

Right Next Door But Worlds Away

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Overview

The purpose of the unit “Right Next Door But Worlds Away” is to help students explore and appreciate the similarities and differences between themselves and children from Latin American cultures. Through exploring stereotypes, the students will be able to work through their own prejudices and become more sensitive to the differences between cultures. This Unit will encourage the students to explore and counter the stereotypes of Latino populations. It will also help them to develop the tools to break down other stereotypes they may encounter regarding their own or other cultures.

Rationale

The reason for developing the curriculum unit, “Right Next Door But Worlds Away” was to assist students in creating a connection to children from other countries that they study about in their Social Studies books. Often students at the middle school level have a very hard time being concerned about anything beyond

the circumstances that affect their everyday lives. Hopefully, through the research and reflection pieces in this unit the students will begin to relate what they learn in Social Studies to their everyday life and develop a healthy way of viewing other cultures.

Through the Pittsburgh Teacher's Seminar, "Latinos in the U.S.: Literature and Culture" I was able to get a wealth of resources. Throughout the seminar, in the books that we read and in class discussions, it became apparent that my students share many things with the Latino children we were considering, many of whom immigrated to the United States. For example, many children in middle school struggle to be accepted by the high-status group. And the risk of not belonging to some group is a sad reality in today's society. Many students believe their identity is deeply connected to the group with which they associate. This leads to some student's view of gangs as a place to find a sense of belonging. The same seems to be true for some teenage immigrants, who find themselves in the position of outsider in a culture that is foreign to them. The need for a sense of belonging among a peer group often supersedes common sense and family values. Through appreciating the similarities between themselves and the lives of the Latino immigrants they will be exploring, my students will hopefully become more aware of their own identities and gain insights into why they see themselves in a certain way.

Although designed for a sixth grade full inclusion Social Studies classroom, the Unit, "Right Next Door But Worlds Away" could easily be adapted for other grade levels. The Unit will meet the Core Curriculum Standards that are required by the Pittsburgh Public Schools. The Citizenship Standards, along with the standards for the other disciplines will be posted in the class. The standards will also appear in student-friendly terms. While working on the Unit, the students will be refining skills from different disciplines. Researching, presenting and listening, will meet many of the Communication Standards. The students will be able to record data and design charts and graphs for quick referencing. The graphing and measuring used in the unit would meet some of the Mathematics Standards. While developing the unit, close attention was given to the many Special Needs students who might require that their lessons be adapted for them. Since there are so many different learning styles and various learning abilities in each class, a wide range of learning experiences will be incorporated in the Unit. Most aspects of the lesson could be adjusted to meet the needs of the individual students and teachers.

Even though this Unit will focus on Mexico, El Salvador, Cuba and the Dominican Republic, it could be adapted to cover any Latin American country from which people have immigrated to the U.S. in large number. The countries were chosen because they have some of the largest immigrant populations in the United States. Also, this will give the students a chance to study about cultures they are most likely not acquainted with. Unlike many medium to large cities in the United States, Pittsburgh has a very small population of mostly recent Latino immigrants. Because most of my students will have had little or no contact with Latinos, they are likely to have preconceived ideas about this important ethnic community, many of them based on negatively stereotyped and hyperbolic representations in the popular cultural media, such as television, movies and music. This lack of reliable information leads to misunderstanding, which often develops into prejudices. (www.npg.org)

To introduce the lesson to the students there must be an understanding of the history of Latino immigration to the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the three states with the highest number of Latino immigrants are California with 10,112,986, Texas with 5,653,466 and New York with 2,575,696 immigrants. (<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~gstudies/latin/lessons/backgd.htm>). The following is a short overview of the history of immigration from Mexico, El Salvador, Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

Mexico

Mexican immigrants by far are the largest Latino immigrant group in the United States. In the U.S. Census Bureau for 1990 there were 13,393,208 Mexican immigrants in the United States. Many Mexicans did not immigrate, but when the United States took territory from Mexico, the Mexican people stayed on their land and willingly or not, became U.S. citizens. (<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~gstudies/latin/lessons/backgd.htm>) Of those Mexicans who voluntarily immigrated to the United States in the past century, the majority came seeking jobs and economic opportunity. Because of their unique geographic positioning, and in contrast to the many other immigrant groups that came to the United States from Europe and other places, Mexican immigrants often go back and forth between the U.S. and their home country. A recent California study found that “half of all immigrants from western Mexico, whether they are in the United States legally or illegally, return home within two years, and fewer than one-third stay for ten years.” (González 197). Since the southwestern states border Mexico many of these states have a very high number of Mexican immigrants compared to the other states.

El Salvador

Salvadorans account for a large number of Latino immigrants who sought refuge from political violence in their own country during the decades of the 70s and 80s. . Many were refugees who, during the 1970's and 1980's were escaping a ferocious U.S.- backed civil war. " In El Salvador alone, human rights groups estimated that five hundred people a month were being massacred by the death squads. The carnage caused so many refugees to stream across the Mexican border that 500,000 Salvadorans had arrived in the United States by 1984." (Gonzalez 138) While the numbers of Salvadorans seeking refuge in the U.S. has slowed since the peace process has led to the end of fighting, large Salvadoran communities remain, especially in Los Angeles, New York City and New Jersey.

Cuba

Many immigrants from Cuba left their nation, like the Salvadoran immigrants, for political reasons. The largest numbers of Cuban immigrants started to arrive in the United States after Fidel Castro took power in 1959. Unlike many of the other Latino immigrant groups, this first wave of Cuban immigrants were skilled workers, largely white, educated and in possession of both economic and cultural capital: "The refugees of the 1960's and 1970's were largely from the upper and middle classes and brought with them enormous technical skills." (Gonzalez 109). The later immigrants from Cuba, those that arrived after the infamous Mariel Boatlift were, by and large, poor and unskilled. In this way they were similar to the other Latino immigrant groups. As one would expect, given the proximity and climatological similarity of Southern Florida and Cuba, most Cuban immigrants settled in and around Miami, Florida.

Dominican Republic

The immigrants from the Dominican Republic during the 1960's were political refugees like the immigrants from Cuba and El Salvador. They moved mostly to the northwest. They arrived and settled into neighborhoods without standing out because they were black, and were often assumed to be ethnically African American. Many of the people in these communities did not classify their new neighbors as Latinos: "New Yorkers tended to mistake them for blacks who happened to speak Spanish. By the 1990's, however, they had become the second-largest Hispanic group in the Northeast" (Gonzalez 117).

The sixth grade course of study for the Pittsburgh Public Schools already includes two different units that compliment my Pittsburgh Teacher's Institute unit. The first is a unit entitled "Valuing Others." In this unit, the students will be able to use the skills they learned and practiced from this unit and incorporate

them into the “Right Next Door But Worlds Away” unit. The second unit that is already in the course of study is “Latin America.” This unit will be taught in conjunction with the “Right Next Door But Worlds Away” unit.

Objectives

Through group work, research, oral presentations, and reflection writing, the students will easily meet many of the Social Studies standards that we are accountable for in the Pittsburgh Public Schools. For example, the students will work in cooperative groups, which will meet Citizenship Standard Eight: All students demonstrate that they can work effectively with others.

Students will be able to compare and contrast the life of an average teenager from Latin America to that of a teenager living in the United States. The students will also identify the cultures of Latin America and the groups that have influenced them. Some of the groups that the students will study will be: the Spaniards, Afro-Latinos and various indigenous groups. One would find more Afro-Latinos in Cuba and the Dominican Republic than in Mexico and El Salvador.

Strategies

The students will begin the unit by reviewing the Five Themes of Geography. Each time the students start a new unit in their sixth grade Social Studies book, they work through the information by using the Five Themes of Geography. This unit will be taught in the spring to stay in sequence with the sixth grade syllabus. Because it will be taught later in the year the students will have had plenty of practice with the Five Themes of Geography. Also, since they have already done this for previous units this year, it will be easier to build on the foundation of knowledge they already have. The Five Themes of Geography: Location, Place, Human/Environment Interaction, Movement and Region will be a reference point that the students will return to throughout the unit.

The students work through three phases in the unit. First, they will look at the Latin American immigration patterns in the United States. Second, the students will develop an appreciation of how it feels to be an immigrant through a series of writing and reflection assignments. Thirdly, with all of the resources

they have acquired the students will be able to examine their thoughts on differences between cultures as being positive.

Along with class work, the students will need to do research on each of the Latin American Country highlighted in the unit to complete the lessons. There will be class time scheduled in the school library and computer lab, where the students will be able to access the Internet. Also if time is available the students will go on a field trip to the Carnegie Library in Lawrenceville to do research. This library is within walking distance from the school.

Over the years I have watched my sixth grade students collect information and sometimes lose it due to poor organizational skills. With each lesson in this unit there will be an exact way that the student will be expected to organize his or her work. Each student will need to keep a notebook for vocabulary words and reflections. There will be many assignments that would make assessing the students' progress very easy. The notebook could be checked for a class work grade. The students will organize the information that they research and record not only in their notebooks, but they will also develop different visual aids. Charts, graphs and maps will help the students remember the information and will make it easier for them to explain to their peers. The many different writing assignments could be done using a rubric. This will also help the students to stay on task throughout a certain assignment. There will also be homework assigned to the students. The homework assignments will usually be an assignment that the students will hand in for a grade, and then get the work back so that they could use it to build on in class.

Since the unit integrates lessons across other curricula, the teachers from those classes will be asked for any input into the assignments that they might have. For example, the writing teacher may want to do a lesson on letter writing in relationship to the letters being written in the unit "Right Next Door But Worlds Away".

Before the classroom activities begin the students will be separated into six groups. The two reasons for doing this are: to make sure the special education students are placed into groups where the make-up of students will be supportive to the learning for all of the students. Second, this will expedite the process of putting them into groups during the lessons. In each group the student will pick a partner. There will be times in the lesson where the students will work with a partner.

Classroom Activities

The unit “Right Next Door But Worlds Away” will work with the Unit already covered by the sixth grade curriculum unit used by the Pittsburgh Board of Education. Therefore it will not take away from the time allotted in the syllabus to the study of Latin America.

The first lesson will be to identify the countries of Latin America that the students will be researching. The materials needed for this activity will be thin markers or colored pencils. Each student will be given four different colors. Each color will represent a different country. Also, the students will need individual blank maps of the United States and Latin America. There will be a large wall map of the Western Hemisphere in the front of the room. To start the lesson, the students will volunteer to come to the front of the room to locate: Mexico, El Salvador, Cuba and the Dominican Republic on the wall map. Before the students begin the assignment they will go over the rubric for the maps. The students will outline each of these countries a different color. Then after researching where the immigrants of these countries are concentrated in the United States, the students will draw an arrow, again in the color that signifies the country to the area in the United States where the largest population of that immigrant group can be found. To research the areas of the United States, a census for each state where there seems to be the highest number of immigrants, will be given to the students and they will work in their groups to record immigrant population statistics. Then the students will color the state with the largest number of immigrants the same color as the representing country. The students will make up a map key to symbolize each country. Using a rubric the students’ work will be graded and displayed in the room.

For the next activity in this lesson, the students practice their measuring skills by using the map scale to measure the distance from the mother country to the place where the immigrants settled. Along with rulers the students will need individual erasable maps and a black marker. Using the map scale the students will measure how many miles an immigrant traveled before settling in the United States. The students will measure and label each inch, at the end they will add up all of the numbers. The students will take the total miles traveled and place that number in the state. The total number of miles will also be recorded in their notebooks to be used later in the unit.

Besides the miles traveled and the number of immigrants the students will consider the different ways in which people arrived. For example if they traveled to the United States by land, air or sea. Later the students will reflect on the travel

experiences. Also during the research the students will study the history of those countries. While researching the history the students could closely examine how the history of the country might have influenced the immigration periods.

The students can then make two different bar graphs, one showing the number of immigrants from that country to the United States and the second, the miles traveled. If some of the students have trouble either collecting data for charts or designing the charts themselves, they will take all of their own resources and work together in groups to organize and present the projects to the class. If there is a shortage of time, the students will be assigned a country and they will access the Internet to research statistics. During the next class period the students will then share the information with the group. Before the students put the information away from this lesson they will organize the information on charts. The students will be given charts, in which each country will be named; they will fill in the charts with the missing information. For example, the first line in the chart might have Mexico, and the students will need to fill in the population column and state with largest number of immigrants column.

The students will need to understand many terms to be able to discuss the lessons in the unit. To develop the vocabulary for the unit, the students will view the materials from the unit. There will be copies of readings and worksheets for the students. Then with their partners, they will underline the words that they do not know. The class will then combine the list to make a master vocabulary list. Each day the students will be introduced to a few of the words from the master list. The students will use these words throughout the lesson to become comfortable with them. At the end of this lesson the students will add the words that they successfully identify and use, to the classroom word wall. Some terminology that might be included in the vocabulary lesson are multicultural, celebrate, ancestors, immigrants, identify, discrimination, value, prejudice, undocumented immigrants, and stereotypes.

With the countries located and the vocabulary reviewed the students will then move on to the third lesson in the unit. A few days before this lesson begins, the students will collect magazine pictures representing Latin America. The students will view popular culture of Latinos from the homework that they bring in. After seeing examples that represent the Latin American cultures the students will meet with their group. Each student will present to the group a sample that supports a stereotype. The group will then brainstorm making a list of stereotypes that could be formed looking at these representations of the different cultures. The list will be written on large poster board so that it can be saved. After the list is completed it will be displayed in the room.

The students will write a reflection piece on how they believe the stereotypes might follow the immigrants to their new homes in the United States. In the piece they could pretend to be a new immigrant from a certain country and write the piece from the view of a child their own age. In their essay titled, “What makes this a Different America?” they would consider how it would feel to be a foreigner in the United States. It might help if the students reflected on how they would feel going to a different country. There could be leading questions, for example “How would you communicate if you did not know the language?” Or the students could consider how it would feel to look and dress different than everyone else. In their writings they would need to use words from the vocabulary lesson. The students would need to express an understanding of how the stereotypes affect not only how the immigrants view the children of the United States, but may cause them to react to them.

The students will also record their feelings regarding this lesson in their notebooks. The students will be read a story about a young immigrant. After listening to the story the students will have time to revise their pieces “What Makes This a Different America?” The students will then have the opportunity if they would like to share their essay with the rest of the class. After finishing the book the students would have a class discussion on the book and how it fits into the unit. Some time would be given to how the adults in the story influence the way the child develop stereotypes.

The second list of stereotypes then would be compiled but it would be from the view of a child from Latin America. The stereotypes of how the children might see them would then be hung up next to the other stereotype list. At this time the students could see if there are any similarities in the stereotypes.

After the stereotypes are identified, the students could come up with ideas on how the stereotypes are false and why they believe the stereotypes were formed. Through proving that each stereotype is incorrect, the students will be able to develop an awareness of the similarities they share with children from Latin America. Sometimes it is the differences that the students will focus on. To help the students appreciate those differences they will do the following exercise. The students will envision a world where everything is exactly the same. In this world every person is the same color and speaks the same language. All of the clothing is the same style. Hairstyles are all alike. The students will shut their eyes and think of a day in this world. How would they feel if all the food and music were never changing? Following this activity the students will share what it would be like to live in a world where everything is the same. Hopefully, the students will come to develop a respect for the differences among cultures.

Now that the similarities and differences between the cultures have been explored and discussed, the students will be ready for the next lesson in the Unit. For the next activity the students will imagine that they are going to host an exchange student from Latin America for a few months. The information that they had researched earlier in the unit could be used. Information from other resources will be also introduced. The students will draft letters to the exchange students. The letter might assure the visitor that there are similar things in both cultures. To prepare for the lesson the students will need to reflect on the similarities and differences between the cultures. The students could reread their essays, "What makes this A Different America?" They will need to meet with their groups and discuss how to overcome the communication barriers that they will encounter with the exchange student. While in their groups they could brainstorm on ways to make their guests feel at home. As they work in groups one person from each group will record the ideas on large poster paper. For example, find recipes from the exchange student's country. When they are done brainstorming the posters of all of the ideas will be displayed around the room so that the students can refer to them when drafting the letters. The students will then meet with their partners to peer check the letters.

The students will look at many different aspects of a country, such as the climate of the country where the exchange student is coming from and if there is a difference. For example, if the exchange student is coming from a warm climate to Pittsburgh in March, the student must include helpful tips on what type of clothes to pack. A homework assignment would be for students to list everything that they would do to prepare for their visitor's arrival, to make their stay as comfortable and enjoyable as it could be. By studying the customs of the exchange student's country, the students would be better able to prepare the list. The students would then draft the letters during class time. For students who find the activity of writing the letter difficult, they could start by describing their everyday life to the exchange student. The final copy of the letter could be used as a classroom grade.

This is one area where a Spanish Teacher could collaborate with the lesson. We do not have a Spanish Teacher at our school, so our lessons on Spanish words will be limited. The introduction to the lesson will be a list of Spanish words that are very similar to the English words. Each student will play a game of trying to guess what the words are in English. Also, the students could learn Spanish greetings from a tape. The CLAS outreach program will be used and invitations to guest speakers will go out. From past experiences, the students really benefit by being able to talk to a speaker from the country that the student is studying.

The next lesson will look at the celebrations that the Latin Americans have and compare them with how the people in the United States celebrate. For example, how birthdays are celebrated. Also, the students could look at the holidays of specific Latin American countries. The students will prepare to have their own Latin American celebration. For the celebration, the class will be split into two groups. One will research and plan a celebration that would take place in Cuba. The second group will research and plan a celebration that would take place in Mexico. From the six working groups already in place in class: one through three will come together to work on Cuba. The remaining groups will be the planning committee for the Mexican celebration. The groups will examine each of the Five Themes of Geography when researching the country. The students will especially need to be aware of the climate and vegetation of the country. This will dictate what types of food can be grown there, and served at the celebration. The students will draw a large poster size map so they can label it with different things representing Cuba or Mexico. For example, natural resources or magazine pictures could be put on the map. The map will be used as a decoration for the celebration. When choosing the music and dances for the celebration the students will pay close attention to where these originated. After the celebration the students will write an essay comparing and contrasting the cultures of Cuba and Mexico. The students will include how the ancestors of these countries' influenced many aspects of the culture of those countries'.

The next lesson will explore how it feels to be discriminated against. In this activity the students will be divided into two groups. Group one will represent the legal immigrants and group two will represent the undocumented immigrants. Group one will be seated in the front of the room; they will receive fancy markers and paper to do their work. Group two will sit in the back of the room and receive no new supplies. Since the feelings of some students may get hurt during this assignment the class will need to be prepared on what the appropriate behavior will be during the lesson. Group one will be given the assignment to develop passports for themselves or work visas. Group one will be given special privileges in the classroom, for example being able to walk around and talk to their friends in group one while they are working. Group one will be given Band-Aids and interesting reading books. These items will symbolize health care and education that group one will be able to receive. Group two will not get any of the things that group one is entitled to. The length of the lesson will depend on time restraints. If there is little time for this lesson, it could be used as an introduction. Following the introduction the students could reflect on discrimination and how it made them feel. Then the word will be added to the word wall for this unit. If there is more time the students could develop their whole community. For example, each group would decide where they would live and how they will make a living. Since group one has work visas and the

opportunity to go to school, their list of jobs should consist of better paying jobs than group two.

When the students are done with this activity they class will compare and contrast the standard of living between group one and group two. The answers will be put on large poster paper and when finished it will be posted on the wall. The students could also discuss what life would be like for an undocumented teen-ager. If appropriate this is the section in the unit that the students will discuss why they think some teen-agers join gangs.

The unit “Right Next Door but Worlds Away” will conclude with class discussion. The students will examine the resources from the units, lessons and will be asked to draw conclusions from them. The groups will meet one more time to draw up a proposal titled “Healthy Ways to Look at Different Cultures”. Hopefully, the students will develop steps from their lessons, which they will be able to use in their later studies. After the groups present their proposals to the entire class, together the class will combine the ideas into one class proposal. There will be a written unit test given including vocabulary and essays questions.

Annotated Bibliography/ Resources

Teacher’s Reading List

Anzaldúa, Gloria. Borderlands: La Frontera. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1999. The author examines the culture of the borderlands, and reflects on the identity of women in the Chicana Culture.

Burciaga, José Antonio. Drink Cultura Santa Barbara: Joshua Odell Editions, 1993. A comical view on the cultures of the southwestern people.

Garcia, Cristina. Dreaming in Cuban. New York: Ballantine Books, 1992. The story is about a family divided not only by where they live but also culturally and politically. The outline of the family tree in the beginning of the book will be helpful when reading the book.

Gonzalez, Juan. Harvest of Empire. New York: Penguin Books, 2000.
A book that outlines the history of the migration of Latinos to the United States.

Rodriguez, Luis J. Always Running: La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993.

The author describes his life in Los Angeles, while providing very descriptive details on L.A. gang life

Santiago, Esmeralda. Almost a Woman. New York: Vintage Books, 1999.
The Puerto Rican author relates her experiences as a teenager with an over protective mother.

Villarreal, Jose Antonio. Pocho. New York: Anchor Books, 1989.
The book describes the life a boy whose parents left Mexico to live in the United States.

Student Reading List

Arnold, Helen. Post Cards from Mexico. Steck-Vaughn Co., 1996.
The book is written from the point of view of a child, and contains a large number of pictures. This text would be a great reference book for children.

Olawsky, Lynn Ainsworth. Colors of Mexico. New York: Carolrhoda Books, Inc., 2000.
The book talks about the history and culture of Mexico.

Web sites

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~gstudies/latin/lessons/backgd.htm> This site has an enormous amount of information for a teacher who needs background on Latinos.

<http://www.ucis.pitt.edu/clas/english/publications/public.htm> This site has information on the countries of Latin America.

<http://www.census.gov> Statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau.

<http://www.chatham.edu/PTI/home.htm> Units from the Pittsburgh Teacher's Institute.