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Survival Stories [6th grade]

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Education Department

Understanding by Design Curriculum Units

Trinity University

Year 2006

Survival Stories

Allison Grant

Survival Stories

Brief Summary of Unit (including curricular context and unit goals)

In this unit students will read historical fiction and nonfiction texts focusing on the tragedy of the Titanic. The readings will provide them with the opportunity to uncover the understandings that the genre of a text not only determines its purpose but also informs our approach to reading and that survivors make adjustments or adaptations in their lives in order to overcome significant challenges or difficulties. As students read the historical fiction book *Voyage on the Great Titanic* accompanied by various newspaper articles and nonfiction sources on the sinking of the ship, they will answer the question “why does genre matter?” Through the story of Margaret Ann Brady, students will explore the questions “what makes a person a survivor?” and “to what extent does our ability to change or adapt affect our chances of becoming a survivor?”

The unit will conclude with two projects in which students will apply what they have learned. For the first project, students will choose a book to read outside of class from a pre-selected group. After they have read the book, they will create both nonfiction and historical fiction texts to apply their understanding of what it means to be a survivor to another fictional character. The second project will require the students to see themselves as survivors and to reflect back upon their surviving the transition from elementary to middle school in order to help future sixth graders survive the transition successfully.

Content Standards

6.7 Reading/fluency. The student reads with fluency and understanding in texts at appropriate difficulty levels.

6.8 Reading/variety of texts. The student reads widely for different purposes in varied sources. The student is expected to:

(C) read for varied purposes such as to be informed, to be entertained, to appreciate the writer’s craft, and to discover models for his/her own writing.

(D) read to take action such as to complete forms, make informed recommendation, and write a response.

6.10 Reading/comprehension. The student comprehends selections using a variety of strategies. The student is expected to:

(A) use his/her own knowledge and experience to comprehend.

(B) establish and adjust purposes for reading such as reading to find out, to understand, to interpret, to enjoy, and to solve problems.

(D) describe mental images that text descriptions evoke.

(E) use the text’s structure or progression of ideas such as cause and effect or chronology to locate and recall information.

(G) paraphrase and summarize text to recall, inform, or organize ideas.

(H) draw inferences such as conclusions or generalizations and support them with text evidence and experience.

(L) represent text information in different ways such as in outline, timeline, or graphic organizer.

- 6.11 Reading/literary response. The student expresses and supports responses to various types of texts.
- 6.12 Reading/text structures/literary concepts. The student analyzes the characteristics of various types of texts (genres). The student is expected to:
- (A) identify the purposes of different types of texts such as to inform, influence, express, or entertain.
 - (B) recognize the distinguishing features of genres, including biography, historical fiction, informational texts, and poetry.
- 6.13 Reading/inquiry/research. The student inquires and conducts research using a variety of sources. The student is expected to:
- (B) use text organizers, including headings, graphic features, and tables of contents, to locate and organize information.
 - (C) use multiple sources, including electronic texts, experts, and print resources, to locate information relevant to research questions.

STAGE ONE – DESIRED RESULTS

Understandings

Students will understand that:

- Genre not only determines the purpose of a text but also informs our approach to reading it.
- Survivors make adjustments or adaptations in their lives in order to overcome significant challenges or difficulties.

Essential Questions

- Why does genre matter?
- What makes someone a survivor?
- To what extent does our ability to adapt to change affect our chances of being a survivor?

Knowledge

Students will know

- Historical information on the sinking of the Titanic
- Literary genres
- Characteristics and purposes of historical fiction and nonfiction
- Greek and Latin vocabulary

Skills

Students will be able to

- Use comprehension strategies including summarizing, predicting, and clarifying
- Express and support personal responses to text
- Read a variety of texts from different genres
- Conduct research in response to specific questions

STAGE TWO – ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

Performance Task #1

Survivor Profile

While we are reading *Voyage on the Great Titanic* as a class, each of you will be reading your individually chosen book for your final project. To apply your understanding of genre and survival, you will create examples of texts from two different genres – historical fiction and nonfiction – in order to provide answers to the following questions about your character:

What makes the character a survivor?

How did this character adapt to change in order to overcome his/her challenge?

Nonfiction – You will write a newspaper article about the event or challenge that your survivor overcame. You should:

- Use the characteristics of nonfiction and newspapers as discussed in class
- Do background research on the history of the event to include in your article – document at least two sources that you use
- Make sure that your writing is original!

Historical Fiction – You will write a diary entry about the most defining moments that make your character a survivor. You should:

- Use the characteristics of historical fiction and diaries as discussed in class
- Include a chart or graph which identifies both the fictional and historical elements of your diary
- Make sure to answer these important questions:
 - Who is your character?
 - What challenge does your character have to overcome?
 - Why is your character a survivor?

Upon completion, you will assess your own work and performance on this task.

Performance Task #2

I'm a Survivor!

Now that we are nearing winter break, you will soon successfully complete your first semester of middle school! The transition from elementary school to middle school is a challenging one: your teachers assign more homework, you have at least seven teachers throughout the day, your classes now change every 45 minutes, and you must take more responsibility for your behavior and assignments. It is a significant challenge which you can proudly say that you have survived! In order to use your experience as a new middle school student to help others survive the transition in the future, you will put together a package for next year's sixth graders. Your packages might be opened by next year's group of sixth graders and will include two things.

- You will write a letter to next year's sixth graders telling them what you wish you had known before you walked in the doors of Jackson Middle School for the first time.
 - What is the challenge (the first day) really like?
 - How did you survive (overcome the challenge)?
 - In what ways can your experiences help future sixth graders to survive?
- You will choose an object that next year's sixth graders can use to help them survive their first days of middle school.
 - Ideas might include a stuffed animal, a specific book, lyrics to a song, a movie, a meaningful quote, or a piece of art. Don't be limited by these options – use your creativity!
 - Include a note card with an explanation of why you chose your object.

In addition to presenting your time capsule to the class, you will assess your own work and performance on this task.

Other Evidence

- KWL chart specifying what students have learned about the Titanic
- Numbered Heads to review 882 ½ *Amazing Answers to your Questions*
- Paper dolls describing the main character in the book
- Timelines comparing the history of the Titanic to the historical fiction book
- Journal responses to questions about what the students are reading
- Informal checks for understanding, specifically using Michael Eaton questions
- Exit slips to monitor student's questions and misunderstandings
- Interactive Homework
- Continuum of reading purposes
- Greek and Latin vocabulary test

STAGE THREE – LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Day 1

- Students will decide to what extent they agree or disagree with a number of provocative statements in a Four Corners activity that introduce various issues and problems about survival that are addressed in *Voyage on the Great Titanic* and that will present the idea of survival as a problem to investigate.

Day 2

- Students will activate their prior knowledge about the Titanic and share their own information with their classmates in a Give One, Get One activity to develop a working background knowledge of the Titanic disaster.
- Using the lists that they created in the Give One, Get One activity, students will begin a KWL chart. They will use their lists to fill in the “what we Know” column. Students will then turn in an exit slip with a question that they would

like to have answered about the Titanic. These questions will be used to create the “Want to know” column of the chart. The “what we have Learned” column will be completed throughout the rest of the unit, especially while discussing nonfiction.

Day 3 & 4

- In order to teach the students background information or history on the Titanic, students will conduct a modified Jigsaw activity. They will be broken into teams of four. Within those teams of four, each student will have a focus area that they must concentrate on while reading the book *882 1/2 Amazing Answers to you Questions about the Titanic*. Each group member will be given separate handouts with specific questions to answer and will move to a new expert group so that they are working with others who have the same questions. Within their expert groups, students will work to find answers to all of their questions. Each expert group will also submit one to three different questions that they find most interesting from their section. These will be used in the Numbered Heads activity. They will then return to their original groups of four to teach their material to their teammates.

Day 5

- To make sure that students know the background information and facts about the Titanic, they will work with their group of four to answer questions. After being given some time to review, each group member will be given a number. When a question is asked, students will consult with each other to make sure that everyone is ready to answer the question. A random number will then be called and the student who has that number in the group will have to stand up. The first person in the class to stand up will be given the opportunity to answer the question. Points will be given for correct answers and the winning team will be given a positive reinforcement card.

Day 6

- Students will sit in groups of four or five. Each group will have a basket of books that have been pre-selected to be used for their final assessment project. The Pass Around activity will be modeled for the students. During the three minutes that they will have to look at each book, students should look at the cover, read the summary on the back, flip through to look at the number of words per page, notice the total number of pages, and begin reading the first few pages to see whether or not the book is one that will interest them. This cycle will be repeated so that students have the opportunity to look at the most books possible. At the end of the class period, students will submit a note card with their top three choices of books to read for their final project.
- The essential questions for the unit will be introduced and students will be given the assignment for the final assessment.

Day 7

- Students will once again be placed in groups of four to inductively discover the concept of genre through a Concept Formation activity. Each group will be given an envelope that contains examples of TV shows that are watched for different reasons. The groups will empty their envelopes onto their desks so that all members can see and will be asked to create two groups using the items given to

them. Once a group finishes their categorization, they should discuss and list the differences between their two categories. They will then create their own labels for the two groups.

- Once students have discovered the concept of genre, they will be introduced to the continuum of reading purposes, an Advance Organizer that will be used throughout the unit. “For information” will be written on one side and “for entertainment” on the other. Throughout our exploration of texts from different genres, we will reference this advance organizer. The genres that they discover during the concept formation activity will then be added along with other genres that they brainstorm.
- Students will be given their book assignment and parent letter to return signed. They will also get a worksheet with questions and things to think about as they are reading their book in preparation for their final project.

Day 8 – 10

- While we are reading *Voyage on the Great Titanic* as a class, students will complete paper dolls of the main character, Margaret Ann Brady. They will have to include six things about the character that they learn while reading (thoughts/dreams – thinking bubble, sights/sounds – head, possessions/work – hands, feelings – heart, settings/places – feet, and something about physical appearance). These will be collected on day ten.

Day 11

- Before beginning our reading day, students will listen to music that may have been played on the Titanic by the orchestra in the final moments of the ship. After listening to a few selections, students will be asked to write a journal entry describing how the music would have made them feel if they had been one of the passengers trying to survive that night.

Day 12

- To introduce the genre of historical fiction, students will look at examples and non examples to figure out the concept of historical fiction through Concept Attainment. They will also have the opportunity to come up with other examples and place pre-chosen examples in the correct column.
- Since students have thought about what makes historical fiction a literary genre through the concept attainment activity, they should now be able to identify its characteristics. Place students in pairs to Think-Pair-Share answers to the question “how do you decide if a work is historical fiction?” While students are working, a transparency will be placed on the overhead so that as students share their answers, a list of the characteristics of historical fiction will be created using their own knowledge.
- Students will add historical fiction to the continuum of reading purposes where they think that it best belongs.

Day 13 – 15

- While we are reading *Voyage on the Great Titanic* as a class, students will complete timelines in order to organize and sequence the plot of the book while they are reading. A timeline of the actual history of the days that are covered in the book will be provided so that students will see a visual alignment of the fictional story created around an historical event. Students will write events of the

plot in their corresponding places on the timeline. These will be collected on day fifteen.

Day 17

- Students will read a newspaper article that was written in the days surrounding the tragedy of the Titanic sinking. The newspaper will be introduced and placed within historical context. While we read the article together as a class, we will talk about the distinguishing features of newspaper writing (headlines give us the main idea, the first paragraph answers the who, what, where, when questions, subsequent paragraphs tell us details, mood and character descriptions are not included). We will also talk about main idea and details. The main idea is usually found in the headline and first paragraph of a newspaper article.
- Model writing a newspaper article about the first day of middle school. Ask for individual students to contribute to the article.
- Students will add newspaper to their continuum of reading purposes where they think that it best belongs.

Day 18

- After a short review of historical fiction and Venn diagrams, students will help to construct a Venn diagram comparing historical fiction to newspapers. In order to do this, a large Venn diagram will be constructed on butcher paper at the front of the room. The circles of the diagram will be drawn in different colors and students will be given one post-it note of each of corresponding colors. Students will write one characteristic of historical fiction, newspapers, and both on each of the post-it notes that correspond to the colors of the appropriate sections of the Venn diagram. Then students will place their post-it notes on the large diagram and will discuss the similarities and differences as a class.
- Students will work together to create a live continuum of reading purposes with titles that are given to them.

Day 19-20

- As students read silently to finish the book, they will each complete a set of questions that assess their comprehension of the book and ask them to begin considering the essential questions for the characters and situations in the book.

Day 21

- In order to summarize and conclude *Voyage on the Great Titanic*, students will review the essential questions and answer them for Margaret Ann Brady. With modeling and guidance, students will create a diary entry for her character that includes answers to the questions and models the activity that students will have to complete for their own character as part of their Survivor Profile.

Day 22 – 26

- Students will be given these days to work on their final assessment projects in the classroom or in the computer lab. They will also be guided and directed to create research questions to be answered for their nonfiction newspaper article.
- Library resources on the specific historical events that are covered by the individual novels will be available for students to use.
- Students who complete their projects early will be given opportunities to earn extra credit.

Day 27 – 30

- Students will turn in their final assessments and begin to share their time capsules with the class in formal presentations.

Day 31 – 35

- During these days, students will continue their time capsule presentations.
- Students will take a test over their Greek and Latin words that they have accumulated through Warm-Ups during the unit.
- With any time that is remaining during the week, students will watch parts of the movies *Secrets of the Titanic* and *Titanic* in order to debrief and to relate their understanding of historical fiction and nonfiction to movies.
- Students will evaluate the unit to describe their favorite and least favorite parts, to articulate the most important things they have learned, and to give their own answers to the essential questions.