

SETTLERS: CREATING FAMILY TREES & HISTORICAL PLAYS

Joan Andersen, Labrador

Grade 5 & 6 History, Language Arts, Drama, Art

CONCEPTS

- Family history, local and global history, and founding families.

INSTRUCTIONAL OUTCOMES

Students will:

- learn how to research a family tree;
- understand how local culture and history relates to the culture and history of people in other parts of the world;
- demonstrate an understanding of the ways in which their own cultural traditions have shaped them;
- analyse the ways in which immigration has influenced local and national society;
- share ideas, experiences, and information with others through story telling and drama.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This activity works well in a small community where some of the students will have descended from that community's founding family. The teacher should offer a variety of teaching/learning contexts in which students can research and record their impressions of both personal and community history.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

On a classroom wall, display the family tree of the founding family. Use paper of a different colour to represent each generation. Also display a large map of the world.

Briefly discuss with students:

- 1.WHO the founders of your community were;
- 2.WHERE the founding family came from (have students locate and discuss these places);
- 3.WHAT business or trade prevailed at the time and how the founding family related to these occupations;
- 4.HOW and WHY the settlers came to your area;
- 5.WHEN the founding families arrived.

DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Have the students do their own family tree going as far back as their grandparents (some students will be able to go further). Involve the parents as much as possible. Ask them to share family stories with their children during the unit.

Have students make a booklet entitled “My Family Album” or “All About Me.” Model the assignment for students by doing your own album. Include a Table of Contents, a family tree, a timeline of your personal history and either photos or drawings illustrating the highlights of your life. Write a paragraph about each picture and share your writing with the class.

Visit the community graveyard with your students. Before you go, discuss proper conduct in the graveyard, respect for loved ones, etc. Have each student do a rubbing of a headstone of their choice using chart paper and wax crayons. Display these in the classroom.

Read aloud *The Family Album* by Bernice Thurman Hunter.

Gather and share as many historical magazines, newspaper articles, photos, books, etc. which relate to local history and in particular the daily life of the founding families.

Invite an elder from the community to speak to the students about her/his life and encourage students to draw comparisons between life today and life in the past.

Introduce the idea of developing an historical play with your class. Discuss the importance of paying attention to the fine details of the historical resources they are using and have them prepare reports to share with the class. [In this particular instance, students shared articles about home remedies, storytelling, period games and toys and character profiles of members of the Andersen family (the founding family of Makkovik, Labrador). Through the information sharing, students were able to begin visualizing particular scenes for the play.]

CONCLUDING ACTIVITIES

Over the next several weeks, students are given topics relating to daily life in the “old days” to work on in small groups. Students are asked to improvise a scene based on a topic such as: doing chores; friends at school; how to end up back in time from the present; etc.

Students share improvisations with the whole class and a sharing of ideas begins: “I liked the character you developed and used in that scene...”; “Let’s use her as the character who goes back in time...”; “Jermaine, I like the idea of seeing someone at your fishing nets but when you got out to him, there was no one there. Let’s use the idea of a ghost in our play.”

During this process, a skeleton plot is produced. Each practice thereafter will simply add more meat to the bones. A written script is not really necessary. One situation leads up to another and the students become accustomed to the flow of the story. However, a teacher-director is necessary in order to ensure a good beginning, middle and ending to the play.

HELPFUL TIPS

Painted double or queen size sheets were used as backdrops for the different scenes. We used three, which we were then sewed together and placed on a rack so that each scene could be flipped over like a flip-chart page.

We created a time machine out of a large cardboard refrigerator box that we painted and stuck cut-out numbers on, representing the buttons. A science-oriented student wired the box for lights.

Study old photographs to decide on costume needs. We found that we could improvise quite easily using clothing from home.

We learned an old song passed down from one of the students' grandfathers. We used the song in one scene, as well as an eerie chant that we performed when going back in time or returning to the present.

MATERIALS/RESOURCES

- variety of coloured paper
- individual booklets
- family tree questionnaires
- variety of family photos
- chart paper
- wax crayons and tempera
- *The Family Album* by Bernice Thurman Hunter
- historical magazines
- community elders
- world map
- period clothing, tools, furniture and music

About the Educator

Joan Andersen teaches Inuit and settler ancestry to students at JC Erhardt Memorial School in Makkovik, Labrador. Joan uses a wide range of teaching methodologies to generate excitement and facilitate learning. Her fresh and innovative approach is exemplified by the play *A Trip Through Time* that her students created. Through the process of researching, writing and performing the play at the 20th Labrador Creative Arts Festival, her students experienced their community history.