

Reflections in The Hill District

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Overview

At Pittsburgh Miller, the students are taught a value system called the Nguzo Saba, created by Dr. Maulana Karenga. This value system was created to introduce and reinforce principles of African culture. These ideals contribute to building and reinforcing family, community and culture among African American people. The Nguzo Saba is based on seven principles: Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective work and responsibilities), Ujamma (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith). As a teacher, I must remember that these principles are not simply words and phrases to memorize, but must be taught through direct instruction, guided practice, and modeling.

Every morning, the students and staff at Miller take part in what we refer to as Unity Circle, also known as a Harambee Circle. The students and staff come together in a circle to state daily pledges, affirmations and relay any important information for the day. The most special part of Unity Circle (in my opinion) is when the leader of the circle (a different teacher every week) proclaims two of the seven principles, relays information about a particular ancestor of their choice and reflects on how that person demonstrated those principles. BINGO! There is the framework of my unit. What if I could do the same concept with my students on a more intense scale?

This unit has been designed to be taught within the Communications curriculum, i.e. Reading and Writing (however, the unit could be easily adapted to be used in a Social Studies setting). The introductory lesson of the unit would be used to re-familiarize the students with the principles of the Nguzo Saba and why they are important to them on their way to becoming good citizens of our school,

our community, and our world. The succession of the lessons will be to introduce the students to several “Hill District Natives” (or notable African-Americans with ties to the Hill District) through primary and secondary sources, multimedia sources and oral history. Some of these sources will need to be adapted for my population (3rd and 4th grade Learning Support students), but can be pulled from many different resources to reflect the given population. Each lesson will be based around one particular “native”. After reading and discussing the accomplishments of that particular person, the students will be asked which principle of the Nguzo Saba did they believe the ancestor reflected most (checklist will be created for each principle). After conferencing and brainstorming with each student, the collective whole will be walked through the writing process. The writing pieces will reflect the relationship between a particular ancestor and how they demonstrated a Nguzo Saba principle in their lives. Each student will be responsible for seven writing pieces, which would be combined into a class book and bulletin board. Graphic organizers and structural guides will be use to formulate the beginning pieces. The Write Tools curriculum will be implemented into the unit to help aid the students through the process as well.

Rationale

For the last 3 years, I have driven through The Hill District on my way to my destination, Pittsburgh Miller. Everyday, through sleep deprived eyes, I would stare at the decayed buildings. Everyday, I would pass an abandoned theater on Wiley Ave. Everyday, I would be engrossed with the time-forgotten mural on the side of that theater. Everyday, I would imagine the people who would frequent that theater in days gone by. Everyday, I would wonder, “Do my students view their neighborhood the same way I view it?” Everyday, I would wonder, “Do my students know the treasures of their neighborhood?” Everyday, I would wonder.

Through my PTI class, I feel as if I have discovered a mine filled with diamonds. That mine being The Hill District. Being a Pittsburgh native, I have always heard stories of Pittsburgh’s “Little Harlem”. However, I never knew how deep that mine went, and I never knew how many diamonds came out of that mine. From my ignorance, many questions manifested in my mind: If I am unaware of the many contributions of The Hill district, how ignorant are my students of their surroundings as well? Why is it that my own experience in the Pittsburgh Public School district did not include this history? What would I have done with this information had I acquired it earlier on in my educational experience? From my ignorance sprouted the rationale of why it necessary for me to teach this unit.

As a teacher at Pittsburgh Miller, an African Centered Academy, it is my

job to help my students gain and maintain a sense of identity, purpose, and direction. It is my goal to be able to convey to the students a sense of who they are, what their purpose is in life, and in which direction to go to achieve that purpose. It is my belief that the foundation of these goals comes from knowledge of their history and how it shapes their present lives and future selves. “The students must be centered in their own historical and cultural heritage which fosters a positive self-esteem, develops group identify, and provides for entrepreneurial activities that encourage collective work and responsibility” (Kenyatta 30).

Every morning I, my students, and the whole of Miller recite pledges. There are several lines within the African Centered Education Pledge that calls out to me and assures me that my reasoning for teaching this unit is essential: “... I pledge to learn so that I can teach and share my knowledge to make a better world that restores, retains, and reflects the best of Africa and humanity. I owe my skills and values to my ancestors, parents, community, self, and the children unborn.”

Objectives

The foremost goal of this unit is to introduce the students to the rich history of their community and the people that it has produced. They will develop these skills by listening, reading, and communicating (both verbal and written) their discoveries about the Hill district and the people it produced. The covert goal (My students like their education to be hidden in the fun. It is kind of like putting yucky medicine in their Kool-Aid. Thanks mom.) of the unit is to develop and define communication skills. Last, but certainly not least, the goal is to help produce self-esteem within my students.

The students’ objectives are to produce seven written pieces about Hill District residents of the past and how they demonstrated the traits of the Nguzo Saba in their lives. The students will be involved in depth, critical discussions about what the Nguzo Saba is and how it can be demonstrated through actions. This goal will help develop both critical thinking skills and verbal communication. The students will also be taken through the writing process systematically several times (seven to be exact). This will help the automaticity that I hope will develop in their writing.

Strategies

This unit has been designed with 3rd and 4th grade Learning Support students in mind. These are students that have been identified as having significant learning needs, which require specially designed instruction to enable them to achieve academic success. The students I work with have a wide range of learning discrepancies, but one of the most common traits among my population is a limited ability to read and comprehend printed material. Therefore, many of the strategies that will be used take on the form of a guided instruction and practice activity. Much of the printed material used will have to be adapted to meet the reading level of each individual student.

Classroom Activities

The following plan gives a general outline of the activities designed to help students achieve the objectives of this unit. Approximately 25 (or more) 45-minute class periods should be prearranged for instruction. This is only a recommended timeline. Most of my students need extended time to complete this type of multi-step activity. I also find that I have students who need more individualized attention than others do. This unit was designed with the mind that it would not be conducted on consecutive days. My population of students benefit from “breaks” in order to properly digest the information. It is best to make your own professional judgment depending on your classroom population.

Lesson 1

The students will be (re)introduced to the principles that make up the Nguzo Saba. Each student will be given a structured outline/concept web that will be filled out during the class discussion. The outline will be used to access and organize prior knowledge and newfound information about the Nguzo Saba. The structured outline should be duplicated on a large poster board that can be later used to create a bulletin board. With my students, it is best to fill out the duplicate outline with them; however, it can be filled out prior to the lesson to save time. The bulletin board can be a reference point during the continuation of the unit to remind the students of key points.

To thoroughly explain the Nguzo Saba and the relationship between the Hill District natives and the seven traits, you must know the meaning of each trait.

The following is a brief description of each trait:

Nguzo Saba definitions

1. Umoja (Unity): To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.
2. Kujichagulia (Self-Determination): To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves instead of being defined, named, created for and spoken for by others.
3. Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility): To build and maintain our community together and make our sister's and brother's problems our problems and to solve them together.
4. Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics): To build and maintain our stores, shops, and other businesses and profit from them together.
5. Nia (Purpose): To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.
6. Kuumba (Creativity): To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.
7. Imani (Faith): To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

Each principle will be discussed and defined. A general definition should be given for each principle. After the general definition is given, lead the students into a discussion on how we can simplify that definition and what key points make up that definition. Those key points will be placed into the structured outline. During this discussion, keep in mind exactly what key points you want the students to define for each principle. To get to the key points that you want to highlight, use examples that the students can relate to and pull from. However, make sure to keep control of the reins. It has been my experience in the past that my students tend to go off on tangents during open discussion.

Organization is the key. Make a working folder for each student. After leading the students through the discussion and the completion of the outline, present each student with their folder. Have the students place their completed outline into their folder. With my population of students, it is critical to keep them organized. With so many other road blocks facing them (below grade level reading skills, comprehension difficulties, lack of rigorous vocabulary, etc) it is important to make everything else as simple and stress-free as possible. Organization is a skill that will help the students make sense of things that may

evade them otherwise.

Lesson 2

Students will review the definitions that were created from the previous lesson. Within this lesson, the students will have a discussion on how people can demonstrate these principles within their lives. Make sure that students discuss how people can demonstrate these principles through actions and behaviors. We want to start making connections between the actions and the principles so when we present the information about Hill District natives in later lessons, they will have examples to pull from. School events, community happenings, television, stories read in school, and movies are always subjects that the students can chatter on about.

During the discussion, create a checklist for each principle. For example, have the students discuss a prominent African- American figure such as Martin Luther King. Throughout that discussion, the students may list traits that Dr. King held. Have the students look at their outline from the previous day and see what words would define the actions of Dr. King. The students may list actions that reflected unity amongst people. This action would reflect the principle Umoja which means unity. The students will help develop what types of actions and words would define Umoja. This model can be used for each principle. To make the examples more tangible for the students, use figures that the students know. They can range from historical figures to people around the neighborhood. The key is to put a face to a principle. We want the students to have an example that they can hold close and relate to. The more in depth the connection is for the student, the better they will be able to comprehend and retain the definition for each principle.

Explain to the students that we want to be clear about the expectations for each principle. The checklist will be created before and filled out during the lesson. As with the past lesson, this checklist should be placed into the students working folder.

Lessons 3-4

To introduce the students to concept of the unit, I thought it would be interesting for them to view the film “Wiley Ave. Days”. I hope that this will excite the students to see familiar places that they pass on the regular basis. With the population that I teach, their reading skills are below basic. Presenting information through another media besides print is a way to ease into our intended

concept without intimidating the students.

One thing that I have learned in the past with viewing “educational” movies is that you must give the students things to look for. This keeps their attention and allows the teacher to get the students to retain information that will be pertinent in later lessons. Tell the students that they will be looking for actions and examples of the Nguzo Saba in film. Have the students fill out the “Wiley Ave Days” worksheet while they view the film. I suggest viewing the film beforehand and taking note of where the students would be able to find examples within the film. My students have a tendency to get overwhelmed when they are presented with multi-task activities. To lessen the stress, I will tell the students I will make a signal during the movie to let them know an example of the Nguzo Saba has presented itself. The signal could be a bell, a buzzer, or something as simple as yelling out “NGUZO SABA!” The latter may be disturbing to fellow teachers, but I think it would be the most enjoyable. It might be necessary to stop the film during these points so that students can refer to their guides and have time to write. Emphasis that you want descriptions of the actions and behaviors that represent the stated principle.

I recommend splitting this lesson into two days. With my population of students, it is better to present information into smaller chunks. This enables the students to digest the information, mull it over in their minds, and revisit it at a later date. However, if you have students who have an attention span that extends beyond that of common hyperactive, sugar-filled fourth grader, by all means, teach this lesson in one day. Good luck.

Lesson 5

This is the day we start to get into the "nuts and bolts" of the unit. Prepare yourself for some resistance at first. However, the more enthusiasm that you show, the more your students will show as well. My students have always been quite resistant to writing. However, if they are walked through the writing process, step by step, they are more apt to follow that yellow brick road. So paint on a happy grin and get to stepping.

With learning support students, it is always important to explain, demonstrate, explain again, demonstrate again... and repeat as necessary. So this lesson will be dedicated to re-teaching the development and organization of the stand-alone paragraph. Since I am working with students that have demonstrated below basic skills in reading and writing, I want to be able to create a goal that is challenging, but in arms length of them. The teaching of this lesson should be

based on a professional decision. If your students could benefit from a review of paragraph writing, then I suggest digging into this lesson. If not, skip it and go to the next lesson. This lesson can also be adapted for students that are more advanced. Students that have more experience with writing paragraphs could develop multi paragraph pieces.

In her curriculum, *The Write Tools: Improving Literacy Instructions*, Alice Greiner outlines the simple, concise steps needed to help students recognize a complete, stand-alone paragraph:

1. Put an instructional level, appropriate paragraph on an overhead, and then read it to the students. Ask the students to think about the three parts of a paragraph: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion
2. Ask students to identify the introduction.
3. Underline the introduction in green, and write the word introduction next to it. Explain that the first sentence in this paragraph is called topic sentences. Write that down as well. Explain that the topic sentence tells readers what they are going to be reading about in the rest of the paragraph.
4. Ask students to identify the conclusion.
5. Underline the conclusion in green, and write the word conclusion near it.
6. Draw a bracket around the rest of the sentence in the paragraph. Ask your students what they are called. Label them body sentences. Their job is to tell us more about the topic.

The rest of the lesson will be devoted to helping to explain the rest of the color coding system. Topic and concluding sentence are to be highlighted in green. Relate the green to the word “Go”, as in when the stoplight turns green and the car must “Go”. The concluding sentence is also in green because it relates back to the topic sentence (Go back). Body sentences are to be color coded in the yellow and red (or pink). Yellow sentences represent “big idea” sentences. This tells the reader to “slow down” and starts to give us details about our topic sentence. Red (or pink) sentences represent “tell me more” sentences. This tells the reader to “stop and explain” more about the yellow sentences. In other words, more details about the details. You may want to repeat this activity with several additional examples of stand-alone paragraphs that have a clear introduction, body, and conclusion.

Lessons 6-20

Today we will begin introducing the figures that we will use to create our writing pieces around. I have created biography cards representing notable Hill District Natives and others that have ties to the Hill District. The

information on the cards has been gathered from multiple sources: websites, biographies, general knowledge (oral history), television documentaries, and so on. The biography cards can be adapted for differentiated instruction. The information on the cards can be re-created to be grade level appropriate or presented in a power point presentation as bullets. Do what works best for your population.

With my population of students, the best way to present this information is orally. This is the best method for me because I can slow down the pace of how the information is presented, emphasize important facts to guide my students, and stop to check for comprehension. I would have my students sit in semi circle, with myself in the middle, and read the information to them. I would then have the student engage in a discussion about important information that they just heard. Allow this discussion to go about 10-15 minutes. We want to be sure to generate as many ideas as possible. The longer and more in depth the discussion, the easier it will be for our students to create writing pieces. There is nothing worse than a student with a sheet of paper in front of them and saying, "I don't know what to write." During this discussion, I would emphasize that the students look for key attributes that fit one of the seven principles. Students may link principles to figures that you may have not connected in your own mind. This is ok. We want *them* (the students) to make their own connections. Our job is to just help them thoroughly explain their connections and articulate them (both orally and written).

After the discussion, the students will be allowed to look over their checklists and discuss with the teacher, individually, which principle they fill fits the chosen figure. We need to take this time with our students to make sure they fully understand the goal of the project and what we want of them. It is important to meet with my students individually because of the range of learning disabilities among them. Some students will need more guidance than others will. Some students will need a more detailed approach of an explanation. It is essential that this written process be molded to each student. Writing seems to be a big scary monster to our children. By taking the time to alleviate any worries, answering all questions, and guiding them to their destination, we can almost guarantee on a more enjoyable experience. I am dedicating at least 2 days to each figure.

The basic framework of these lessons can be adapted for all levels. Instead of presenting the information oral, as suggested earlier, it can be presented as

a PowerPoint. The biography cards could be made into an overhead sheet and presented that way. The students could be given copies of the cards and they can be read silently. Instead of creating writing pieces, the students could create posters, a magazine article, or a mock interview. They could even create power point presentations. The possibilities are endless. What ever your population may be, adapted it for them. Take into consideration what *you* are willing and able to do. Deliberate on what your *students* are willing and able to do. Do what is *best* for you and your students.

Lesson 21-22

Lesson 21-22 will take the same basic form as Lessons 6-20, however the presentation of the information will be different. The student will watch a documentary on the life of August Wilson. Most of my students are very familiar with the name of August Wilson, but they know very little of his accomplishments. By this time, the student might be a little tired of hearing me present information. Allow the students time to digest the information in small does. I suggest viewing the documentary ahead of time and finding points in the film that would be ideal to stop and discuss. This will help the students to think critically about the information being presented. It will also give them an opportunity to develop their verbal communication. Since the information is not presented in written form it may be helpful to create a worksheet that help the students assimilate the important

Lesson 23-24

This is the lesson that all the students have been waiting for. This is what my students and I coined “making it all pretty”. In this lesson, the students will take the final copies of each of their writing pieces and publish. The students will be given the opportunity to visit the computer lab and type their writing piece. We want to make it special for them, so supply them with an assortment of publishing paper to choose from. Encourage them to use graphics to illustrate their writing. If they like, they could find pictures of the “natives” online and use those. We want to propel them to be as creative as possible. Make this a “no holds barred” lesson. Push them to think of ways of “making it all pretty” When the students are done publishing, make copies of everyone’s writing pieces, copies of the bibliography cards, and copies of the Nguzo Saba checklists and combined them into a book. Since I have a small population of students, I will be able to make books for all of my students. If you have a large class, it may be more economical to make a large class book and have the students just make individual books of their own pieces. What ever works best for you.

Lesson 25

We have reached the end. WHEW! In my school every teacher is assigned a month to design one of our main hallway bulletin boards. This is an opportune time to take advantage of all that hard work. Design a bulletin board similar to the Nguzo Saba chart included in the appendix. Instead of having a list of the behaviors at the bottom, chose seven of your students' best work that represents each individual trait.

Annotated Bibliography

Books and Articles

Brewer, John M. *African Americans in Pittsburgh*. Charleston: Acadia Publishing, 2006.

African Americans in Pittsburgh chronicles the trends in black populated communities in Pittsburgh.

Buni, Andrew. Robert L. Vann of The Pittsburgh Courier. Politics and Black Journalism Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974

This book gives valuable information given about Robert L. Vann and his influence on black culture and politics in Pittsburgh.

Gidding, Paula. *In Search of Sisterhood: Delta Sigma Theta and the Challenge the Black Sorority Movement*.

In Search of Sisterhood is full of compelling, fascinating anecdotes told by the Deltas themselves, and illustrated with rare early photographs of the Delta women. The book includes notable Deltas including Daisy Lampkin.

Greiner, Alice. *The Write Tools: Improving Literacy Instruction*. Englewood: Lead and Learn Press, 2006.

This is a user-friendly guide that leads teachers through systematic reading strategies. The easy to use strategies make an immediate difference in the classroom. This guide is a godsend and makes writing easy and enjoyable for all students.

Kenyatta, Kwame. *Guide to Implementing African-Centered Education*. Detroit:Black Star Press, 2002.

This informational guide was designed to assist educators, parents, and students in the implementation of African-centered education in public schools. This book was given to me by my principal when I first started working at Miller. It has helped me to have better understanding of what African-Centered Education is.

Rasinski, Timothy and Padak, Nancy. *Effective Reading Strategies: Teaching Children Who Find Reading Difficult*. Upper Saddle River: 2000.

A user-friendly guide that offers instructional strategies and games for helping children in an informal, easy-to-read book. Most of these strategies have been tried and tested by myself and can work miracles for many students.

Ruck, Rob. *Sandlot Seasons: Sport in Black Pittsburgh*. Muncie: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

An account of the Negro baseball in Pittsburgh during the 20th century sandlot seasons. Also depicts accounts of social, political, and community connections during the glory days of Negro League baseball. Book goes beyond mere sports trivia.

Multimedia/Videos

August Wilson. Dir. Tony Knox. Prod. Melvyn Bragg and Tony Knox. DVD. Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 2004

This DVD is wonderful. It captures August Wilson in all his glory. In the DVD, August Wilson returns home to the Hill District in 1990 to review his life and career. He shares candid stories of his time on the Hill and how it helped develop his career.

Wylie Avenue Days. DVD. WQED Multimedia, 2007

In this wonderfully made documentary, the Hill District is displayed in its heyday and chronicles the area in a wonderful light

Websites

www.officialkwanzawebsite.org

A great resource to use to get a better understanding of the Nguzo Saba and how it is an integral part of Kwanzaa.

www.northbysouth.kenyon.edu

I used this website to help create the bio cards for Gus Greenlee and Robert L. Vann. This website can also be used to develop bio cards for several other notable African –Americans.

www.pbs.org/blackpress/news

This website helped me to find more information on Robert L. Vann and his accomplishments.

www.voices.cla.umn.edu

I used this website to gather information about Hallie Quinn Brown. She was an integral part in the development of the Hill and can be used as an alternative bio.

www.pbs.org

This is another great website to get biographical information on all notable Pittsburgh natives. This was a wonderful source for me when gather information on Billy Strayhorn.

www.billystrayhorn.com

The name of the website says it all. On all things Billy Strayhorn, you must visit this site. It allows you to get all the details that your heart would desire on the jazz musician

www.nlbpa.com

This website is dedicated to negro baseball league history. This is a great source for getting information on the Homestead Grays and the Pittsburgh Crawfords. This site helped me gather information on both Gus Greenlee and Charles Harris.

Appendices-Standards

Reading, Writing, Listening Standards

- 1.1. Learning to Read Independently
- 1.2. Reading Critically in All Content Areas
- 1.3. Reading, Analyzing and Interpreting Literature

- 1.4. Types of Writing
- 1.5. Quality of Writing
- 1.6. Speaking and Listening
- 1.8. Research

Geography/History Standards

- 6.4. Economic

- Interdependence
- 7.3. The Human Characteristics of Places and Regions
- 7.4. The Interactions Between People and Places

Appendix- A

Nguzo Saba Definitions

1. **Umoja:** To strive for and maintain unity in the family, community, nation and race.

- _____
- _____
- _____

2. **Kujichagulia:** To define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves and speak for ourselves instead of being defined, named, created for and spoken for by others.

- _____
- _____
- _____

3. **Ujima:** To build and maintain our community together and make our sister's and brother's problems our problems and to solve them together.

- _____
- _____
- _____

4. **Ujamma:** To build and maintain our stores, shops, and other businesses and profit from them together.

- _____
- _____
- _____

5. **Nia:** To make our collective vocation the building and developing of our community in order to restore our people to their traditional greatness.

- _____
- _____
- _____

6. **Kuumba:** To do always as much as we can, in the way we can, in order to leave our community more beautiful and beneficial than we inherited it.

- _____
- _____
- _____

7. **Imani:** To believe with all our heart in our people, our parents, our teachers, our leaders and the righteousness and victory of our struggle.

- _____
- _____
- _____

Appendix-B

Nguzo Saba Checklists

Does this person represent the following:

- Respect for others
- Accountable actions
- Unity in the :
 - Community
 - Family
 - Nation
 - Race
- Collectivism

_____ represents

the Nguzo Saba trait **UMOJA!!!**

Does this person represent the following:

- Confidence
- Pride
- Self-Motivation
- Leadership
- Goal Setting
- Group Identity

_____ represents

the Nguzo Saba trait **KUJICHAGULIA!!!**

Does this person represent the following:

- Cooperative
- Dependable
- Conflict Resolution
- Group Interdependence
- Sympathetic/Empathetic

_____ represents
the Nguzo Saba trait **UJIMA!!!**

Does this person represent the following

- Loyalty
- Responsibility
- Self-Sufficient
- Productive
- Economic Knowledge

_____ represents the
Nguzo Saba trait **UJAMBA!!!**

Does this person represent the following:

- Community devotion
- Acknowledges the Past
- Ethnic Respect

_____ represents
the Nguzo Saba trait **NIA !!!**

Does this person represent the following:

- Self Expression
- Creativity
- Innovative Thinking
- Aesthetic Appreciation

_____ represents
the Nguzo Saba trait **KUUMBA!!!**

Does this person represent the following:

- Resilient
- Belief in Self and Others
- Perseverance
- Righteousness

_____ represents
the Nguzo Saba trait **IMANI !!!**

Appendix-C

Wiley Avenue Days

Nguzo Saba on the Hill

DIRECTIONS: While viewing the movie, write down examples of the Nguzo Saba whenever you hear the signal.

BONUS: If you see other examples of the Nguzo Saba not signaled, write those down as well and share them with the class later for a bonus prize.

1. Umoja example:

2. Kujichagulia example:

3. Ujima example:

4. Ujamma example:

5. **Nia** example:

6. **Kuumba** example:

7. **Imani** example:

BONUS examples:
