: He is abusing his power. He orders Idaho to build. He demands Missouri to cheer up.
Dakota: He is powerless. He is imagining his power -- demanding it. It's like a dream.

Lisa asked the students to think about how decisions are affected by power. In their small groups, they made a T-Chart about school. One side showed "Decisions I get to make" and on the other side "Decisions others make for me." Their charts included a range of observations about power in school:

Decisions Others Make
• People tell you who to be friends with.
• We have to wait in computer lab for others, even when you know what to do.
• When to go outside at lunch.
• Who to be partners with.
• Schedule for the day.
• Don't choose the books the school buys.

• Dress code.
• People make us do our work.
• The music we play in Band/Orchestra.

Decisions We Make Ourselves
• Taking care of ourselves.
• Who to hang out with-who to be friends with.
• What instrument we play in Band/Orchestra.
• Choose the books we read.
• What to wear.
• Answers on a test.
• Three choices for lunch.
• What to play on the playground.

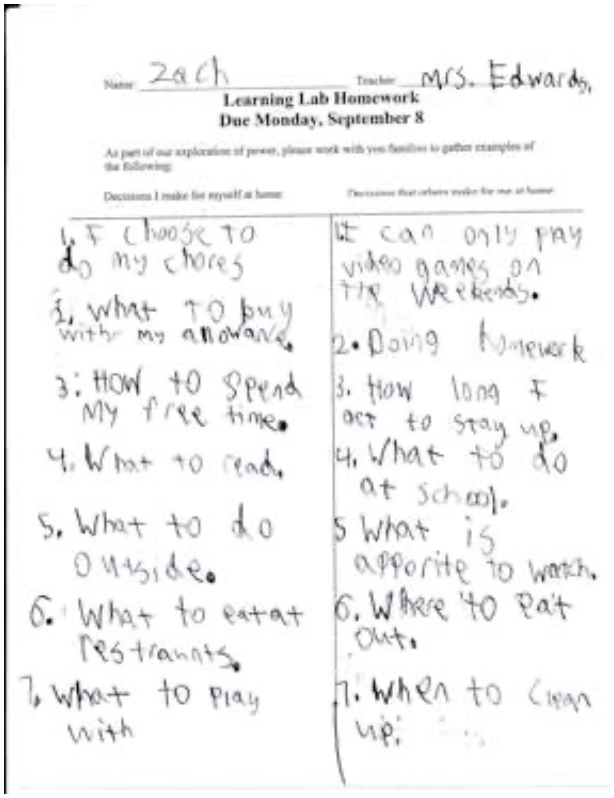
Figure 1. Decisions I make/Decision others make for me.

In circulating around the groups as they were working, Alyssa and I had a conversation about power. She noticed that the things she had no control over were not always in the control of someone directly above her. She said that kids don't always get to choose what they want to learn about. When I told her that I don't always get to teach what I want, and that the Department of Education tells me what to teach, she made the connection that there is a hierarchy of power. When talking with Danielle's group, an attitude of cynicism that was typical of fifth graders became apparent. They noticed that the choices they had available in many situations were limited. For instance, at lunch they could choose from either hot lunch or lunch express, but the choices were limited to only two things. They could choose to drink milk, but the flavors to choose from were determined by adults and limited to only three flavors. This cynical attitude became clear in their class discussion.

As students synthesize what they had charted, they came up with several big ideas about power. Lisa kept a large chart on the story floor to record their big ideas about power and added to it each week right before our class left the lab.

Jake L.: Some people have more power than others.
Robbie: Students do have some power.
Jake L: We have power in different ways, like the Olympics.
Danielle: Some do, some don't, but we all try to have power.
Alexis: Some choose to have it. Some choose not to have it. Some don't notice they have power. Some have it and don't use it.
Jake L: I noticed power doesn't always work. You don't have to do something, as long as you're willing to take the consequences. No one can make you do something.
Danielle: You can choose certain things but only from a selection that others have already chosen. You can choose a flavor of milk but can't choose what flavors are offered. There's a limited selection. Others choose for us.

Students were asked to complete a homework assignment that involved a T-chart on the choices they get to make at home and the choices others make for them. They were asked to get their family's point of view as well. As we left the lab, students made a connection between power and homework, pointing out that they have to do homework, but they can choose when to do it.



Name: Zach Teacher: Mrs. Edwards

Learning Lab Homework
Due Monday, September 8

As part of our exploration of power, please work with you families to gather examples of the following:

Decisions I make for myself at home	Decisions that others make for me at home
1. I choose to do my chores	1. I can only play video games on the weekends.
2. what to buy with my allowance.	2. Doing homework
3. How to spend My free time.	3. How long I act to stay up.
4. What to read.	4. What to do at school.
5. What to do Outside.	5 What is apporite to watch.
6. What to eat at Restraants.	6. Where to Eat Out.
7. what to play with	7. When to Clean up.

In the next lab session we reviewed our big ideas about power from the previous week and added their new observations about power based on their charting at home.

• Some people don't know how to use power.
• Some people abuse power.
• Some people have power over others.
• Your parents are taking power from you if they don't let you do something.
• Some people try to have power but can't because of consequences.
• When it comes to power/decisions, no one can really MAKE you do anything.
• Everyone has at least a little power.

Lisa read an excerpt from *Hey World, Here I Am* (Little, 1986) titled "About Lovin," a short story that demonstrated how some families show love. She wanted students to understand that families operate in different ways as a framework for sharing the homework. She told the students that all families work well most of the time and that all families have problems some of the time. She encouraged the students not to be afraid to share about the decisions made in their families and asked them not to judge others as they were sharing the homework about decisions at home. If people felt judged, they wouldn't share and be honest.

Students went to tables to share who made decisions about what things in their families and charted their responses. As they were discussing if everyone at the table agreed on who made particular decisions in their families, that decision went in the "All" category, but they had to come to a consensus. The same standards were applied to each category.

Decisions I get to make at Home

All Some do, some don't None

As I went around the room I noticed decisions being added to the charts, including:

• When to practice instruments
• When to go to sleep
• Only child so have more choices
• The larger the group, the fewer the choices
• What to watch on TV
• When you get grounded
• If you get to take showers
• What to do after school
• When to go to bed
• Drink caffeine at night
• Watch PG-13 movies
• Choose position you sleep in
• When to get haircut

Figure 2. Family decision chart.

The kids did a great job of reporting without judging other family's decisions. I was glad of Lisa's warnings and encouragements to be open minded as I found myself silently comparing some of the decisions with those of my own in raising my family and reminding myself that everyone does things differently.

Jake's comments about being willing to suffer the consequences led us to think about power and consequences for our next lesson. Lisa showed the students how to make a flow chart using the story of Dodsworth's life from *The Pink Refrigerator* (Egan, 2007), which was a touchstone book from the previous year with our study of Journey. The students remembered the book well as it was one we revisited time and again. The flow chart showed each decision Dodsworth made and the consequences of that decision. After reading aloud Fox (Wild, 2001) and having a short discussion, students were asked to choose a character from *Fox* and examine a decision that character made in the story. They worked in pairs to make a flow chart of the consequences of that decision.

Students were really engaged with these flow charts. They put a "D" next to the box that showed the decision and then used arrows to show the consequences of that decision. AJ, Jorden, and Zach H. chose Fox and his decision to take Magpie to the desert. Some of the consequences were:

• Magpie would tell everyone if she survived and Fox would be suspected.
• Dog would go out looking for Magpie and dog could get lost, hurt, or dehydrated. Dog might think he was left by Magpie and be hesitant to make a new friend.
• Magpie would die. Dog would be sad.

Another group also focused on the same decision by Fox, but their flow chart reflected the consequences for Magpie rather than Dog.

Figure 3. Flow chart from Fox.

Lisa asked students to bring these decisions together so that new ideas could be added to the class chart. Students added observations about power, choices, and consequences.

If someone has more power than you, you will probably do what they want, even if you don't want to do what they ask. You might do it because you don't want them to get mad at you.

We were reading novels about China in small groups in my classroom during this time period and I noticed students talking about who had power in the story. They noticed that certain characters held more power than others and that sometimes power shifted over the course of the story. It was exciting to see the kids make this connection between the Learning Lab and class.

We moved into a discussion about how power can shift over time in our next lab time. Lisa shared a story from her childhood in which she had to improve her math scores to stay on the Patrols. Power shifted as Lisa studied hard to do better on her timed math tests but then was accused of cheating by the teacher. Lisa's mother talked to the teacher to verify that she had been studying at home to improve her scores and Lisa was allowed to continue on the Patrol squad. The students discussed the events and connections to power while Lisa created a flow chart focusing on power shifts.

Lisa read aloud Yoon and the Jade Bracelet (Recorvits, 2008) about Yoon, a recent immigrant from Korea. Yoon is given a beautiful jade bracelet by her mother and a new friend at school manipulates Yoon into letting her wear it and won't give it back. They discussed the story and made flow charts to show how the power shifted throughout the story and to use symbols to represent who had the power in each part of the story.

We noticed that this discussion was not as focused on power and that the kids seemed reluctant to share. We had reached the end of September and the social dynamics of being a fifth grader seemed to be kicking in. Students were more concerned with entertaining each other than in

pushing their thinking. There was definite social drama going on as some of the boys were posturing for more powerful roles. A new boy in our class was getting a lot of attention from the girls. The girls wanted to play it cool in front of him and so we heard nothing from them that day in the discussion. This was not our best discussion; it was clear there was something going on with the girls in how they were positioning themselves as well as allowing themselves to be positioned by others.

Because we were concerned with how this social drama was going to translate into the work that day, we assigned partners to work on the flow charts. This worked out well, even though I don't normally like to assign partners. The discussion wasn't the best, but the flow charts were incredible. Many used symbols to represent the shifts in power along the continuum of the story. Danielle and Robbie created a flow chart that used bar graph symbols for each character to represent the shifts in power as the story unfolds. The key at the bottom of the chart shows the abbreviation on each bar to designate the character such as OG for older girl, YG for Yoon, and T for teacher (Figure 4). It was interesting to watch each pair of students talk about the ways in which power shifted from character to character throughout this story.

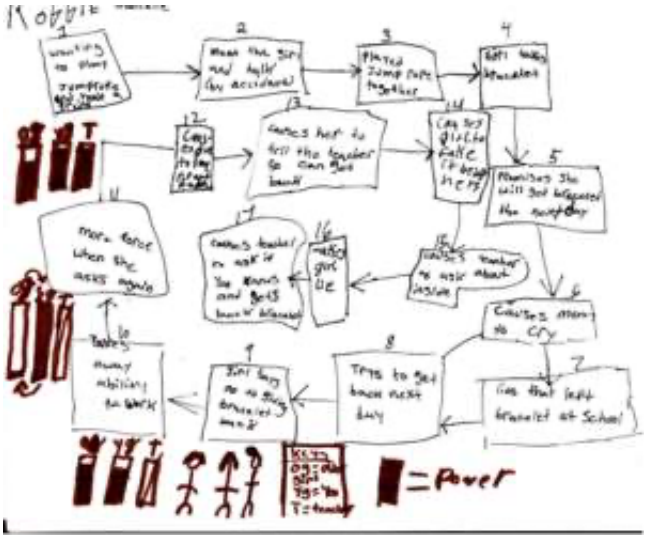


Figure 4. Flow chart from Yoon and the Jade Bracelet.

Students added to the class power chart before leaving the lab:

Dakota: Your power can change when someone has more power than you. Some people think they don't have power, everyone has power.
Robbie: Sometimes you don't realize how much power you have until someone with more power makes you realize it. Manipulation is one way people have power. Frustration makes you realize you have power. When other people are bossing you around, it makes you want to use power.
Danielle: It's like the game Mousetrap, one thing sets off another, and then something else happens. Sometimes you don't know you have power, then suddenly you have it.

In class, students read *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* (Coerr, 1977) in preparation for attending a field trip to the play performed by Pima Community College. In truth, I squeezed this novel into the curriculum at the last minute because I felt it would be a great way to prepare the students for this play. I'm so glad I did.

The play was a beautiful production and the cast and director were most impressed by the fact that our entire group (third through fifth grades) had read the book beforehand. The students all made strong connections to the character of Sadako. Our outing included a backstage tour and a question and answer period by the staff. During the Q and A, students from other schools asked questions about the costumes, how long it took to memorize lines, and how long the actors had been performing. Robert cut to the chase when he raised his hand and told the director how powerful the story was to him. He said the story was a clear message about how dangerous nuclear weapons were in wars. The director thanked him for his observation and we launched into a discussion of power while walking backstage.

Danielle told the director that there was a clear power shift in the story. She said at first the atom bomb had the power, then the leukemia had the power, but at the end Sadako held the power. It was clear that our kids were used to discussing issues. He looked at me and said, "What are you teaching these kids at Van Horne?" I told him we were looking at the big idea of power. He was clearly stunned at the students' ability to conceptualize the issues and themes in the story and, shaking his head, asked what other books we were reading. The kids started calling off the titles of the literature circle books we had just finished, The Diary of Ma Yan, Red Scarf Girl, *Chu Ju's House* and others. He didn't know any of the titles, but found it interesting that we were focused on books outside the United States and wanted to know the titles of plays we might be interested in seeing in the future. It was a great experience for the kids, because they were able to make conceptual connections to what they had read at school and in the visual interpretation of the book on stage. I felt so proud of this group of smart fifth graders.

When we got back to school, I finished reading *Hiroshima*, by Lawrence Yep (1996), a short chapter book about the Enola Gay, the B29 that delivered the bombs to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I wanted the students to hear the other side of the story, a different perspective. As I read the step-by-step description of what the pilots were doing as they were readying and executing their mission, the kids were thinking of Sadako and her family on the ground in Hiroshima.

In their discussion it was clear that students felt ashamed of what Americans had done to the families of Hiroshima. They knew of the great losses we had suffered at the hands of the Japanese at Pearl Harbor but did not make the connection between Pearl Harbor and the dropping of the atom bomb. The cause and effect of these events was not part of their background knowledge. Even after talking about Pearl Harbor, the students only thought of Sadako because of the strong

connections they had made to her character. Jose asked me, “Mrs. Edwards, when they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, did they know that Sadako was down there?” I was so choked up, I almost couldn’t answer. I told him that as human beings, they were probably trying not to think about it, but as soldiers they were trying to carry out their mission successfully and that they knew there would be lots of civilians killed. The power this character had over my students was striking.

At the beginning of October, we moved from personal power to broader issues of power in other people’s lives. At this point in the year, I noticed social positioning and some shifts in roles, particularly in attitudes that resembled nonchalance and the emergence of definite leaders. Lisa read Rebel! (Baillie, 1994), a picture book set in Burma about a military leader who marches into a school to announce he is taking over. He is challenged in an unconventional way by a student who is brave enough to rebel. The object of power is a single student who anonymously removes her thong (sandal) and throws it at the general. In an effort to hide the identity of the “rebel,” all the students and teachers take off their thongs and throw them in a pile so the general can not determine who is missing their thong. We wanted to show the students that sometimes power can come from an unpredictable source and to show the power of a group of people who normally are perceived as powerless. The students in my class immediately started to twitter about the word “thong,” which they interpreted as underwear, and completely lost attention to the rest of the details in the story. Being fifth graders, and given their propensity for any opportunities for fun, the discussion took a strange turn.

In the group discussion it was obvious the students didn’t understand the story and wondered why the students threw underwear at the general. Bloome & Katz, (1997) state that people come together to accomplish something. Usually they have an idea about what that something is, however, the explicit purpose may not necessarily be what gets accomplished. The participant social relationships both influence and are influenced by the social action people take and by what is socially accomplished. It was apparent that this was happening here. The students had transformed the purpose into something different than what we had intended.

When asked what they thought of the book, they said it was very interesting, but no one caught who did it. They weren’t sure what went on. They said they needed a second book to find out. They wondered if the thong was thrown on purpose or accidentally. When Lisa mentioned that the children took off their thongs and put them in a pile, the students giggled. They wondered if the thong was thrown by one of the soldiers. Finally someone said they thought it was on purpose and was thrown by a kid. A debate followed.

According to Bloome and Katz (1997), people attempt to socially position themselves in particular ways, but that at the same time others are also socially positioning them. One student who was a poor reader was very outspoken during the discussion, even though it was evident he didn’t

understand the story. He was not discouraged by redirection from the teacher or the other students. He was trying to show his dominance in our class and himself as a leader of the group. He was attempting to socially position himself as a leader in this situation. He felt like the discussion forum was the place to do this because, even though his reading skills were poor, he was comfortable with his verbal skills. Also within the classroom he was respected due to his size and athletic ability. His desire to have fun throughout the day was also admired by many of the boys. Many of his comments lead the group in the wrong direction and they silenced the girls who clearly didn't want to appear to agree or disagree with him.

Initially I wondered why such a straightforward story would confuse students, both in the details and the big ideas. Once I realized why the students were distracted, I revisited the book later during a class read aloud to see if they could do a better job of understanding the concepts of power.

For this lab period, the students went to the tables to do wide reading of picture books about power and then returned to the story floor for a whole group discussion. Some of the books included in this text set were *Night Golf* (Miller, 1999), *17 Things I'm Not Allowed to do Anymore* (Offill, 2006), *My Secret Bully* (Ludwig, 2005), and *Always With You* (Zee, 2008).

Concepts they discussed from these readings were:
• One kind of power is talent.
• You can lose power if you use it in a bad way.
• There is power in choosing your own friends and standing up to others who aren't.
• Soldiers have power over people.
• There is power in love, trust, and memory.

After a second lab period of wide reading they found:
• Power is courage to follow your dreams.
• Courage is power to make friends.
• Bossing people around is forced power.
• Some people think they have more power than they do.
• Racism is an issue of power.
• People are afraid of losing power when they share.
• Some people have power they don't know about.
• Emotions hold power.

The discussions for the next several weeks were inpacted by the social practices and positioning that continued to develop in our class. It was a bit of a concern as a teacher to see the girls, who I knew had so much to contribute be silenced by several vocal boys. I also knew that some of the

voices were dominating and not leaving room for others or leading the discussion in nonproductive directions. This social drama was surfacing in classroom discussions as well.

The following week in lab, our goal was to compare, contrast, and categorize our many ideas about power to organize our thinking. Lisa asked students to use their brains to categorize the ideas. They reviewed our class chart about what students had noticed about power each week. Lisa had typed up the ideas so that students could cut the sentences into strips and easily sort them. To help them understand sorting, Lisa used name tags and asked students for ideas on different ways to sort or categorize them, such as the different ways the name tags were written -- color, size, font, number of letters, vowels, etc. She told them they would be sorting the statements by their meaning about power.

Students were asked to:

1. Read the list together at the tables.
2. Cut the sentences into strips.
3. Sort the ideas about power into categories.
4. Have an adult check to make sure they made sense.
5. Glue them onto the chart, and create labels for the categories. (*Must have more than three statements in a category, but no more than seven.)
6. Think together and read aloud.

There were major differences in the way the student groups worked. Some groups thought and worked together, while others had one person who took over and organized the task by giving directions. As the students sorted and created categories, we were surprised by the range of their thinking. As adults checked the categories, students talked about why they chose to group the statements in particular ways. They were able to justify their answers without hesitation, often through dialogue with each other.

Figure 5. Categorizing Power.

Harste says that we outgrow our current selves through dialogue (Short & Harste, 1996). These students went beyond their current understandings of power and knew they were coming to new understandings. It was apparent that they were thinking conceptually about big ideas. They worked at a feverish pitch to finish their categorizing, engaging in negotiation and intense talk about power with each other. They barely finished, working frantically at the end. It was a giant "Aha!" moment for many students and the adults in the room as well.

Our study of power was meaningful to the students. I don't think they believed they could make new discoveries about a subject they clearly knew so much about already. Lewis (1998) states that a social organization exists in all classrooms that privileges certain social and interpretive ways of being over others. What was evident was that for this work the social drama was put aside as these groups worked as a team. They were completely absorbed in the process, and were not worried about looking cool or the fact that they were the big kids on campus. It was amazing to see them so involved in this process and it was obviously important for them to engage with a lot of thought and creativity. They lost themselves in the ideas and in the excitement of pushing their thinking and forgot just for a moment they were fifth graders who did not want to appear to like school. They were able to engage as equal members of a team in a community of learners and thinkers.

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Experiencing the Way the World Eats
by Lisa Thomas, Project Specialist, Van Horne Elementary School

Like many schools across the United States, our school holds a canned food drive during the winter holiday season. We have been challenging ourselves to support students in taking meaningful action and so began to question this tradition. It became clear that our students were going through the motions of bringing food from their parent's kitchen cabinets to school. The action that they were engaged in was conceived by someone else and the food that they donated was purchased by someone else. At one point, we were forced to entice students to participate by offering free popcorn to those who brought in cans of food. While we recognize that community food banks rely

on these drives, we wanted our students to choose to get involved because they recognized the need within the Tucson community, understood the root causes of hunger, felt compassion and empathy toward those struggling with hunger, and believed that they had the power to address this issue and make the world a better place.

Cowhey (2006) points out that while school food drives are well meaning, they send unintended messages that reinforce stereotypes about the poor, oversimplify the problem and solution, fail to teach an understanding of poverty or local efforts to improve conditions, and further stigmatize low-income children in the school. She states that when children collect canned foods for "poor people," those efforts make the poor seem like a "predestined, anonymous group" and poverty seem like a "permanent, almost genetic condition" (p. 26). This type of "give the helpless a handout" approach does not help children understand the complex reasons why people are hungry or challenge prevailing stereotypes of poor people as lazy and unintelligent. The solution is oversimplified as simply giving someone a bag of food and the agency and resourcefulness of those who live in poverty and struggle daily to meet their basic needs are not acknowledged.

We knew that our students have good hearts and want to help others, however, they did not understand hunger in a way that would allow them to connect and care. We decided to initiate a school wide inquiry into hunger. We knew that to take more effective and meaningful action, students needed to see hunger as a significant problem in our world and develop a deep understanding of the root causes of hunger. Our inquiry included many invitations for students to think broadly and delve deeply into the complexities of hunger in our world. In developing these experiences, we particularly drew from Kids Can Make a Difference, and their sourcebook, *Finding Solutions to Hunger* (Kempf, 2005), that contains a range of activities and resources focused on understanding the root causes of hunger (http://www.kidscanmakeadifference.org).

One of the most powerful experiences was our Global Feast. This simulation, developed by Oxfam (http://es.oxfamamerica.org/en), helps students recognize that there is enough food in the world to feed everyone. The common misconception that people go hungry because of inadequate global food supplies is challenged as students experience the unequal distribution of food. This simulation involves the students acting in role as a member of a specific population in the world. This type of drama places students in a fictional role and context to explore and reflect on an issue to generate thoughts, feelings, and language that go beyond typical classroom interactions (O'Neill, 1989).

We intentionally planned the banquet early in our study to provide students with a reference point for thinking about hunger in our community and world. To include everyone in the school, we planned two separate banquets. At each banquet, approximately 100 first through fifth graders filed into the library, anticipating the global feast we had been talking about all week. All the children knew was that an announcement was sent home, saying that they would be eating the way

the world eats and that any contributions to support the feast would be greatly appreciated. Some students were concerned that they might be forced to try foods that they didn't like while others looked forward to a special meal in the middle of the morning.

As the children entered the library, they were randomly given tickets that sorted them into groups. About 12 children in each session received blue tickets, 60 children received yellow tickets, and 28 received red tickets. These numbers roughly represented percentages that exist in the real world related to food and hunger. The children with blue tickets sat at a large banquet tables with fancy plates, napkins, apple juice and flowers. Those with yellow tickets sat at round tables with piles of paper plates, forks and a gallon of drinking water. Children who received red tickets sat on the floor around a tarp with a jug of brownish water and no plates or eating utensils. Each table was labeled with the names of countries where people who fell into that group lived. It was particulary important for us to reinforce with our students that people from all three groups live within the United States, challenging the misconception that people are only starving in other parts of the world.

We welcomed the students to the global feast and reminded them that they would be eating the way that the world eats. We told them that we had very good news -- there is enough food in the world for everyone to eat in a way that will allow them to be healthy. We asked them to keep that in mind during our feast.

Because we work with elementary-aged children we knew that it would be a challenge to instill a sense of the magnitute of the world's hunger problem. We needed to find appropriate ways to ensure that they were able to connect what they learned during the feast experience at school to their world. We would be talking about numbers in the billions with children who were as young as five. We knew that many would have a difficult time conceptualizing a billion -- we as adults have a difficult time getting our heads around numbers of that size. We decided that knowing exactly the size of a billion wasn't necessary as long as children knew it was a lot. To make the idea a little more tangible, we used a page from *How Much is a Million*, by David M. Schwartz (1998).

"How big is a billion?" I read aloud, "If a billion kids make a human tower, they would stand up past the moon" (Schwartz, 1985). It was clear from their "whoa" responses that the kids were able to connect to this description and saw that a billion was a very large number.

We called the children's attention to the large numbers on the red, yellow, and blue signs that had been posted near each group. We asked one person from each group to read their number and told them that this is how many people in the world fell into their group. About 12% of the world's population or 1,000,000,000 people fall into the blue group. About 60% of the world's population, or 4,000,000,000 are in the yellow group, and the rest of the world's population, over 25% or

1,800,000,000 are in the red group.

Then it was time to bring in the food. We began with the food for the blue group. In walked two teachers, each carrying six extra large pizzas. They purposely walked past the red and yellow groups so that everyone would be aware of what the blue group was going to eat. Then they placed all 12 pizzas on the banquet table where only 12 children were seated. The room was buzzing with excited children. They all love pizza -- and they couldn't wait to get their share.

Next, we brought in the food for the yellow group. The teachers entered carrying bowls of rice and red beans. After walking past the red and blue groups, one bowl was placed on each of the tables in the yellow group section of the room. The tone in the room shifted from excitement to confusion.

Finally it was time to bring in the food for the red group. Our school couselor brought in one bowl of plain white rice. She walked around the room to show everyone the bowl and then sat it in the center of the tarp where a group of 28 kids were ready to eat. Before we began eating, we asked the kids to do a quick write about what they were thinking.

The quick writes showed that at this point in the experience, most of the students were concerned

about the inequity of the immediate situation. Sean, a fourth grader in the yellow group, wrote, “I don’t know if it’s fair because they each get their own pizza and red has to share one bowl. I wish we had pizza. I’m mad.” Stanley, from the red group wrote, “The blue group gets the biggest share of pizza for everyone. The red group barely has any. I think the blue group should share.”

Fourth grader Zachary, who was in the yellow group, immediately applied the simulation to the real world. He wrote, “I have one thing to say about the teacher’s earlier statement, ‘There is enough food for everyone in the world to share.’ Dang rich people! They eat at fancy restaurants every day. Others who don’t have homes have bread and rice.” Zachary didn’t seem to realize that he and his family are members of the world’s blue group -- they are those "dang rich people."

Many of the younger children focused on the way they were feeling. Kindergartener Isaac observed, “People are kind of sad and kind of mad.” Sarah said, “I was really sad to get rice and not water or pizza.”

Before the students ate, we took some time to talk about each group. We told the children that the blue group represented the 1 billion people in the world who have more than enough to eat at all times. These people won’t die of hunger and don’t have to worry about where their next meal will come from. On the other hand, the people in this group tend to eat foods that are very high in fat and sugars and will cause many of them to die of heart disease, obesity, and cancer.

We told the children that the yellow group represented the 4 billion people in the world who get just enough food to eat. They usually get the calories and nutrients that they need to be healthy but not necessarily the foods that they want. Sometimes things happen in these people’s lives and they have to go without food for short periods of time.

We explained that the red group represented the 1.8 billion people in the world who are hungry all of the time. Most of these people live in the southern hemisphere but there are people from the red group living in countries all over the world, including the U.S. They never get enough food to be healthy. They often don't have access to clean water. Many die everyday from starvation, chronic hunger, and deseases caused by bad drinking water.

To demonstrate the economic insecurity that many people in our world face, we shared a few examples of how changes in circumstance can cause someone from one group to move to another. We wanted to challenge any assumptions that membership in a group is guaranteed or that someone who is hungry today has no hope of ever finding food security. We asked the child with the name John Drew written on his ticket to stand. John was in the blue group. We explained that John works in an electronics store and has lost his job. He has no family to rely on and no savings to fall back on. Without a job, John has no money for food and so he was asked to move from the blue group to the red group. John was very disappointed. The reaction from the rest of the room was mixed; some students felt badly for him, while others were glad that he too would not be getting pizza.

The student with the name Barbara Baker on her ticket was asked to stand. Barb, the children were told, owns a coffee shop. Because the price of coffee has fallen around the world, she is able buy beans for less but still sells coffee at the same price. Even though Barb is already in the blue group, she is now making more money than ever and so would be able to have two helpings of dinner. Barb was pleased with this development, but the students in the rest of the room didn't like this at all.

The drop in the price of coffee wasn't good for everyone. Al Hernandez from the red group was asked to stand. He works on a coffee plantation in El Salvador and has lost his job because the price of coffee has fallen. He is no longer able to provide any food at all for his family. Without help they only get water. Since Al was already in the red group, he couldn't change groups but he was told that he would only get water.

Finally, it was time to eat. Adults waited on the blue group, pouring their apple juice and passing out pizza. The children in the yellow group pitched in to distribute plates and forks to the people at their small group tables. At some tables the children passed around the rice and beans so that each member could help themselves. At other tables, one person served portions of food, making sure everyone had a share.

The behavior at in the red group was different in the two sessions. During the first banquet, Alyssa served the brown water, making sure that everyone got some. The group passed the bowl around the circle, each child scooping out a small handful of rice in an orderly way. Everyone who wanted rice was able to have a small serving, but they weren't satisfied. Ricky, a kindergardener, wrote, "I was at the red table. I was really sad because we only got rice and brown water. It was not fair. We only got one bowl of rice to share one drink. We had to use our hands to get a handful then pass it."

Three of the members of the red group in the second banquet refused to eat the rice. They sat at the edge of the tarp staring at the pizzas in the blue group. One of the fourth-grade boys grabbed the bowl of rice and brought it over to his friend. The two of them began gobbling rice with their backs to the group, not allowing any rice for others in their group. Out of frustration, Elizabeth, a third-grade girl from the group went over to the boys and took away the bowl, passing it carefully around the circle, but the rice ran out before everyone was given a portion. The other children in this group were outraged and rumors of the boys' selfish behavior spread rapidly throughout the school.

After letting the children eat for 10-15 minutes, we asked them to pause and share what they were thinking. Abby, from the red group said, "This is really sad. There isn't any other food that some kids get to eat. They get flavored food and we get unflavored food and dirty water. We would rather have pizza and not have to use our hands." Manny from the blue group shared, "Logan said we should share. We have enough food to share."

In both sessons some of children from the blue group decided that they had enough to share with the other two groups. After convincing the others in their group, they worked together to pass out a piece of pizza to everyone in the room. Once the children had finished eating their pizza, we asked then to do one more quick-write about what they were thinking and what they had learned from

the experience. These responses provided us with valuable information about their existing understandings and helped us decide where we needed to go next in our work with children on hunger and taking action.

> People that don't have enough food will die of hunger. The numbers of people who don't have enough food are huge! There are almost 2 billion people who starve each day. It's sad to know that we can help more than we have over the years. -- Zachary, 4th grade

> Some people in the United States are rich like the blue group, but some people are still in the red group. -- Stanley, 4th grade

> I have helped the hungry. I feel good and feel it's the perfect feeling. It's a win-win. But I don't get more apple juice. I guess its okay. I'm still happy. -- Logan, 5th grade

In study group that afternoon teachers discussed what they noticed about their students' thinking. Teachers felt the feast was beneficial in helping students begin to recognize the problem of hunger, and in helping teachers identify the stereotypes, confusions, misconceptions, and limitations in students' understandings about hunger and taking action that would need to be challenged during our study.

In reflecting on their students' written and oral comments during the feast and during their classroom discussions following the feast, teachers noticed that the students understood or were beginning to understand a number of things. Many older children recognized the extreme disparity in the distribution of food and were beginning to see the magnitude of the problem. Their discussions focused on waste and on having enough to share with others. Some students were impressed by the number of people who go hungry every day. In one classroom students wondered how it was possible that someone could have a job and still not have enough money to prevent hunger.

There was evidence of compassion and empathy for the others in many of the students' responses. Elizabeth and Alyssa made sure that everyone was served within their groups. Morgan, a first grader, wrote, "I feel sad for people who have to suffer for days." Carah, another first grader, wrote, "I would be heartbroken if I was in the red group."

In his quick write, Logan, a fifth grader, shared an internal struggle, "I'm thinking that it's not fair that only we got pizza, but I get it so I don't care. I do feel sorry that the other people only get rice or rice and beans. The more people, the less food. I get my own pizza. Not everyone can get good food, but I'm lucky and I get good food." It was interesting that his struggle with this moral dilemma mirrored the tensions that privileged people around the world face. Ultimately, Logan was the person in his group to encourage others to share.

In their writings and classroom discussions following the feast, a number of the fifth graders seemed primarily concerned with liking or not liking the food and didn't address the broader issue of the inequity of distribution. While some students recognized that hunger exists in our community as well as in other places in the world they seemed to believe that only the homeless go hungry. We knew that we would need to challenge these students in seeing the issue from other perspectives. Hayden, a kindergartener at the blue table, dictated, "I like the pizza. It feels good sitting at the blue table." He wasn't yet concerned that there were others who didn't feel so good.

There was also concern by the adults that the students from the blue group who shared their pizza with the rest of the students did so with a sense of entitlement. Logan was disappointed that only one person told him thank you as he was sharing the pizza. They saw themselves as benevolent and giving to those in need, rather than from a sense of responisibility and concern with inequity. We would have to find ways to help children recognize that people in the world have little control over the economic situation in which they are born -- those with food are not more deserving that those without -- and that taking action to make the world a better place is a responsibility, not an opportunity to display their generosity for those with less.

The teachers were also concerned that the quick solution -- students in the blue group immediately distributing the pizzas to the other groups -- may have resulted in a missed opportunity to empathize and understand. They felt that the simple and rapid solution was misleading and took away the children's chance to stuggle with the tensions that had been introduced.

That same evening, the school had a parent event and so we saw many of our Van Horne families. The parents told the teachers that the kids came home and described the experience in detail. It was clear that the global feast had an immediate impact on students' thinking about hunger.

Following the feast we moved into engagements that allowed students to think deeply about the range of causes for hunger. We personalized the issue for students using stories, videos, and guest

speakers as well as provided them with a range of nonfiction resources that provided facts and statistics. As our study progressed, students made reference to the feast over and over again. They associated the experiences of characters in the stories they read with the group colors and referred to the big numbers that remained posted in the library during their discussions and refections. When asked to create a sketch to stretch of her understandings about taking action at the conclusion of our study, Elizabeth drew red, yellow, and blue people to express her thoughts about the need for everyone (red, blue, and yellow) to work together to help the hungry, as well as the need for a caring heart and ideas about the causes of hunger.

We believe that the Global Feast was memorable because children engaged in an affective as well as cognitive experience. O'Neill (1989) argues that this type of drama experience encourages children to create and retain knowledge as well as to recall the power of feelings generated during the experience. Drama creates an open space that encourages the movement to critical dialogue around multiple voices and perspectives. By carefully examining these perspectives, students have the opportunity to build understandings of the complex ways in which we live in a diverse society and to consider other possibilities for taking action and living in the world.

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Creating Conceptual Understandings of Hunger
by Kathryn Tompkins, Third/Fourth Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

Most of the students in our small public school seem to be well-taken care of. They know that they have a roof over their heads, clothes to wear, food on the table and lots of love. So when our parent organization decided to sponsor a canned food drive, we wondered whether the students really understood what it is like to suffer from hunger -- not to be hungry but to *know* hunger.

As the holiday season approached, students collected canned goods for the food drive. In a class discussion, we talked about "tight times" and why families might need extra food. The students kept referring to the "economy" as the reason that people were going through tight times, but didn't really know what the economy entailed. They were repeating words they had heard from the adults around them without a deep understanding of those ideas. The class did decide that they wanted to collect good food from home, not food that was out of date or that they wouldn't want to eat themselves, and donate the food to families in need from our school, giving the remainder to the community food bank. Students brought food to donate and placed it on a large table in the hallway that was organized by proteins, grains/rice, and fruits and vegetables. The students were also aware that the student council was selling popcorn each Friday and the proceeds would go to buy additional food for hungry families.

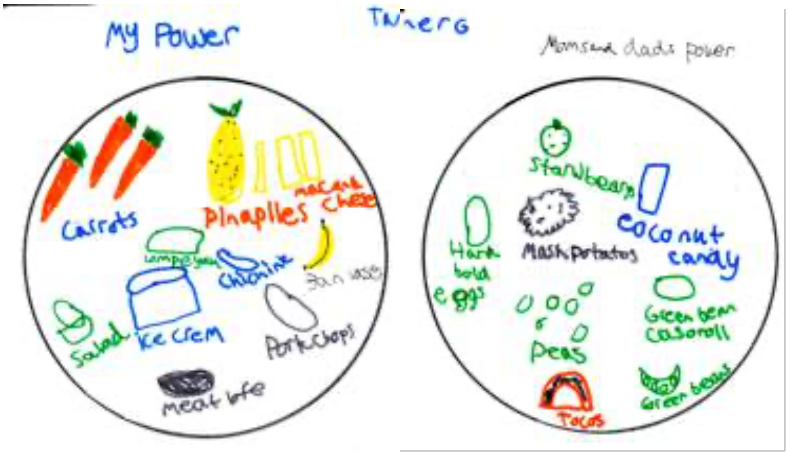
School-wide, students collected a large amount of food. They were proud of their accomplishments but teachers couldn't help but wonder if students understood the magnitude of the need for food, including people in their own community. To most students, hungry people are the guys who stand on the street corners holding up signs or people who live in other countries that they see on television. Hunger was not an issue that they felt was prevalent in their city or neighborhoods. As teachers, we were uncomfortable with students' misconceptions about hunger and their lack of understanding about the global and local issues involved with hunger.

When we returned from our winter break we decided to focus on hunger to build stronger conceptual understandings of hunger as a global and local issue. We began by talking about diet, since it was January and there were constant television commericals and newspaper ads about diets. Many students thought diet was a plan to lose weight, but Elizabeth said, "What you eat is your diet. Diet also tells what animals eat. Bird has a diet of berries and bugs." Evan simply said, "Good food or bad food is your diet."

We also talked about whether children have power over their diets. We read aloud *Burger Boy* (Durant, 2005) about a boy who only eats burgers until he eventually turns into a burger and is chased by hungry animals and people. He then eats vegetables to turn back into a boy and his mom warns him that he is going to turn into a carrot -- and he does. This book led to discussions about the need for a balanced diet. Mason said that you need to "eat a little bit of everything."

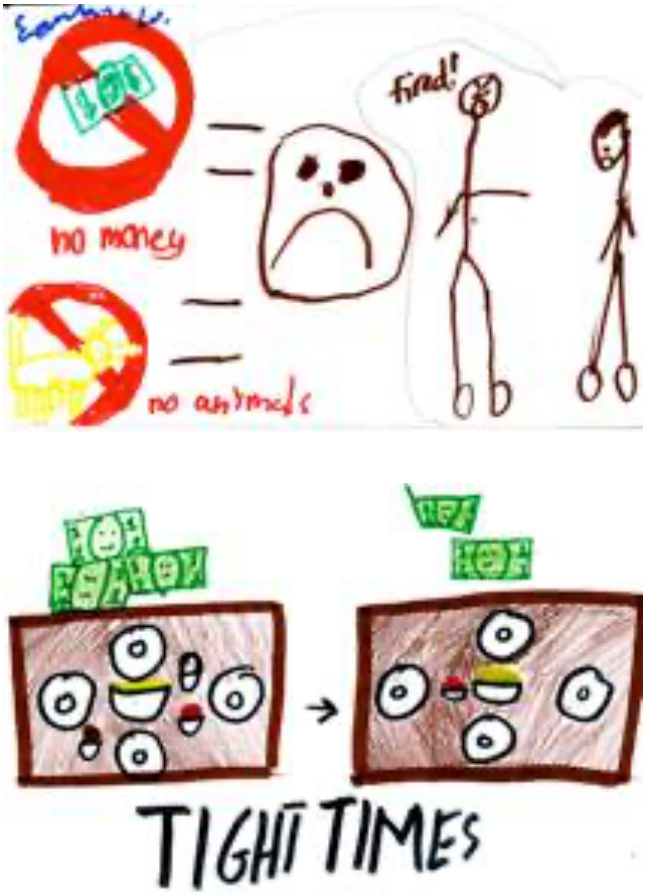
To think more about power of choice related to diet, the students were given a paper with two large

circles. On one circle, students were asked to put all of the foods they would eat if they had the power over their diet, and to put what they would eat if their parents had all of the power in other circle.



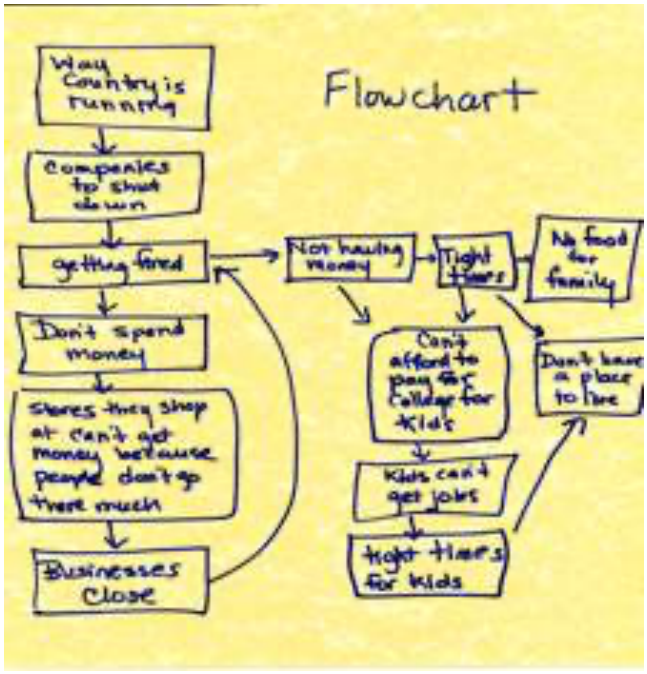
We then came back together as a class and created a web showing student thinking about the power of diet. The class decided that if we don't eat what we need, then we face obesity, starvation, or disease. We have to change our diets. The students seemed to be seeing some of the larger issues and not just focusing on food as what they put into their mouths.

The next read aloud was *Tight Times* (Hazen, 1979) about a family whose father loses his job and, even though mom is still working, they can't afford what they need. Kylie worried about the family because, "If they can't afford vegetables, then they can't eat healthy and they will have a low immune system." Tayler didn't understand why they didn't have money if they had jobs. Each student created a Sketch to Stretch to show the symbolic meaning of the story through visual images and labels. Many created sketches that included a variation of NO $= NO FOOD.



Evan said, “I drew a no money sign equals unhappy because they are sad and don’t have food or pets.” Edel commented, “In the first picture the person has enough money to buy food for their family. In the second picture, they don’t have enough money to buy food. The food is less and the bowls are smaller and they’re having very tough times right now.”

In large group, students created a flow chart to show the consequences of tight times. The flow chart traced the way problems in a country can lead to companies closing and people losing jobs and so not having money for an education and not being able to get a good job, eventually leading to people ending up homeless and without food.



What seemed hardest for the students to understand was the idea that children could suffer from hunger in a home where there were two working adults. They couldn't figure out how people could have jobs and still be hungry. We contacted the community food bank and a representative was able to come out and do a presentation that included informing the students that most food bank recipients do have jobs -- they just don't make enough money to take care of themselves. The representative told the students that the other two major groups of people who need food in Tucson are children and senior citizens. The picture of the homeless man in ragged clothes at the stoplight or the child in India seemed to be fading.

A turning point came when students worked in small groups to read sections of *Famine: The World Reacts* (Bennett, 1998) and focused on the differences between hunger and feeling hungry. The information they received from this book helped them understand the difference between rumblings in your stomach and going day after day without enough food to ever satisfy hunger and so always feeling sick, weak, and tired. They also began to understand the difference between chronic hunger where a person has just enough food to stay alive over a long period of time before eventually dying from disease and famine where there is suddenly no food and starvation often leads to a quick death.

Then we held a global banquet with all of the classes from the school. As the students entered the library, they drew a red, yellow, or blue card. Those with red cards sat together on the floor and represented 25% of the world's population who are experiencing chronic hunger. They only received a tiny amount of rice to share. Those with yellow cards represented 60% of the world who get just enough to eat. They sat at small tables and shared rice and beans with enough for everyone to get a good portion. Those with blue cards represented the 15% of the world who get more than their share. They sat at fancy tables and had tons more pizza than they could possibly eat. During the banquet some students "lost their jobs" and had to switch toanother group and one student doubled her income and got double her share of pizza. The experience demonstrated to the students that there is plenty of food in the world to feed everyone, but that it isn't distributed properly.

After the banquet we returned to our room to discuss what happened. I tried to get the students to think about what the banquet represented by asking “why?” to their complaints about not being in the blue group. After much discussion, they decided that location plays a huge part in food availability. They realized that they were fortunate to be born in a location where so many foods are available. They also felt that parents’ jobs and incomes make a big difference in what kind of “hunger situation” kids face. Evan seemed to sum up our thinking when he said that, in the real world, people don’t share their abundances and so others face horrible hunger. Engaging in this drama experience helped students understand that hunger is often the result of factors over which people have no control and to feel frustration over being in the wrong place and so not getting the food they needed or wanted.

Our explorations of hunger continued through read alouds, such as the novel Nory Ryan’s Song (Giff, 2000), the story of a young girl’s experience of hunger in the Irish Potato Famine, along with picture books that provided a range of perspectives. These books put a human face on the misery that accompanies hunger so that the students would see hunger as more than numbers.

The students decided that they needed to take action to help those suffering from hunger, in particualr they wanted to help a country in Africa. We did some research on various Web sites, and students wanted to focus on raising money for food and water for refugee camps. They practiced learning the different countries in Africa and the states in the United States. Then they asked family members to sponsor them for our “map-a-thon” and they studied the maps each night! After the test and the donations had been collected we had raised almost $300. The students had worked on their own to raise money to help fight hunger. The most valuable lesson they learned was that children can make a difference and take action. They just had to come together to work for the cause.

Through these many experiences, the students began to develop a conceptual understanding of

hunger and of the causes and prevalence of hunger in the world and in their community. Most adults, when asked to define hunger, would refer to the charitable organizations that ask for sponsors of starving children across the world. They would say that hunger is an issue faced by other countries, particularly in times of drought. It's not a surprise, then, that our students have these same misconceptions. Hunger is right in their neighborhoods as well as a real problem all over the world. We may have enough food available to feed the world's population, but without a more complex awareness of hunger and its causes, nothing will change. As teachers, we need to develop deep conceptual understandings of global and local issues like hunger or we risk maintaining the status quo -- feeling pity for those who are in need without any sense of responsibility for understanding that need or taking action for social change.

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Challenging Stereotypes of Poverty through Children's Literature
by Kaye Wingfield, Fourth/Fifth Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

Many children accept society's stereotypes of the poor as dirty, dishonest, lazy, and dependent on free handouts from hardworking citizens. These stereotypes are so pervasive that children cling to them even when presented with contradictory evidence, and even when their own families could be viewed as poor. The sociopolitical issue of poverty and economic difficulty was particularly relevant and poignant in Spring 2009 when many families in our school experienced changes in their lifestyles due to the economic crisis in the United States. Children from a range of backgrounds, including middle class and working class families, were struggling and experiencing "tight times," not just the families previously viewed as "poor." Our students saw their own parents, friends, and family members struggling with financial difficulties or heard news reports about people in Tucson who were losing their jobs and worrying about their homes and feeding their families. They had previously assumed these events only happened in faraway places, not in their own families and community. We realized that this context provided an opportunity to challenge students to push their thinking and critique some of the common stereotypes associated with people living in poverty.

We wanted children to realize that many people, including themselves, experience "tight times" and difficult situations, despite working hard and often due to no fault of their own. They needed to

see themselves as connected to the conditions that can lead a family to experience poverty, instead of viewing the "poor" as somehow different and inferior. At the same time, the tight times experienced by families do vary greatly, and might mean anything from delaying a trip to Disneyland or the purchase of a new toy to not having enough to eat or a place to sleep. We wanted children to recognize the significant differences between delaying "wants" and not meeting basic "needs."

We had explored conceptual issues of power during the fall semester, and had begun talking about the power of diet and food within our school. Lisa Thomas, our Learning Lab instructor, connected to these ideas as a way to move into a discussion of tight times. Lisa reminded students of a previous activity where they documented what they would eat if they had the power to choose anything they wanted versus if their parents had the power to force them to eat only the things that they thought were good for kids. This activity included a discussion of power and diet in our world and in our lives. She also reminded students about the canned food drive at the school before the Winter Holiday. Students talked about the times in people's lives when things are tight and how tight times can lead to situations where there is not enough food or families can not buy extra food or go out to restaurants.

Lisa read aloud a book about what causes tight times in one particular family. *Tight Times* (Hazan, 1979) is a story about a young boy who desperately wants a dog, but his father says no because of tight times. Examples of tight times in the book include eating generic cereal because of rising prices on name brands, playing in the sprinkler in the yard instead of going to the lake, eating lima bean soup rather than roast beef, and coming home from school to a babysitter because the mother needs to work. One day, the father comes home early because he has lost his job. When the boy goes outside while his parents talk, he hears a cat crying in trashcan. He brings the cat home, getting it milk with the hope that his parents will agree to let him keep the cat. His plea brings tears for the whole family. The father agrees to keep the cat as long as the boy promises not to ask about a dog again. In reply, the boy decides to name the cat Dog.

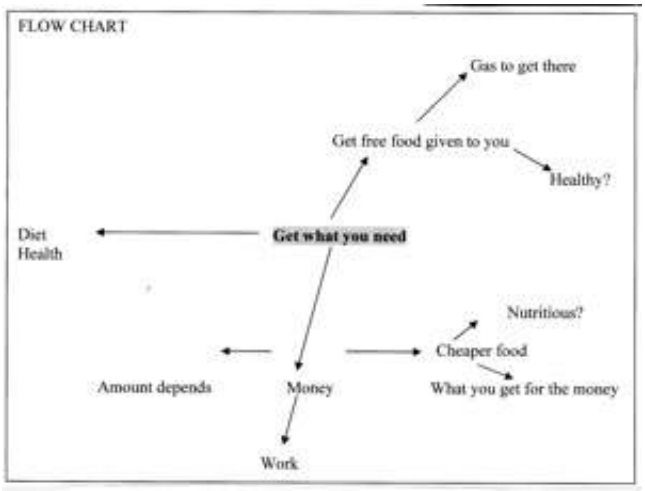
Lisa encouraged the students to talk about the book while she and I took notes about their comments. The students were aware that they did not have to raise their hands to speak during discussions, but they needed to wait for the person before them to finish. We had also been working with them on listening to and acknowledging previous comments.

Kaitlynn wondered why everyone in the family cried when they saw the cat drinking the milk. Zachary responded that they cried because the cat would be one more stressor and they would have to worry about having money to buy cat food. Abbey commented that they may not have been crying about the cat specifically but about the dad losing his job. Some students were interested in trying to figure out why the dad lost his job. Several wondered whether the tight times might not

just be affecting this family but others as well. Maybe the company had to lay off lots of their employees like all the people at the Tucson city newspaper who were losing their jobs at that time. Also the babysitter in the book lost her job because the dad would now be home. A number of children were concerned about why someone would put the cat in the trash can. One child wondered whether the cat got in the trash can because it was looking for food. Lisa asked why the dad changed his mind about getting a pet and let the boy keep the cat. Logan and Jacob thought that maybe he thought the cat was little and needed help or wanted the kid to stop asking for a dog or cat.

After this discussion, each student created a sketch to stretch on the most significant meaning of this story. The students were asked to go to a table and work silently, independently, and focus on listening to their brain. Instead of talking, they were to think and then draw, using visual images and symbols to express their ideas, rather than sentences. Words could be used as labels for these visual images, but they were primarily to use visual images to reflect on the meanings of the story. Their stretches reflected common threads of issues, such as the father losing his job, the family having little money, and connections to pets. Adrianna's sketch went further with her words and symbolism focusing on emotions, such as stress and depression. Sean used the symbol of a rainbow going from bright colors and happiness to more somber colors and tears of sadness.

After completing their sketches, the students returned to the whole group and created a flow chart of their thinking about the possible consequences of tight times for food/diet and health.



During the discussion about getting free food, Frank said his family had been to the Community Food Bank to get a food box because his mom's hours had been cut at work and there just wasn't enough money for food. He was worried about his mother having enough to eat. Sometimes students associate laziness and the expectation of handouts with people who are poor. There is also a disconnect between people that students perceive as poor and themselves. Frank's comment indicated that students were becoming comfortable with sharing their experiences and not being ostracized by the group because of an economic situation. His comment helped other students realize that there were classmates in their midst who were experiencing what they thought was happening elsewhere. Through personal experience, books, news reports and class discussions, students seemed to be moving away from some of the more common stereotypes and were beginning to understand that everyone experiences these tight times to some extent.

During Learning Lab the following week, students were encouraged to think about the differences between needs and wants and consider how the consequences of tight times can differ from family to family in significant ways. Lisa had the students review a book they had previously discussed,

The Lady in the Box (McGovern, 1997) which Kygatheo summarized as a story about a homeless lady who needed shelter, food, and blankets. Lisa also asked them to revisit *Tight Times*, which Terrell summarized as a book about a boy who had to do without a pet he wanted. Terrell pointed out that the boy had food, just not the kind he wanted. Lisa reminded the class that we had been discussing food and the issues of tight times and that we wanted to think more about these issues, in particular by talking about how tight times can mean different things to families, including doing without, waiting and/or getting help from others.

Mary Cowhey (2006), author of *Black Ants and Buddhists*, finds it powerful to draw on personal experiences or experiences that are public knowledge when talking with students. Consequently, Lisa talked about a current news report in the United States about the executives who run the car companies and make millions. They were asking for tax dollars to help their plants stay open because they were in trouble, but then got in private jets and flew to Washington to meet with Congress to ask for that money. People in the country were upset and wondered whether the government should spend money to help these companies. The next time the auto executives had to go to Washington, they drove in cars, showing that even they were being affected by the economy, however, the debate continued about whether they really needed the help.

Lisa asked the students to work with a partner to read a book and think about the causes of tight times. The characters in the books make decisions about what they need and what they want and students were to infer the causes of the tight times and think about what the characters were doing without or had to wait for as well as whether that was a need or a want. Lisa asked the students to fill out a sheet answering two questions: Why are there tight times? and What do they have to do without? Students were to consider different possibilities and think about who struggles more in tight times, people with needs or people with wants.

Each partner chose one book to read together from a text set that included: *Beatrice's Goat*, *Fly Away Home*, *A Shelter in Our Car*, *A Castle on Viola Street*, *Peppe the Lamplighter*, *Those Shoes*, *The Hard Times Jar*, *Bothers in Hope*, *A Chair for My Mother*, *If the Shoe Fits*, *Homeless*, and Four Feet, Two Sandals. They read together and then talked through and wrote their responses to the questions.

Students noted a range of reasons for why people experience tight times:
• War leads to lack of food (leave their homes/refugee camps may not have enough food)
• Losing jobs (not enough money for medicine/food/shelter)
• Sickness (parents sick/can't work/no money for food or shelter)
• Both parents working but jobs don't pay enough to cover food/shelter/clothing
• Too many bills to pay
• Business not selling enough merchandise so can't afford much food or clothing

• Can’t replace things that break

Students also noted a range of things that people do without in tight times:
• Shoes and clothes
• House/Large enough house to fit large family/Repairs in a house
• Money
• Education
• Car
• Books
• Pets
• Friends
• Family

After reading the books and recording their thoughts, students returned to the whole group and shared a short summary of each book and talked about the needs and wants evident in the books. During the discussion, Max shared that he was saving for some Bionicle toys and instead gave his money to his mom because they had run short on food for the week. The students did not directly comment on what he said, but in looking around the room, it was evident that this gesture tied directly into what they were reading and made it relevant to their lives.

Finally the group worked through where to place the books on a continuum between doing without needs and doing without wants. For each book, they had to decide where it would go on this continuum between needs and wants in relation to the other books, requiring some difficult and complex thinking and distinctions. They clearly understood that doing without food and shelter was definitely a need and doing without a new or popular pair of tennis shoes was a want, but placing books in the center of the continuum involved a great deal of discussion and negotiation. They agreed to put the family where the mom still worked and the dad had lost his job in the same spot as the family where both parents were working but did not make enough money to support the family with the appropriate housing and food. They put books where both parents were working but not making enough money to meet the family needs slightly to the right on the continuum towards doing without wants. To the left on the continuum, they put books where the parents were not able to work due to war, illness, and job loss as well as books where children did not have parents to support them.

The students did not blame the victims in these circumstances and didn't fall back on stereotypical judgments that sometimes are connected to these situations. For example, when they encountered a family that was doing without things, they didn't write or say, why don't these parents get a job? If there wasn't enough money to support the family, they didn't say, why did they have so many children? or why did they spend their money on this item instead of that item? They seemed to grasp the concept that these issues are deeper than just the individual family unit and that these situations happen for many reasons around the globe. This discussion reflected a major conceptual shift in their thinking and recognition of complexity in the functioning of societal systems.

The students continued to make connections about the concept of needs and wants throughout the rest of the semester. One such time involved a discussion that followed our Global Feast, a school-wide simulation of food distribution and hunger around the world. Each group of students represented a percentage of the world and reflected how food is distributed –- those who have more than their fair share of food, those who have just enough to eat, and those who never get enough food to stay healthy. The food they received ranged from an abundance of pizza to just enough beans and rice for each small group to one small bowl of rice for a whole group. The students who had just enough beans and rice for their small group to eat realized that they wanted pizza, but it wasn't a necessity. They could survive on their portions, while the large group that had only one small bowl actually needed more to survive.

Another situation involved the Scholastic Book Fair that occurs twice a year at school. Students usually rush in during the preview time and list all sorts of books, toys, and posters that they want to buy. During the spring, I noticed a few students looking at the toys and the posters and telling each other that, with money being an issue for their family, they were going to spend some of their own money and ask their parents for less. They were going to limit themselves to one book and one poster, even though they wanted more than that. Some even commented that they didn't need any of the merchandise. Nate said he needed to get a book for his book report and Colton replied that he could actually get a book from the library. Jeremiah commented that the PTO needed the students to buy books to help with their fundraising.

These comments and distinctions between needs and wants indicated that students had taken on a new awareness about needs and wants as part of their thinking and actions. By starting with personal connections to tight times, students were able to look at their everyday lives and community from a new perspective and not just locate economic struggles as a problem that was

"out there" away from their own immediate worlds. Literature provided a safe way for them to make these connections without revealing too much about their own family situations, unless they chose to do so. Literature also provided a way to look at multiple family contexts and societal situations that might cause difficulty, so that they did not reduce tight times to a narrow view of the causes and consequences. Through the literature, they came to recognize the complexity of these causes and the range of possible consequences, as well as to develop empathy for those who struggle with tremendous needs, not just wants. These understandings of causes and consequences, in turn, provided students with ways of thoughtfully taking action. Instead of holding onto stereotypes, they took an important step away from blame and charity to considering how to make a difference in the world.

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Helping Young Students Think Conceptually: An Inquiry Study of Hunger and Power
by Jaquetta Alexander, First/Second Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

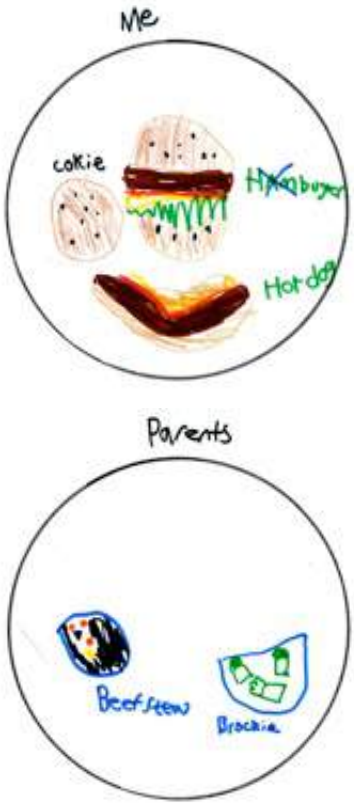
One of the consequences of shifting to an inquiry-based approach in my teaching has been a shift in how I plan curriculum. Instead of following a predetermined set of theme units and lesson plans, I look at larger chunks of time and am constantly involved in examining student thinking and questions in order to determine where we might go next in our learning. I still have a plan and a

focus for our inquiry, but find that I need to spend time carefully examining student work, reflecting on my observations, rereading my teaching journal, and talking with colleagues to create that plan for curriculum.

Having explored a school-wide concept of power for the fall semester, I met with my colleague, Jennifer Griffith, to consider where this inquiry might go during the spring semester. Jennifer and I had worked together closely the previous year, but this year we were teaching a combination class of first and second graders, sixty students total. After reflecting over the fall semester, one tension stood out for us. Each year during the holidays our Student Council organizes a food drive for the Community Food Bank. We realized that our students were not making a meaningful connection to this effort. They did not get to see what happened to that food and where it went after they gathered it, and we had not offered them opportunities to understand the significance of this endeavor. The relationship between the students' efforts to support the Community Food Bank and our inquiry into power sparked a realization that we could deepen their conceptual understanding of power by thinking broadly about the Power of Food.

Reflecting now on our work, I realize that the journey our students took prompted a real shift in understanding. Initially our students brought in canned food for the food drive during the fall because they were asked, but by the end of the spring semester, they brought in canned food because they understood the needs of families and identified with the reasons behind why we donate to the Community Food Bank. Short and Harste (1996) argue that inquiry should always begin with connections to the concept based on children's life experiences before broadening understanding of the issue. Instead of starting our inquiry so far away from the children as had been done with the food drive, we wanted to start this time by having children think about food in their own lives and what it means to have tight times as a family. Because of the economic crisis in the U.S. and our community, we felt these were powerful points of connection for children.

Lisa Thomas, our Learning Lab teacher, started the process of thinking about food with our students. She read *Burger Boy* by Alan Durant (2005), a story about a boy who eats so many burgers that he turned into one! After a short literature discussion, Lisa asked the students to think about diet and food, and the power that food has in their lives, continually asking students to ponder the concept of power. Each student was given a piece of paper to show what they would eat if they had the power to choose their food. On the other side of the paper, they drew what their parents would choose for them to eat if their parents had all the power. This engagement proved to be helpful in setting the foundation to help students understand "The Power of Food."



The next Learning Lab session provided students with a touchstone text. Lisa read *Tight Times* by Barbara Shook Hazen (1979), a book about a boy who wanted a dog, but his family couldn't afford one because the father had lost his job. It was apparent from the literature discussion that our students made strong connections to this book.

Bailey: I have a connection because we sometimes go through tough times, but we always get through it.
Maria: My cousin doesn't have much because her mom doesn't have much because her dad doesn't pay money.
Justin: My dad has hard times because he quit his job.
Ysabel: My mom has hard times because she quit her job. We don't have many toys either.
Haley: Do you have a car?
Ysabel: No, it broke down.
Bailey: I have a connection to Ysabel because my mom quit her job, and I don't get to see my dad much because he works from 4:00 in the morning to 5:00 at night. I miss my dad.
Nick: My mom, sister, dad and me had a tough time because we got a dog from the pound, and he got sick. He had to be put asleep.
Connor: I have a connection with Bailey because my dad works overtime now.
Maria: I have a connection with Connor because my dad has to work more to work on the planes.

Our discussion about tough times continued into our next Learning Lab session when Lisa asked the students, "What are tight times?" The students' responses were:

• not much money
• not much food or money
• may not have houses
• may live in shelters
• no money to go to school, and can't have dogs or cats

When asked to be more specific, "What are tight times when we're talking about money?" Justin stated, "It's like if you get some money and you want a game but you don't have food. You should buy the food." Justin continued to reflect, "It's what you need, not what you want." Dewey (1938) argues that the beginning of instruction shall be the experience learners already have; that this experience and the capacities that have been developed during its course provide the starting point for all further learning. At this point, it was clear that our students were making connections to issues related to tight times and that they were ready to build upon that knowledge. We decided to shift their thinking to explore the root causes of hunger so that they could build strong understandings of why people suffer from hunger and the different kinds of tight times that families might experience.

We talked together as a staff about the kinds of invitations we might offer students in order to engage them in productive learning that would encourage them to develop new understandings and take them beyond their life experiences. It was at this point that we introduced the students to the terms hungry, hunger, and famine in the Learning Lab. Every student had felt hungry, and so Lisa described hunger as a feeling you have when you're hungry for a very, very long time. We asked the students to describe what hungry and hunger might feel like. They described hungry as feeling bad, feeling mad or cranky, and feeling like you are going to be sick. Hunger was described as a feeling of sadness for yourself and your family, an empty feeling, and a feeling that you are broken down. Lisa helped them grasp the term famine by describing that it was when thousands and thousands of people in an area experience hunger.

Hungry	Hunger
Feels bad	Sad for yourself and family
Tummy is empty	Could die - won't survive
Stomach Talk	Wouldn't feel good
Like you are going to be sick	Bones would turn weak
Sad	Nauseous and dizzy
Stomach saying, "I want food"	Sick - even more
Don't have energy	Feel like you are shrinking
Gonna throw up	Feel empty
Mad - Cranky	Wouldn't run or play - broken down

In the same Learning Lab session we hoped to push their thinking when we introduced the non-fiction book *Feeding the World* by Janine Amos (1993). This book gives examples of causes of hunger, such as drought and war. By using selected parts of this text we hoped to give the students information that would support their understandings of the causes of hunger and famine. This Learning Lab session was important because it pushed the students to think about things that were uncomfortable, things that they had not experienced before, and things that would be important to their understanding in later engagements.

Around this time, during a Study Group session, we explored a book by Stephanie Kempf (2005), *Finding Solutions to Hunger: A Sourcebook for Middle and Upper School Teachers*. After thoughtful discussions and careful consideration we decided to modify an engagement from this book so it would be appropriate for our elementary students. “Eating the Way the World Eats” allows students to experience firsthand how unfairly food is distributed in our world. Three different meals are prepared in advance -– each representing one of the three groups in the world: those who have more than their fair share of food, those who have just enough, and those who never get enough food to stay healthy. By sheer “luck of the draw” students are randomly assigned to one of these groups (Kempf, 2005). We held a school-wide banquet to simulate this activity. Our first and second graders attended the banquet with other students in grades three to five. Each student was given a ticket with a color that represented a percentage of the world’s population; yellow represented 60%, blue represented 15%, and red represented 25%. The students were simply told that they were going to eat the way the world eats. We delivered pizza, enough pizza to feed everyone present, to the blue group. There was excited chatter and a sense of anticipation in the air at that point. Then we delivered community bowls of beans and rice to the yellow tables. The yellow group was divided into ten tables of six students. Each table received a community bowl. The red group was given one community bowl for all 25 students, who were sitting on the

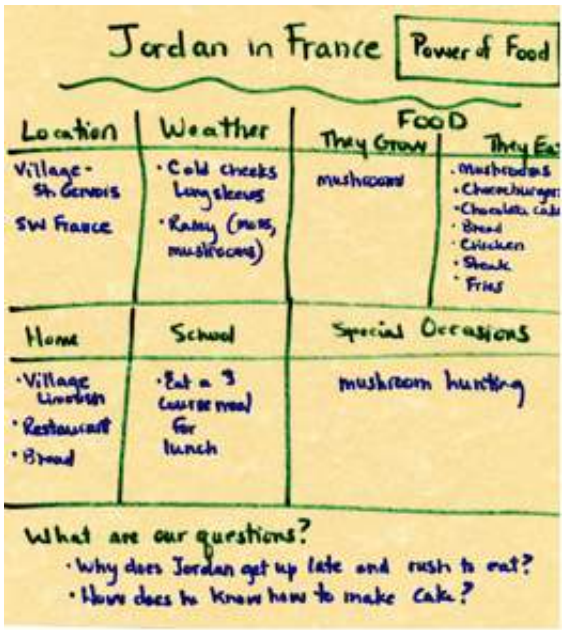
floor. To simulate natural movement due to changes in circumstance we then moved several students from one group to another due to changing economic factors. We anticipated a mixed reaction from the students, and that is exactly what happened. It was important to us that the banquet not create anger or hostility within the groups. Our goal was to elicit thinking and further our students' conceptual understanding of power, specifically food as connected to issues of power. Therefore, in the end, after everyone had the opportunity to experience how the world eats, each student got to eat pizza.

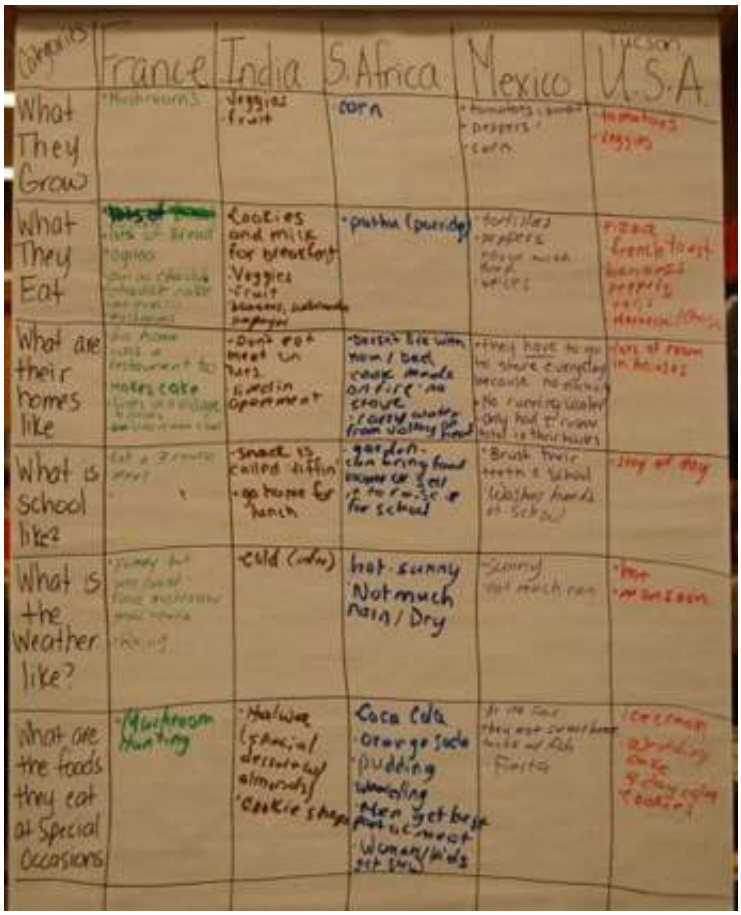
Jennifer and I were uncertain as to the significance of the banquet and how it affected our young students' understandings, however, the conversation we had with our students immediately following the banquet helped to put aside some of our uncertainty. Students made a range of comments:
Jordan: I was happy when I walked in, but I got scared because there were a lot of people there.
Carah: When I got a ticket and sat down I got excited, but then I felt angry because we got beans and rice. I didn't want beans and rice.
Reid: You should feel lucky you got pizza from us.
Abbey A.: We should be lucky and grateful that we even got food.
Abby G.: I think I disagree. When I came in and got a ticket I wondered what it was all about. Then I smelled the pizza and thought we were going to get it, then the blue table got it and I was mad.
Morgan: I felt sad for other people in Tucson because we live in the desert and there's not much food in the desert. I feel sad for people who have to suffer. That's lots of days to eat just beans and rice.
Carah: I'm heartbroken because the red group sounds so sad.
Morgan: In real life people actually suffer. Maybe the people who have lots of food could share.

Dewey (1938) suggests that we create environments that have the most potential for tension. Morgan's comment was significant because we could sense that our students were experiencing tension over the fact that there are people in our world who do not have enough to eat. We perceived those tensions as opportunities to move our students beyond learning and into deep understanding. Now that our students were on the edge of knowing about the distribution of food and the power of food we were excited to expand our work into the classroom.

Jennifer and I wanted to offer a progression of experiences that would be appropriate to engage our students in productive learning. We hoped to enhance the work being done in the Learning Lab, in which Lisa was helping the students to understand root causes of hunger, such as poverty, economic failure and food distribution. Therefore, in the classroom we began exploring examples of children in other countries who have enough food to eat. At first this idea may seem odd since our goal was to help our students understand hunger, however, we knew that we needed to start

with our students' own life experiences, and since none of our students had experienced hunger or famine we wanted to start with having them examine the food they eat in families and how that differs for other families around the world. We relied heavily on Beatrice Hollyer's book, *Let's Eat! What Children Eat Around the World* (2003). This non-fiction text describes the daily lives of six children, each from a different country. We decided to chart what we were learning about the location, weather, food, home and school life, special occasions, and any questions that still lingered after reading a section of the book on a particular child. This book was very engaging because it allowed students to make connections to children from around the world who were their same age. The students engaged in many conversations related to how the children from the book lead lives that are both similar and different from their lives. We took several weeks to read, discuss, and chart our students' understandings. Finally, we created a comparison chart so the students could think about their lives compared to the lives of the children in the book.





Because our students easily made connections to other children from around the world by exploring their daily lives, we were ready to shift their thinking so they could explore their tensions over the fact that there are people in the world who do not have enough food to eat. We discovered two non-fiction texts that were critical in helping our students understand that many children around the world do not have enough food to eat. These two books, through their text and powerful

pictures, helped our students see what hunger and famine look like. As with *Let's Eat! What Children Eat around the World*, we read *Out of the Dump* by Kristin Franklin and Nancy McGirr (1996), and *The Lost Boys of Natinga: A School for Sudan's Young Refugees* by Judy Walgren (1998) over many days. *Out of the Dump* is a compilation of photographs taken by children living in the garbage dump in the center of Guatemala City. Accompanying each photograph is a piece of writing that describes the photograph, also written by the children living in the dump. *The Lost Boys of Natinga: A School for Sudan's Young Refugees* discusses the lost boys arrival, the history of the lost boys, and their life at Natinga, including school, food, church, health, and recreation. Because the entire text was not appropriate and would have overwhelmed our young children, we used only the portions that would be of benefit to our students' understanding of the power of food.

Even though both books were significant to student understanding, perhaps the most powerful engagements were the school visits from Amanda Morse of the Community Food Bank and Abraham Deng Ater, a lost boy from Natinga. The opportunity for the students to hear first-hand accounts of hunger solidified their understanding of the power of food. Amanda Morse first asked the students what they had already learned about food issues. Some of their responses were:
• when some people have food and others don't
• sometimes you send so much food out of a country that you don't have enough food in the country
• famine
• how food is transferred-transportation
• where food comes from
• what the difference is between hunger and hungry
• sometimes people don't have enough money to pay for food

Amanda described the difference between food secure (safe access to food for a healthy life) and food insecure (don't have food or safe access to food). She also described the purpose of the Community Food Bank and the populations that they serve. The students were surprised to learn that 40% of the people getting food from the food bank are kids! To end her program she stated that donating food is a short-term solution, but teaching people to plant their own gardens is a long-term solution. Our students immediately made the connection to our class garden. We had already planted a garden and were making all kinds of discoveries, such as which plants grow faster, how much water and sunlight is required, etc. Amanda's presentation furthered our students' understanding of the power of food.

Abraham Deng Ater described his journey from the Sudan to Ethiopia to Kenya and finally to the United States. He shared his experiences with having little or no food. He described how he felt and helped students grasp the difference between hungry and hunger, which had always seemed a difficult concept for them. We knew the students had made the connection when they began asking

questions that were particular to the book that we had read about the lost boys, such as “Did you know anyone who ate poisonous leaves and died?” We had read about how children in Natinga had become so hungry that they would forage for leaves and would sometimes eat the wrong (poisonous) leaves and die.

All of these engagements created a context through which students could conceptualize The Power of Food. Since we had based our journey on our students’ life experiences, they were able to build their understandings and add to them as the year progressed. Because Jennifer and I had worked closely the previous year, bringing together our first and second graders, we were able to give the students opportunities to take action in our community. This year’s second graders benefited from that knowledge of taking action. Roger Hart (1992) argues that, “Children need to be involved in meaningful projects with adults. It is unrealistic to expect them suddenly to become responsible, participating adult citizens at the age of 16, 18, or 21 without prior exposure to the skills and responsibilities involved” (p. 5). This kind of thinking pushes us as educators to constantly challenge our students to become better individuals. We also recognized that power is tied to action because it is the ability to influence an outcome. Our thinking was that kids need the opportunity to take action in order to understand power. Therefore, we did not impose our thinking onto students but thought with them and provided structures that challenged them to think more deeply about their understandings of the power of food. We asked them two guiding questions, “How can we use our power to help?” and “When is the time to take action?” Our students said that any time was the time to take action and that we had to take action in places where action was needed. It was obvious that our students were thinking both globally and locally when deciding how to use our power to help.

As this chart indicates, the students wanted to help by donating food from our garden, having a food drive, and spreading the word about hunger to make people more aware. The students decided that our first step had to be to find out who needs help. Ultimately our first and second graders decided to take action locally by collecting seeds, gardening tools, and food to deliver to the Community Food Bank when we visited for a field trip. Our students worked hard to create posters for the school and also to take home. Students even made posters for their parents to take to work! In the end we delivered 674 pounds of food along with packets of seeds to the Community Food Bank. I have always been particularly drawn to the work of Vivian Vasquez (2004), who has shown that even very young children are capable of creating change in their world and taking action on issues that are significant in their lives. In the last several years, I have made some of these same discoveries when working with young children. This year’s class was no different.

After having time to reflect and analyze the journey we took in understanding the power of food, I think the student engagements allowed a flow of experiences that enabled students to better understand the concept. By starting with the students' life experiences, inviting students to reach out globally to create understandings, and then bringing the concept back to their own lives to take action, students gained a broad and deep understanding of the power of food. These experiences, in turn, provided me with new understandings about curriculum and helped me create a framework that will be beneficial to future planning because it is not specific to this one learning experience. This flow of experiences as a frame for curriuculum is one I can use to think about my planning in other areas of instruction. I gained a conceptual understanding of inquiry and curriculum, just as my students gained a conceptual understanding of power and hunger.

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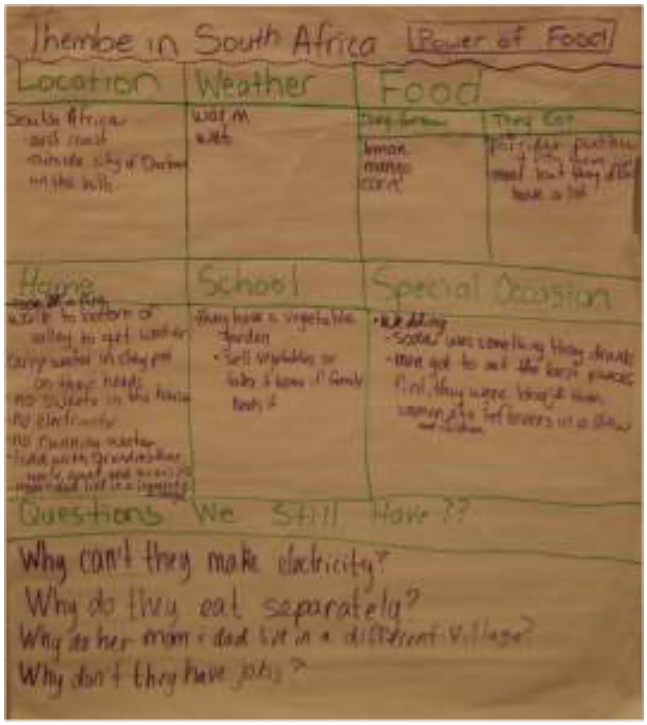
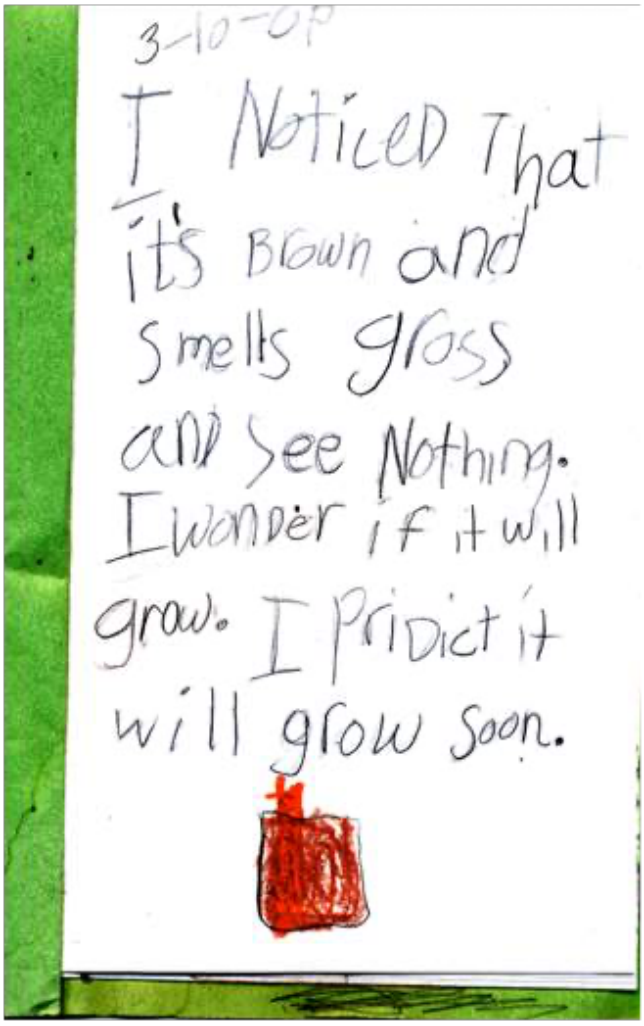
Taking Action as a Process over Time
by Jennifer Griffith, First Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

The teachers at our school decided to focus on the concept of power and food/hunger during Spring 2009 to continue our professional learning about ways of meaningfully engaging children in global issues and social action. Jaquetta Alexander and I team taught first and second grade with 60 kids and so we met to discuss ways to bring our conceptual thinking about these issues into our classroom. We had always wanted to create a community garden at the school and realized that gardening would fit nicely into our look at the power of food.

One of our resource books, *Let's Eat! What Children Eat Around the World* (Hollyer, 2004), shows what typical kids eat on an average day from South Africa, Mexico, Thailand, France, and India. The illustrations and descriptions are written in a kid-friendly way. We decided to use this as our touchstone text to encourage our students to think about what kids grow and eat in other parts of the worlds. We believe in providing a visual tool for our students to record their thinking, and so created a chart to use as we read about each country. The book provides insights into the location, weather, crops, foods, homes, and school lives of the children in these countries and so these areas were recorded on the chart along with our kids' questions as we focused separately on each child in the book. Our hope was for the kids to explore what people grow around the world to give them a better understanding for what we might grow in the desert.



We decided to have a guest speaker talk to the kids about gardening in the desert once they had learned about growing food in other parts of the world. Andrew Baker, our classroom assistant's husband, volunteered his time. He kept the kids engaged and taught them about the soil in the desert as well as shared ways to keep our garden eco-friendly. The kids planted their vegetables with Andrew so they could work the soil alongside an expert. While some were gardening, the remainder decorated their "power of food" journals, making their first entry about what they thought their plant would do first.



We planted a variety of vegetables including broccoli, lettuce, radishes, snap peas, and eggplant. After the planting frenzy, we focused on the life cycles of their plants so the kids knew what to expect and could keep track of the progress of their vegetables. We continued observing our garden, responding in our "power of food" journals and exploring the concept in Learning Lab with an emphasis on understanding the differences between hunger and hungry and the causes of hunger. During Learning Lab, the kids usually listened to a read aloud and then discussed their thinking and responses to the book. Our kids seemed to grasp the idea that food gets damaged by weather and were intrigued with the process food takes to get from one place to another. We watched a short film, *Farm to Table*, and the kids talked about where food comes from. Their ideas included:

• Crops -- get soil ready, plant, get plenty of water
• Orchards
• Farms

They discussed what could go wrong and their ideas naturally switched to weather. Our work with understanding the world around us and how different things grow in different climates helped their thinking. Their responses to what could go wrong included:

• Food could get bruised
• Weather could prevent the food from growing or damage it
• Equipment on farm could break down
• Bad weather could keep food from the store
• Other weather could affect food, like rain, flood, drought, lightening, storms

As we continued with our gardening and "power of food" inquiry, it was obvious that we needed to push the kids further in their thinking. They had grasped the idea of how to plant, understood the cycle of a plant, read literature about food and hunger, and learned about kids and food from around the world. The school year was coming to an end and so we wanted to move into thinking about how to take action in regards to the power of food and deciding whether to take action locally or globally. We had gone through this process of taking action locally the previous school year and knew that young kids need ample time to explore and engage in meaningful dialogue around what taking action is and looks like. Jaquetta and I knew kids needed time if they were to really understand taking action.

A guest speaker from the Tucson Community Food Bank came to the school to share about the hunger problems in our community. This was a huge event for our kids because they had been looking at hunger problems in the world, and now realized that that there was a hunger problem in our own city. The presentation was moving and resonated with the kids who continued to refer back to this experience. She told them that 40% of the food bank users are kids who are hungry, creating a shocked look on the faces of our students. They also learned that the food bank offers several programs; one of them a food production program with a demonstration garden to show people how to grow food in Tucson.

As a staff, we had read the professional book *Black Ants and Buddhists* (Cowhey, 2006), the story of a first/second grade teacher who works to help her kids understand their role in making the world a better place. Mary Cowhey talks about making the conscious decision to teach critically, knowing that young kids are capable of amazing things. We believed this as well and strived to shift our teaching to encourage our kids to be compassionate and take action for social change.

We had created a chart in our classroom on "What We Are Learning about the Power of Food" to record our thinking as we moved through various experiences. We returned to that chart as a way to synthesize our learning before moving to action. Cowhey (2006) points out that children need to take action from a point of knowledge and understanding and so we needed to assess where our kids were at in this process. Students made comments such as:

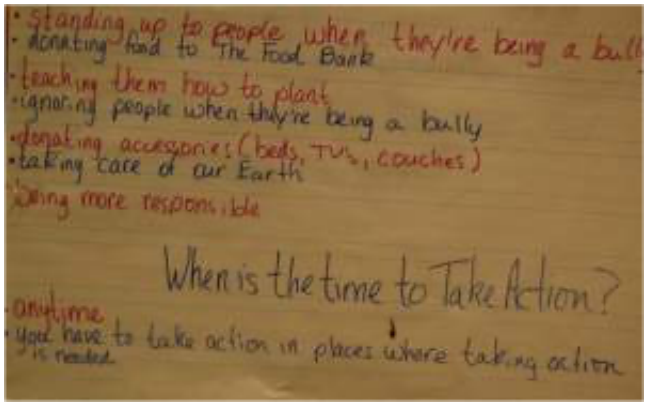
Abby G.: You need to food to grow and live.
Haley C.: Drought causes hunger.
Destini: Crops are the food that you grow.
Riley: We learned about France, India, South Africa and Mexico. We noticed that they eat and grow fruits and vegetables.
Hunter, Jace, & Morgan H.: In Natinga trucks bring food. The weather effected the time it took for trucks to get to camp.
Abby G. & Morgan H.: In the world there are people who have enough food and people who don't have enough food.
Ben, Connor, & Morgan H.: People are dying from not having enough or the right food. We learned that from the boys in Natinga.

Our kids had a good grasp on thinking locally and globally about food, the process food takes, and the causes of hunger. We were ready to bring these pieces together and think about taking action and what that means and looks like. Jaquetta and I planned a field trip to the food bank after seeing how much our kids were intrigued with the demonstration garden. Our hope was that they could take action by helping out the food bank, but we knew that they needed to take ownership in this process in order for the action to be authentic. Cowhey (2006) notes that teachers often choose projects that demonstrate caring and engage kids, but argues that kids need to think critically about each project and be part of the decision making, not just be told what to do. Our goal was to think critically with our students, not for our students.

We began by recording their responses to complete the statement, "Taking action is...." One response was, “Taking action is helping people or friends in need of food, money, seeds, water, home, clothes, and shoes.” I thought this particular response was interesting because the list came from our work in the classrom and lab. In the Learning Lab we had talked about money and poverty as a cause of hunger, our gardening unit had focused on the cycle of a plant, and our exploration of kids around the world had included several children who did not have running water. This response indicated to me that kids were transferring their knowledge to thinking about what taking action looks like. Other responses included:

• Taking action is telling people not to litter and throw trash
• Taking action is making and hanging up posters
• Taking action is picking up trash
• Taking action is spreading the word that people need help
• Taking action is helping people in an emergency
• Taking action is donating food to the food bank
• Taking action is teaching people how to plant

It was awesome to see the kids make connections between what we had explored in the classroom and the Learning Lab, as well as with our guest speakers. They had strong understandings about taking action. We challenged them to think about when they should take action. They felt strongly that taking action can happen any time and that action should occur at any point where there is a need.

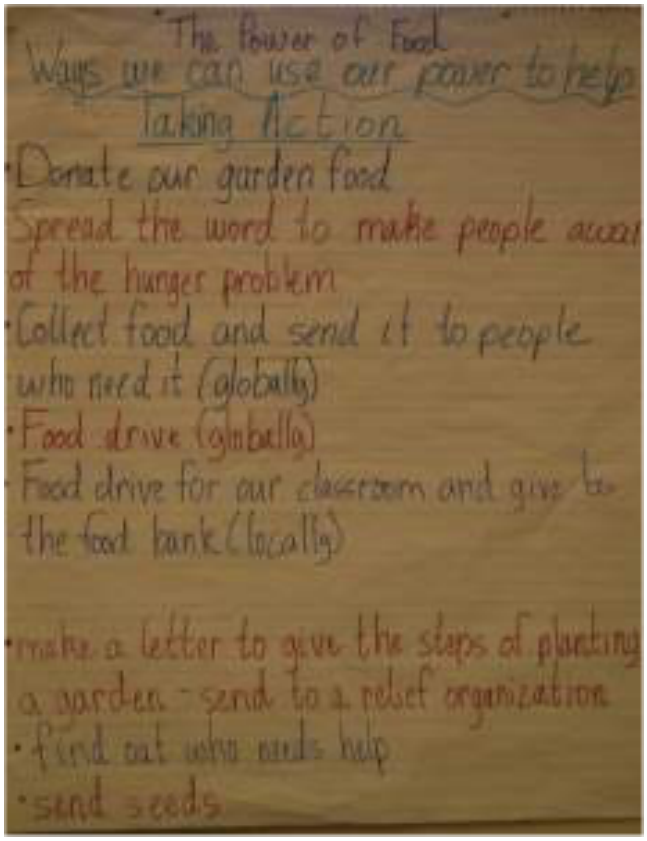


Jacqueta and I could see that taking the time to understand the concept of taking action had paid off. Often teachers rush from experience to experience in school, feeling the pressure of standards and tests, never giving time for kids to really dwell on any one idea. We had taken the time to synthesize their thinking and to provide tools to pull their experiences together to understand what it meant to take action.

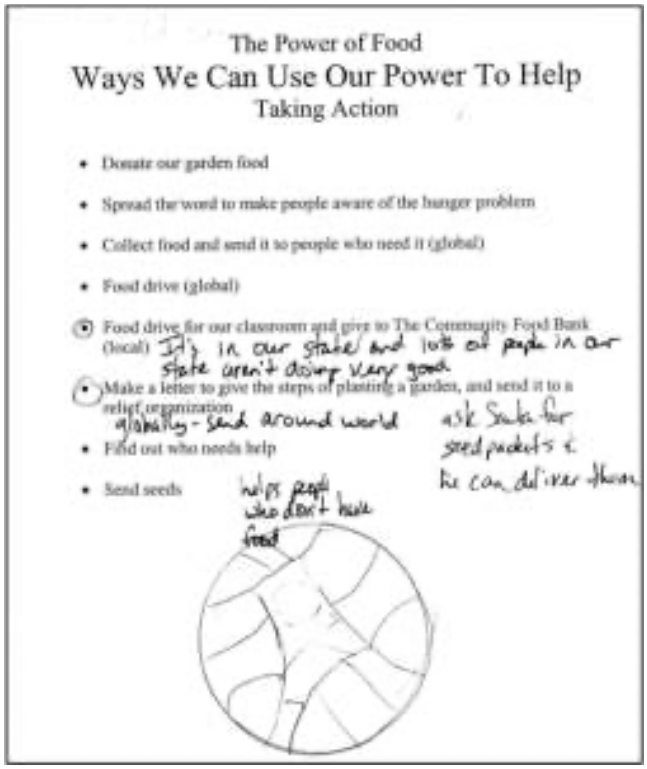
We knew we needed to push them to identify a problem to move forward with taking action. We reviewed our journey through inquirying into the power of food and asked the kids to think about

what they considered significant. Many kids mentioned gardening, growing food, the global feast, our inquiry about the ways kids eat in different parts of the world, and the discovery that there is enough food in the world but not everyone gets some of that food and so goes hungry. The kids felt strongly about the inequity of food distribution and decided that this was a problem they wanted to take action on as first and second graders. Once we posed our problem, we created a class chart to look at how we could use our power to take action on this issue. Some ideas included:

- Donate our garden food
- Spread the word to make people aware of the hunger problem
- Collect food and send it to people who need it both globally and locally



The next day Jaquetta and I typed up the list the kids had made of ways to use our power to take action. They met in small groups to discuss what they felt were the top two choices. Based on our work from the previous year we knew that everyone needed to have their voices heard within this process and that discussion was the key to consensus on our taking action project. The groups engaged in great conversation. Riley, Destiny, and Ethan wanted to spread the word to make people aware of the hunger problem and explained that if people hear about the problem they will be inclined to help. They also wanted to do a local food drive to help people in need. Morgan, DJ, and Isabella wanted to send seeds because they said that people can have food and stay alive with a garden. They also wanted to write a letter to give steps in planting a garden because they were concerned that people know how to garden so they can grow their own food.



The Power of Food

Ways We Can Use Our Power To Help

Taking Action

- Donate our garden food
- Spread the word to make people aware of the hunger problem
- Collect food and send it to people who need it (global)
- Food drive (global)
- Food drive for our classroom and give to The Community Food Bank (local) It's in our state and lots of people in our state aren't doing very good
- Make a letter to give the steps of planting a garden, and send it to a relief organization globally - send around world
- Find out who needs help
- Send seeds

ask State for seed packets & he can deliver them

helps people who don't have food

After working in small groups we came back together as a class to see if we could reach consensus. We made a new chart with the top choices of each group and opened up the floor for discussion to help us select an action project as a class. Carah felt passionate that if we spread the word to others, people would hear and want to help. Bryce felt that if we were able to provide people with supplies they could garden. The issue of local and global action came up. Abby shared that she changed from global to local after hearing that it might be difficult to get food to another country and learned about the importance of helping people in our own community and making people aware. We had narrowed our decision to writing letters and sending seeds. After more discussion and thinking about our upcoming field trip to the Community Food Bank, we decided that we could collect food and seeds to take to the food bank when we went on our trip. The kids were excited to actually be able to deliver these items themselves.

Cowhey (2006) states that often mixed messages are sent when schools do food drives -- that we reinforce stereotypes about poor people, oversimplifying the problem and the solution, failing to teach an understanding of the causes of poverty and further stigmatizing low-income children in the school. It was important that our kids understood our project wasn't about giving a handout to the poor. Between the Learning Lab and the classroom we had done a lot of work exploring the causes of hunger and understanding the immensity of the hunger problem in our world. We had also discussed tight times and the reasons why families might experience difficult times and need some support.

We talked as a class about what to do next in order to carry out our project. The kids liked the idea of making posters and felt that posters would spread the word. They decided to make posters to

hang at home as well as around the school. Representatives from our classroom went to other classrooms in the school to spread the word by letting them know that the Safari Class was taking action and needed their help in collecting food and seeds to take to the food bank. The kids were excited to hear their project announced on the morning school announcements.

Now it was in their hands to bring in canned foods, seeds, gardening tools, and money. We had several weeks until we went on our field trip but the end of the year was only four weeks away, so we decided to collect until then. The donations trickled in and were not as large as we had anticipated. As I reflect on why we didn't get a large influx of donations, I wonder if the end of the year is a hard time to engage families in donations because so much else is happening. Our kids were distracted by end-of-the-year events and plans. We did have donations but certainly could have had more.

In returning to Cowhey (2006), I am reminded that taking action is not about the size of the donations or efforts, but the ways in which action can be a vehicle for changing kids' thinking. Cowhey states that taking action in thoughtful ways can:

• Challenge stereotypes
• Teach understandings about the complexity of the causes of social problems
• Introduce local activists and organizers as role models addressing needs and working for long-term solutions
• Empower children to take responsibility in their community
• Remove the stigma of poverty

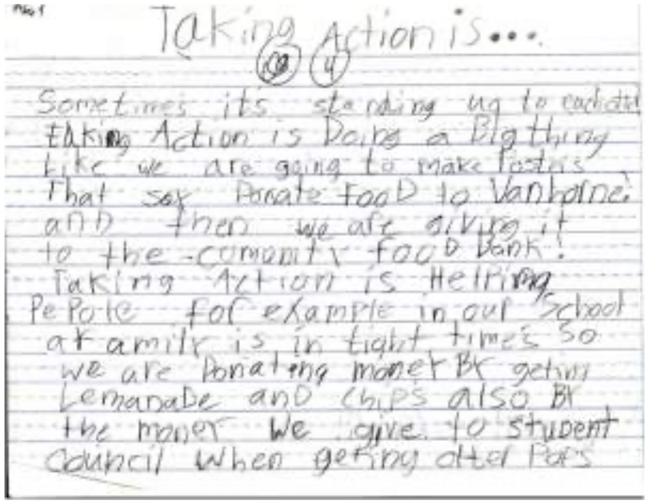
Looking at this list helps me realize that we did encourage kids to do this type of thinkng through our work in the lab and classroom. So although our donations may not have been enormous, our work with thinking critically about action was successful.

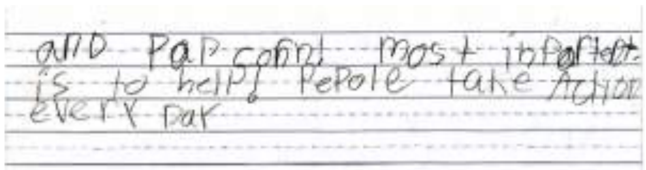
By the time we went to the food bank we had filled up several bins of canned food and seeds, and the kids were excited to deliver them. Our field trip was definitely educational and eye opening. The kids were impressed with the many programs at the food bank and how their system worked. The demonstration garden was a hit; the kids enjoyed seeing a real garden and hearing more about how they help families learn to grow their own gardens so that they don't have to depend on others for food.

The school year was coming to a close and so we wanted to do some final reflection on the meaning of taking action for children. In the classroom, we had the kids take a blank piece of paper and finish the sentence, "Taking action…." Their responses were extremely thoughtful for young children. One student talked about taking action as helping people who don't have food, saying "When they live in poverty, you can give them food or seeds to grow their own food so they don't go

hungry." Morgan H. said, "Taking action is when we spread the word. The word we can spread is to donate food to the food bank. That's a good thing to do."

I was encouraged by how many of the kids pulled their thinking from across our power of food inquiry and other events at school. Abby not only talked about our own classroom action project but also about helping out a family as we had done as a school at Van Horne. She even used the term "tight times" and said that the most important part of taking action is helping and how people take action every day. Bella also went beyond what we had done in our classroom and described taking action as a visit to someone who might be lonely or sick or who had lost their house. At the end of school, our garden was still going strong and so their last entry included sketching their final observations and writing their final reflection.


Taking Action is...
Sometimes its standing up to
Taking Action is Doing a Big thing
Like we are going to make Posters
That say Donate Food to Vanhorne.
and then we are giving it
to the community food bank!
Taking Action is Helping
Pepole for example in our School
a family is in tight times so
we are Donating money By geting
Lemanade and Chips also By
the money we give to student
council when geting


and Pap corn most inportent
is to help Pepole take Action
every Day

Their final reflection took place in the Learning Lab where Lisa Thomas asked them to create a sketch-to-stretch to what taking action meant to them. Many students created sketches that reflected on our action project of going to the community food bank and on engaging in some act of giving out of a sense of caring.

Our explorations of the power of food and the concept of taking action helped us as teachers engage in meaningful dialogue about our project. Using Cowhey (2006) as a touchstone and a way to think about how to engage our students in critical thinking helped us as teachers remain focused on the need to meaningfully engage kids. Knowing they made a difference had a huge influence on children's understandings about taking action. Even though our project may have not produced all of the results we wanted, our kids understood our project and had lived through, and so also understood, the process of thinking and decision-making that leads to action.

Taking action with young children can be challenging but so rewarding. It was exciting to take this journey with our group of sixty kids and see them become compassionate and excited about taking action and making a difference. I love the quote Cowhey (2006) uses to introduce the concept of action from the Dalai Lama, "It is not enough to be compassionate. You must act."

References

Cowhey, M. (2006). *Black ants and Buddhists: Thinking critically and teaching differently in the primary grades*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
Hollyer, B. (2004). *Let's eat! What chidlren eat around the world*. New York: Holt.

Creating a Change that Keeps on Giving
by Teryl Ford, Second/Third Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

One of our inquiries as teachers at our school is how to engage children in taking action in meaningful ways. Often what we do in school takes the form of charity -- the adults in the school decide on a particular cause and a fund-raising strategy for how students will rasie money for that cause. The decisions are made by adults, and children have minimal, if any, understanding of the issues. They may know they are bringing cans of food from their parent's cupboards because people need food, but they don't know the causes of that hunger, nor do they feel any personal

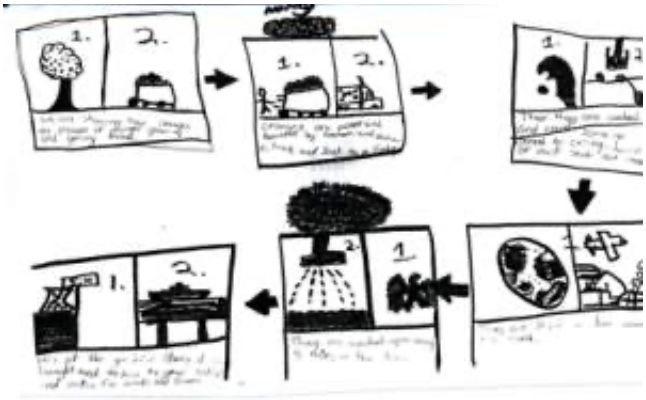
involvement with the people who are the focus of that effort. In fact, often these efforts reinforce steretypes of giving handouts to those who are “helpless.”

We worked at taking action in meaningful ways through a range of strategies. We wanted students to understand the root causes of the particular social problem, so that their action would reflect an understanding of why these problems exist and address those deeper issues. We also worked to collaborate with our students throughout the process in making decisions about taking action instead of imposing a particular fund-raising cause onto them. Another issue was sustainability and considering whether a contribution enables the person receiving that gift to take their own action and to sustain that action over time, for example, instead of only contributing a food box which is gone once it is consumed, helping a family plant a garden so they can grow their own food and take action for themselves.

Sustainability requires children to understand interdependence and the ways in which one action connects to other actions and leads to a range of consequences. Second and third grade students often find these interconnections between causes and consequences difficult to understand and so these connections became my focus.

Our school-wide inquiry on taking action was focused around tight times and hunger because of the economic crisis in our community and country during Spring 2009. We explored various causes for tight times and the different consequences of those tight times for families in relation to whether their needs or wants were being affected. We particularly focused on hunger and the reasons why families experience hunger, such as poverty, war, and the economy. In addition, we looked at food security and possible breakdowns in the system of how food goes from the farm to someone’s table. Throughout these studies, we made extensive use of different kinds of flow charts so that the kids could explore interconnections. The combination of flow charts and the focus on the system of growing and delivering food to the people who need it was significant in helping my students develop conceptual understandings about interconnections.

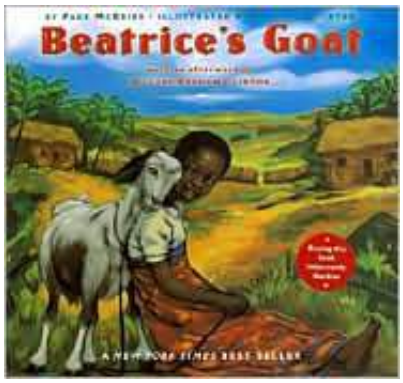
After seeing an educational movie, *From Farm to Table*, my students became aware of the importance of the system and the interconnectedness of how food gets from the farm to their table. They worked on flow charts to show all the steps that are taken for them to get the food they eat. In looking at the charts, I noticed that some skipped right from planting the food to selling it in the store, while others understood each of the smaller steps.



For most students, this experience helped them realize that one thing can lead to another and that a breakdown at any point can lead to hunger -- a new understanding. They had never considered that hunger could come from reasons other than a person not having the money to buy food. They talked about reasons for why the chain might breakdown such as bad weather ruining the crops, mechanical problems in the factory, contamination of food, or transportation problems. Their list of factors that could lead to a breakdown included:

- Farmers don't have enough money for seeds to grow food.
- Bad weather like hailstorms or too much water could ruin the crops.
- Truck could run out of gas or break down.
- Factory could break down or not be able to find workers.
- People could quit their jobs and go on strike.
- Food could rot or get germs.
- Gocery store could close because they can't get good food.

They became aware that the farmers and field workers are part of the process and that they need the work to get money to feed their families. A breakdown in the system meant that the person waiting on the food at the end of the chain might have money but still not be able to get food and that that the person at the beginning of the chain might also be affected and go hungry. One example that intrigued students was a newspaper article about weather affecting the amount of coffee that was growing. As a consequence, some people were not able to get jobs because there was less coffee to harvest.



Two books that I read aloud for class discussions were particularly significant for my students in thinking about sustainability and interconnectedness in taking action. Beatrice's Goat (McBrier, 2001) is the story of a young girl who fulfills her dream of attending school in her small Ugandan village after her family is given an income-producing goat. The book is based on the Heifer Project and information is given about their focus on sustainable small-scale farm projects that help people lift themselves out of poverty, instead of creating dependence on handouts. The students talked about how Beatrice needed to prepare for the gift of the goat by planting certain foods and building a barn and then care for the goat once it arrived. The gift of the goat and her work led to the entire family having milk to drink and to the birth of baby goats whose sale made money for the family to buy more of the things they needed. Eventually, this chain of events results in Beatrice finally getting to go to school. Students were intrigued that the gift of one goat changed the life of an entire family.

The second book we read together was One Hen (Milway, 2008), the story of how reaching out to give one small loan to a person can have a big impact, not just on that person, but on a whole community. Kojo's family along with all the people in his village in Ghana do not have enough money to buy what they need. The villagers decide to each put a little money into a fund that can be used by a specific family for a project, and that family would then pay back the money into the fund, so it can continue from family to family gradually over time. Kojo borrows enough money to buy one hen and then uses the money from her eggs to invest in more hens. In time he grows up to employ many of the villagers in his poultry farm, thus bettering their lives. He also loans out money to other villagers who want to start a business and so the gift keeps giving. In the end Kojo owns the largest poultry farm in West Africa and uses his money to build the many things needed in the village.

The students were astounded that all of these events started from the money Kojo borrowed to buy one hen. They noted that if someone had just given food to Kojo's family, that gift would only have lasted for a meal and then they would have been hungry again. They could see that giving a goat or chicken provided a way for the family to make their whole lives better in many different ways. This book powerfully demonstrated the concept of sustainability in ways that my students understood and found compelling.

The book had such an impact that students wanted to take action to help a family like Kojo's by giving an animal to make their lives better. They wanted to raise money so they could be part of

these changes in people's lives. They did not want to make just a one time difference, but a change that kept on giving.

Students researched agencies that provide a way for people to give money for animals and other needed items in various countries. They located several agencies through internet searches from a list of organizations in *Finding Solutions to Hunger* (Kempf, 2005). As teachers, we used this sourcebook for ideas of activities related to the causes of hunger and to locate innovative programs that focus on creating sustainable work.

My students were particularly interested in Kids 4 Kids, the Heifer Project International, and Save the Children, because they all had programs where they could purchase an animal that would have an on-going contribution. In addition, these programs teach the family how to care for the animal and use it effectively and efficiently. Students were adamant about providing an animal that would help a family take action to feed themselves and make their lives better. They were excited to learn that the animals given to the families are pregnant which enables the family to quickly be able to sell one of the babies and make more money.

As a class we brainstormed ideas on how they could raise the money. One idea that we had discussed as teachers was a World Map-a-thon because this fundraiser fit with our focus as a school on global inquiry. Students learned the names of countries and then collected pledges from family and friends based on the number of countries correctly identified during the Map-a-thon. My students studied but most were not interested, and when we did the test only a few students brought in pledges. I realized that the Map-a-thon did not work because it was my idea and most of the students didn't buy into it. The project felt like homework and they had to ask for pledges from family and friends at a time when many families were feeling financial uncertainty.

We continued brainstorming ways to raise money for an animal and it became clear that they were interested in selling things as they named ideas ranging from having a lemonade stand to much larger items. The Student Council had previously sold Otter Pops at lunch and that had been popular and so we decided take on this project. Most of the students were really excited about being a part of this project. They were willing to do the work, even though some were shy about selling to other kids. They willingly gave up their play time at lunch in order to sell the otter pops. Soon, even the initially reluctant students were engaged and eager to be involved. They started selling more often and were excited about the money they were raising and the good they would do with that money.

Students wanted the animal they selected to keep on giving to that family and to other families and wanted to be sure that the families would be taught skills on how to care for the animals properly and to use them in their farming. They were consumed with deciding on the kind of animal to buy

and considered rabbits, goats, chickens, geese, heifers, pigs, and water buffalo, as well as many more animals that were too expensive.

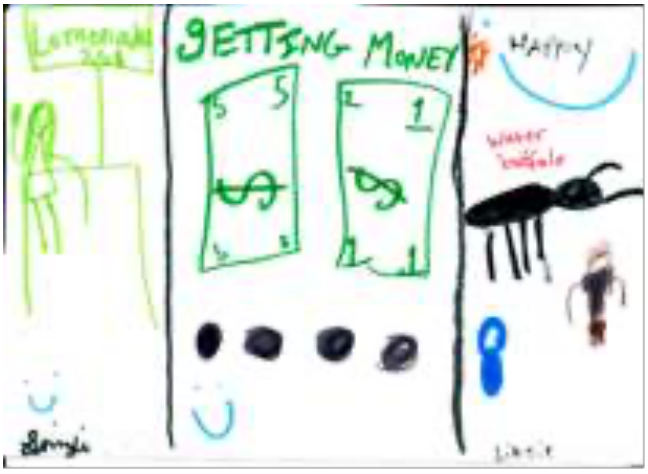
When the last day of school came around, we looked at all the choices and the amount of money we had raised and they decided on a water buffalo because it could be used to give milk and to produce babies to sell. In addition, the water buffalo would make it possible for rice farmers to do more work in their fields in less time, which meant they could grow more rice. They could also rent the buffalo out to other families to use in their rice fields, thus helping those families while providing extra income for the original family. Students felt that the water buffalo could contribute in a range of ways and so would make a bigger difference than some of the other animals.

In addition to the water buffalo, students decided to buy a flock of geese, a flock of chickens, and one flock of ducks because they could affect three other families that way. They could have purchased one other large animal but liked the idea of the smaller animals so they could reach more families. The geese, chickens, and ducks also had multiple uses -- eat the eggs, hatch the eggs and sell the babies, or use the animals as protein.

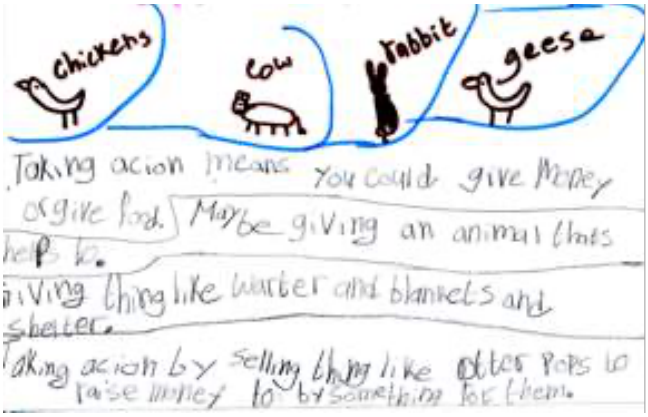
Students were amazed that they would be able to change the lives of four families all because they sold Otter Pops for 25 cents. They told their families and others about their excitement on making a difference in someone's life through giving an animal that would help that person or family take care of their own needs.

During the last week of school, students reflected on the meaning of taking action and each created a sketch to stretch on what taking action meant for them. Some students still saw taking action as charity and their sketches were about donating money or food to feed the homeless. It was clear that some still had a stereotype of the "helpless poor." Others focused on taking action as raising money for an animal and for a gift that kept giving.

Linzie said that taking action means raising money by selling something like lemonade and then using that money to buy an animal for children. Kanai's sketch reflected his belief that one person can make a difference. He said that one person can decide to help the world and that person's action then affects lots of other people.



Skylar could not contain her sketch on just one side of her paper and drew multiple ways for action. She understood the many ways in which action might be evidenced, from giving money, blankets, or food directly to someone to raising money for an animal that allows that person to help themselves.



At the end of the year, every classroom in the school contributed an article for a school-wide newspaper on our inquiries across the school year. Lisa Thomas, our project coordinator, worked with students from each classroom, reviewing the year in terms of what the students had been learning and working on, and then asking them to choose one idea they saw as significant to write as a class article. I thought that the students would focus on issues of power and control. I knew that they had strong feelings about the decisions in their lives controlled by friends, parents, and teachers and the decisions where they had control. Instead, the students focused on the project to raise money for an animal and they wrote an article describing the project. The article ended with this statement, “We hope that what we donate will keep creating food for hungry people for a very long time.”

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Taking Action in Tight Times
by Amy Edwards, Fifth Grade Teacher, Van Horne Elementary School

Sometimes kids will surprise you. Just when you think they just don’t get it, they rise to the occasion and make you aware that they understand in ways you could never imagine. I observed my students move from a position of powerlessness to one of possibility through taking action for social justice. They were able to develop a deeper understanding of taking action for social justice because they were presented with real opportunities to address social issues that deeply concerned them (Wade, 2007).

In January our class shifted from exploring the broad concept of power to examining the power of food to influence our lives. The students had many connections to the word diet, particularly in relation to losing weight, since the TV was full of advertisements from Jenny Craig, Subway, and Nutrisystem in the post holiday season. We wanted them to talk about diet globally and locally as well as consider issues related to the power of diet and how food affects people's lives. Our goal was to encourage them to take some kind of action to challenge their experiences of collecting canned food at Thanksgiving as requested by adults at our school. We wanted them to have a chance to come up with their own ideas about taking action that were not imposed by adults.

This semester-long project led us to understand diet, root causes of hunger, poverty and economic failure, the differences between wants and needs, and problems in the food system in our world. To make this issue real to our students we staged a global feast, where not everyone who attended got enough to eat, while others had more than they could possibly eat. Students learned that our planet produces enough food for everyone to survive, but inequitable distribution causes 30,000 children to die each day from starvation. We explored the mortality rates of different countries and even counted the calories we each ate for three days to see what it takes to maintain our health. We invited members of the Community Food Bank to speak to our students about what it means to be food secure as well as food insecure and ways they could help. We also hosted Abraham, one of Sudan's lost boys who had relocated to Tucson, to tell his compelling story. The students kept a Hunger Journal where they noted the various causes of hunger based on these experiences, and, of course, we read and responded to books.

We explored the word diet by reading *Burger Boy* (Durant, 2005), a picture book about a boy who eats nothing but burgers until one day, he turns into one. Students loved this book and the discussion afterwards was fun and informative as the lesson hit home. Variety is the spice of life.

We read *Tight Times* (Hazen, 1979) about a family who is experiencing difficult financial problems and discussed the choices the family has to make between wants and needs. Students created flow charts that showed the consequences of tight times. They learned that hard times can bring hope for a better future as well as sadness and the loss of hope. Students engaged in Sketch to Stretch (Short & Harste, 1996), using visual images and symbolism to explore their thinking about what can happen to a family during tight times. In his sketch, AJ shows the economy crashing, writing on the back, "My picture is explaining the economy crashing. The people represent the U.S. The one flying means some people get hit harder."

Arianna's Sketch to Stretch shows a family happily in their home in the before picture and the same family on the street holding a sign that says "Need money" in the after picture. Arianna writes, "What I did is a before and after which means maybe you can be really rich one day, then some day else you can end up homeless."

To further explore the difference between wants and needs, the students worked with partners to read picture books containing a range of perspectives on these issues. Afterwards they came together and discussed each book with the whole group. Thinking together the books were placed on a continuum between wants and needs. As the books were laid out, the students had to justify whether or not they belonged closer to the wants side or the needs side of the continuum. As new books were added, the books already on the continuum were shifted based on students' discussions. The books they explored included Beatrice's Goat (McBrier, 2001), *Fly Away Home* (Bunting, 1991), *A Shelter in our Car* (Gunning, 2004), *A Castle on Viola Street* (DiSalvo, 2001), *Peppe the Lamplighter* (Bartone, 1993), *Those Shoes* (Boelts, 2007), *The Hard-Times Jar* (Smothers, 2003), Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan (Williams, 2005), *A Chair for My Mother* (Williams, 1984), *If the Shoe Fits* (Soto, 2002), *Homeless* (Wolf, 1995), and Four Feet, Two Sandals (Williams & Mohammed, 2007). Students engaged in a great deal of negotiation and really had to think together as they debated where each book fell on the continuum between wants and needs.

Bread, Bread, Bread (Morris, 1989) was read aloud to introduce the Food Journal. The kids made many connections to the book related to the different types of breads that are eaten around the world. Students learned that calories are the energy that food provides and are needed to move and function and that protein is important as the building block for growth. They learned that food is measured in calories and protein is measured by grams. They were told that to study food around the world, they needed to study themselves first to understand what others needed to function. They were given a journal to keep track of everything they ate for three days and to record the calories and grams of protein as well. We showed them how to use the chart to determine how many calories and grams of protein are in each food item. They were also asked to add up the totals for each day. When we later examined their food journals, they discovered that they ate between 1,800 and 3,000 calories a day and that a healthy adult needs between 2,000 and 2,500 calories a day.

In February we held a Global Feast in our Learning Lab/Library. The large room was divided up into three areas. The Blue group (15 kids) represented 15% of the world's population and got more than enough to eat. This group was served pizza and apple juice. The Yellow group (60 kids) represented 60% of the world's population and got just enough to eat. This group was served warm rice and beans along with water. The Red group (25 kids) represented 25% of the world's population and did not have enough food to go around. This group got one bowl of cold rice and dirty (food coloring) water. This simulation got an astonishing response. Kids realized that the world produces enough food for everyone but the food does not reach everyone fairly due to famine, war, politics, and economics. One of the biggest surprises was that hunger doesn't just happen in other places; it is present in the United States as well. This was a huge eye opening experience for students.

Along the way students were developing a sense of responsibility and an understanding of the root causes of hunger. They were starting to understand that hunger and poverty are not the result of laziness. Homeless people are not hobos and are not all trying to pull scams. These were misperceptions students had referred to earlier in the year. Another misperception was that hunger only exits in other countries and that we should pity these people. Students realized that tight times and hunger can happen to anyone.

In March we learned about child mortality rates and the difference between chronic hunger and

starvation. Scientists determine the child mortality rate from the number of children who die of hunger by the age of five out of 1000. For comparison, the children learned that the U.S. has a child mortality rate of eight per 1000. This led us to explore the root causes of hunger. To connect hunger to economic failure and poverty, we showed the students several short clips from the movie *Cinderella Man* about the Great Depression. The students reacted strongly as they watched the mother add water to the milk to stretch it out and the father give his small share of the food to his kids. Especially poignant was a scene where the little boy steals a sausage because he is afraid his parents will be forced to send the children to stay with wealthier relatives and so doesn't want to ask his parents for food.

Later in March we looked at food systems, reading the book Famine: The World Reacts (Bennett, 1998) as one example of what might go wrong to prevent people from getting enough food. We looked at each of the steps food takes to get from the field to the table and what has to happen to ensure this delivery. Students charted the possibilities that might cause the system to fail and discovered that many things could happen at each stage of the food system.

In reading *Sami and the Time of Troubles* (Heide & Gilliland, 1992), we looked at war and violence as causes of hunger. Earlier in the year we had read books by Deborah Ellis that highlighted war as a cause of hunger in Afghanistan and so students had insights about this cause of hunger. The students also reported on newspaper articles they had been bringing on food and diet. Some of the articles were about drought in Argentina, salmonella in peanut butter, farm foreclosures, and truckers who couldn't afford gas.

These discussions led students toward taking action. They researched organizations on the internet to see what others were doing to help fight hunger and became excited about choosing an organization to partner with in some way. They liked the Save the Children website because of the personal connection of adopting a child and talked about ways they could earn money. I did not want to dampen their enthusiasm, but was a bit worried about how we could maintain the adoption commitment after the school year ended. As it turns out, the students solved this problem for themselves.

It was about this time that a devastating event happened to one of our families. A boy in our class whose dad was out of work and had lost his health insurance suffered a major seizure and died. Many of my students knew this father because of his involvement with Boy Scouts. He picked up his son everyday on the playground after school and was a reliable chaperone for all of our field trips. The mother had recently lost her job, and was not having any luck finding a new job. On top of the emotional loss for this family, they were now dealing with serious financial difficulty. Not only was the family in danger of losing their home, they had car repairs and a family of four to feed. Loss of a breadwinner was an issue that the students immediately recognized as a cause of hunger.

Our class met several times that week to discuss what had happened and talk about why their classmate would not be at school for a while. Students were concerned about him and many attended the funeral. Our counselor talked with the whole class and later with a small group to help them process this loss. We about changes that occur in families and how we can help kids and families get through difficult times. We talked about what to say to this young student once he returned to school and what would make him feel better. Our counselor shared what other kids had told her was not helpful after they had experienced similar losses.

When it became known that this family was struggling financially, the adults in the school started to take up collections and rally some monetary support. The kids heard about these efforts and started to think about what they could do. A small group who were meeting with our counselor formulated a plan. All of these kids had suffered significant loss and were in a position to understand what our little guy was going through. One boy, Joel, who was not known for being particularly caring of others, and who was not a model student, came up with the idea of selling chips and lemonade at lunch to earn money for the family. He organized the class and created a plan. He got his dad to donate the chips and diligently followed through each day, scheduling who would be manning the table, who was in charge of the money, and who was on the clean up detail. The kids made posters, wrote advertisements for the morning announcements, and discussed strategies for maximizing sales, but it was clear that Joel was in charge. This was the most engaged and excited I had seen him that entire year. This young man was not particularly looked up to for anything except goofing off at school. He was not academically a top student and struggled with peer relationships. Taking action seemed so completely natural to him because it was personal and touched him directly. The plans for contributing to Save the Children were pushed onto the back burner. This was so much more important to our kids because there was a personal connection to the family.

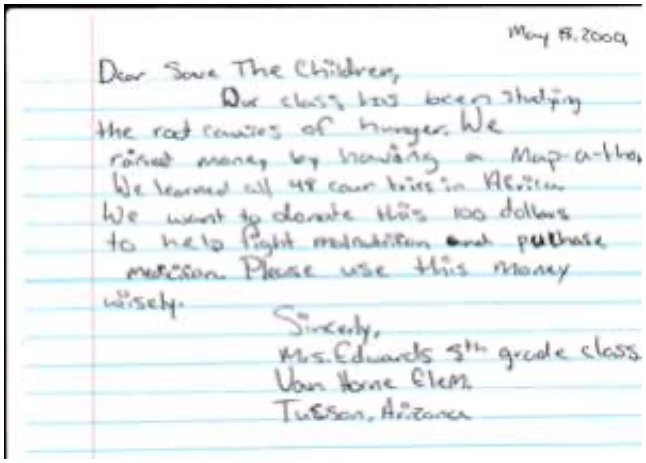
Another student was so touched by this loss that he and his mom walked their neighborhood and collected donations for the family. Mark told the story of what had happened to his friend and asked his neighbors if they could help. He collected over $1000 that day. These two examples of taking action by kids were really significant. Many times adults organize events and kids witness others helping but rarely is the action kid-centered and organized completely by children.

As others at the school worked to contribute to this family, these efforts snowballed into a major event. The local natural foods store held a fundraiser for organizations once a month on Saturday called “A Buck a Burger.” A BBQ was held in the parking lot and members of an organization could buy supplies at cost and take whatever profits they made from the sale of the burgers. The store had never done a benefit for just one family but they were willing to help. The school had to supply tables, chairs, awnings, condiments, paper products, and labor. The market supplied burgers, lettuce, tomatoes, onion, and the grill at cost. We also held a bake sale in conjunction with the

BBQ. It was a whole school effort and successful as 1500 hamburgers were sold that day. The newspaper covered the event and as a result of telling this family's story, the mother was offered a job. Students participated by helping out but this event was organized by adults in our community.

Pupils eager to help when tragedy strikes

In my classroom, students were still thinking about hunger and ways to take action. They decided to hold a Map-A-Thon and collect pledges from sponsors to pay for each correct country they could identify on the continent of Africa. Initially, the money they raised was to be contributed to Save the Children. In retrospect this fundraiser was much less significant and the students only raised about $100, with me kicking in $11 to round out the donation. In discussing the practicality of adopting a child, we went back to the Web site and saw there was another way to donate that made more sense. They chose to make a onetime donation that would go towards nutrition and medicine for needy children. They wrote a letter to the organization and we sent off the check.



May 8, 2004

Dear Save The Children,

Our class has been studying the real causes of hunger. We raised money by having a Map-a-thon. We learned all 48 countries in Africa. We want to donate this 100 dollars to help fight malnutrition and purchase medicine. Please use this money wisely.

Sincerly,
Ms. Edwards 5th grade class
Van Horne Elem.
Tucson, Arizona

Meanwhile the students were still busy selling chips and lemonade at lunch. The first thing they did each morning was to check with Joel to see who was scheduled to work that day. It was such a central part of what was important in their last few days in fifth grade. Joel kept them supplied with a variety of chips to sell, never running out and never forgetting to bring them. I only wish he could have been so reliable in turning in homework! In the end, they raised several hundred dollars from their lunch sales. This experience was significant because the action was initiated and carried out by the students themselves.

Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) point out that informed action is based in expanded understandings and perspectives. They argue that unless students have critiqued their everyday lives, considered multiple points of view, and examined sociopolitical issues and systems, the action often remains superficial and adult-directed. In our case, students had the opportunity to connect literature to issues of poverty and hunger and to consider the consequences of tight times on the needs and wants of families. These understandings provided a basis for taking action when the need arose, instead of just feeling sorry for their classmate. They took action in ways that were personal and much more meaningful than just making a contribution to Save the Children. In reflection, I realize that they did adopt a child -- one of their own classmates who needed their support and caring in a time of need.

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