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Reflections on a Third Grade Social Studies Curriculum

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Gerrity, L. E. (1997). Reflections on a Third Grade Social Studies Curriculum. *New York : Bank Street College of Education*. Retrieved from <https://educate.bankstreet.edu/independent-studies/19>

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Reflections on a Third Grade Social Studies Curriculum

By

Laura E. Gerrity

Advisor: Sal Vascellaro

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Science in Education
Bank Street College of Education
May, 1997

ABSTRACT

This curriculum study is a narrative account of a teacher and the social studies curriculum she uses with her third grade class. The curriculum is divided into two main parts. One is a study of the students' culture and family history which involves interviews with the children's parents, an examination of maps and literature from those cultures, and a description of the way the students experience the study through their writings, drawings, and conversation.

The second part of the study is an investigation of the students' neighborhood and community. Through interviews with community members, neighborhood walks, and their own observations, the children learn about their environment. Their observations are documented by writings, drawings, and a neighborhood history timeline.

Interspersed in the explanation of this curriculum study is an explanation of the learning process this teacher goes through as she creates and implements curriculum. This study also describes the joys and sorrows of teaching in an urban public school.

Reflections on a Third Grade Social Studies Curriculum

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the students, families and staff of P.S. 137.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to thank Sal Vascellaro, Ann Schafer-Wolf, Kathleen Feeley, Cynthia Smith, and my family.

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Prologue

To tell the story of this curriculum accurately, I couldn't separate the study from the way my students and I interacted with it. For this reason, the study is a subjective account of the work I did with my students and the way we related to what we learned. In order for this curriculum study to be thoroughly understood by the reader, I felt it necessary to give some background information about myself and the children I teach.

Professional Development

I began teaching at Public School 137 seven years ago with very little classroom experience. I quickly learned that education was impossible without "social control," and classroom management became one of my most important struggles as a new teacher. Since most of the teachers in my school integrate traditional education with discipline and black culture, I stood out not only because I was one of the few white teachers, but because the smattering of progressive ideas I had been exposed to seemed to clash with my students. I wanted my students to be active and learn by doing, but I soon learned that, as Dewey states in his book, Experience and Education, "freedom of movement"(p.61) did not necessarily lead to the educational goals I had in mind. As a survival strategy, I learned from my colleagues and students and clung to traditional education as the crutch I needed to take my first few steps in a positive direction. I gradually introduced progressive elements into my teaching as I was able (discipline-wise) and as I learned more from teacher education courses. While I was proud of my ability to straddle the fence between traditional and progressive education as I thought my students needed it, I admitted to myself that where I was on the continuum between traditional and progressive teaching wasn't really in response to my student's needs - it was wholly unsystematic. I saw myself in Dewey's criticism of the teacher who provides her students with interesting learning experiences, yet "while each is agreeable, they are not linked cumulatively to one another"(p.26).

At different times in my professional development, I have tried to focus on improving my ability to teach one subject area such as reading, writing, or math. At the end of last year, with my advisor's direction and help, I attempted to integrate different subject areas and focus on curriculum development, on becoming more systematic. This

year, my seventh year teaching, I have a much better understanding of what curriculum means, how essential it is for meaningful education, and I had some experience applying it in the classroom. I use the term “curriculum” to mean one theme that is explored through different subjects (reading, writing, art, etc.) in the classroom for a significant amount of time. At the beginning of this year, I felt ready to accept the responsibility and challenge of creating and implementing a comprehensive curriculum.

Personal Development

I have always been the kind of child, teenager, woman who has tried to please and gain acceptance from the people around me. There are certain areas where this “eager to please” characteristic shows itself more prominently. When I was young, it had a strong impact on the relationship I had with my parents and teachers. When I first joined the work force, after I graduated from college, it was extremely important for me to be respected and well-liked by my colleagues. Since most of my colleagues are African-American, I spent a lot of time absorbing the culture and making sure not to say anything offensive. Although I had learned a significant amount about African-American history and literature in college, culture gets expressed at least as strongly through everyday conversation and activity as it does through history and literature. During my first year of teaching, I remember one of my co-workers was amused that I didn’t know what a “case quarter” was (It is a whole quarter, as opposed to two dimes and a nickel).

During that same first year, I thought I was doing a good thing when I asked Ms. Vines, the educational assistant with whom I worked, to talk to the children about the civil rights era. I thought it was better for them to hear about black history from a black perspective. What I didn’t consider at the time was the message my students received when I assumed an air of authority about all subjects from science to spelling, but deferred to others over race matters. This was particularly likely to occur if the subject involved conflict between blacks and whites, or if a black adult was in the room with me. Topics such as bus boycotts, or the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X brought up my white guilt and gave me reason to hesitate. When another staff member or parent was in the room watching me, I thought they would be judging the (in)accuracy

of my remarks. I did not have similar trouble expounding on subjects Native American, because there were no Native Americans who might be looking over my shoulder.

I was comfortable reading books with African-American themes to the children and I was vigilant about reading books with black characters, but books are convenient props to hide behind. They create a script for the interaction between students and teachers; teachers are accustomed to their role as reader and students question and respond to the material without much prompting. Roles are less defined in other, more spontaneous situations, such as when one student calls another “nigger.” A strange and rare quietness often descends in the classroom during situations like these as the children wait for a cue from you, and little reaction time is provided. As a teacher, I need to be aware of those times were I find myself speechless in front of my students, because it often points to the intersection where who I am as a person meets who I am as a teacher. For some teachers, the uncomfortability surfaces when the subject of death is broached. My uncomfortability surfaced during discussions about racial conflict. While reading Vivian Gussey Paley’s White Teacher, I identified with some of the race-charged issues she struggled with as a European-American teacher of African-American students. As I was explaining the book to some of my fellow teachers, and relating the way I would defer to Ms. Vines about black history when I first started teaching, they were adamant that I needed to take an active role in discussions about race. “You’re their teacher - they need to hear it from you.” What I said to them (and how all of this relates to the curriculum) is that I can and do have those discussions with my students now. Although part of the reason is that I have more experience and know more about black culture, a significant reason I can conquer those subjects now is that I feel more freedom to be myself. As a result, I can react to situations more honestly, with less clutter clouding my thoughts. This enabled me to do a curriculum which entailed a lot of discussion about racial conflict. While I often felt like I should have thought of something better to say during these discussions, they were still very satisfying and I learned a great deal from them.

Who Are Eight Year-Olds?

To be a third grader in a New York City public school means that you will turn eight years old by December 31 of the current school year. Although the class I have this year has presented me with considerable challenges, I can honestly say that eights are a wonderful age to teach.

Most eight year-olds have achieved competency in reading, writing, addition, and subtraction, yet they are aware there is still much to learn and they are eager to learn it. They have not yet reached the point where enthusiasm for learning is perceived as uncool so they are attentive and excited by new ideas. Since they do have some academic competency and can follow instructions, both independent and group work are possible for eights. Teachers do not need to methodically spell out directions as they do with younger children.

In New York State, the third grade is also the year that students begin taking standardized tests. The improved intellectual ability of eights is tapped by many of the questions on the on the math test that is standard for all third graders. Almost all of the questions require the children to use two different processes or math concepts to solve the problem. On their last practice test, my students encountered this problem:

Alice, Ben, David and Susan entered their frogs in a jumping contest. If David's frog landed on point B, how far did it jump?

2 4 B 12 14

To answer this question, students must first decipher the pattern (counting by twos), and then use the pattern to figure out the number that should appear two spaces after the last given number.

In their book, The Development of Children, Cole and Cole (1993) explain that seven and eight year-old children have improved reasoning “not only because they use mental operations but also because they perceive more of the elements of a problem. Younger children often fail to notice more than a single aspect of the problem, focusing

on only one of its salient features” (p.457). While I don’t like the emphasis my school is required to place on these tests, and I’ve seen these tests serve as an exercise in frustration for many children, my students from this year seem to enjoy proving their skill at answering these questions. One of my students called me over during the test to tell me, “See, Ms. Gerrity, I didn’t get tricked.”

At the same time eights enter into this new stage of cognitive development, their degree of physical competency has also reached a new level. While some children are able to ride bicycles, rollerskate, or play ball before the age of eight, a more developed physique combined with a more complete understanding of the skills involved allow eights to become proficient in these activities. For younger children, the experience of learning to skate involves too many early defeats to be enjoyable. In contrast, many of my students this year asked for rollerblades for Christmas because they know it is an attainable goal.

An interest in self-discovery is a wonderful attribute of eight year olds. In previous years, although my students liked to write, I never thought they “got the idea” of keeping journals so I had basically abandoned using them. Last year, another teacher encouraged me to try them again, and they have become a special part of our class life. Third graders are ready and able to think and write about themselves in ways that younger children just aren’t capable of doing. I believe this is part of the reason my students responded so well to the exploration of their cultural and familial history. Like young children, they are able to recognize the family as a significant group in which they belong, but they are also able to recognize and place themselves in categories much larger in scope - such as culture, country, school, and community. In addition to being able to see themselves as members of more than one social group at a time, children seem to enjoy identifying themselves as such. Michelle, whose mother spoke about their African-American and Native-American heritages, raised her hand during a discussion about Caribbean culture to say, “Part of my family is from Trinidad, too.”

A heightened interest in peer approval and a decreased interest in teacher/adult approval is common in third graders. Children start to care much more about the opinions of their friends than the opinions of adult authority figures. When I taught

writing process to six and seven year-old children, there was a constant line of students in front of me waiting to show me their writing. My eight year-olds still enjoy sharing their writing with me, and a few ask for my attention often, but most children are content writing among their friends for a considerable period of time.

This new emphasis on peer relationships sometimes takes the form of a semi-romantic interest in other children. This interest often gets expressed in notes students pass to one another. They often contain such messages as, "Do you like Devin?" and "What is your phone number?" Social groups are most often segregated by sex, but in this year's class, my students frequently divide themselves according to the hard to determine gauge of social desirability or popularity. Since this is the first time I've taught a class which was homogeneously grouped according to ability, I believe this is related to the increased competitiveness I've noticed in this class compared to others. In addition to academic work, this competitiveness seems to apply to social groupings which has been difficult for a few students in our class. These children seem not yet prepared for the level of peer interaction being thrust upon them. I hope these children will have a chance to develop at their own pace before a pattern of ostracism sets in.

Of course, eights have not outgrown the need for adult attention and approval altogether. They still clamor to eat with me on Tuesdays (the day I allow three children to remain in the classroom) and beam at praise. As Dorothy Cohen (1972) writes,

The major thrust in the middle years of childhood is toward increasing freedom from adult authority and direction. This task must be accomplished, however, while remaining safe and secure in a nub of adult protection. (p.217)

It is healthy for my students to begin the separation (from adults)/identification (with peers and self) process, and if we can weather the storms, the classroom can be an ideal, safe environment for children to explore these identities and relationships.

Description of School, Environment, and Class

P.S. 137 is located in Brownsville, Brooklyn. Our school building is slightly conspicuous on the corner where it stands, partly because it is painted banana yellow and partly because it is so large compared to the apartment buildings surrounding it. It has four stories and houses approximately 36 classrooms, a library and an auditorium. A few years ago, Newsday ranked our school as one of the bottom ten in the city in terms of physical condition. As a result of appearing on that list, the interior of our school building was recently plastered and painted. However, the reconstruction job was done poorly, and many of the “repaired” walls have already started to crumble.

Classes span from Pre-K to fifth grade. Except for Pre-K, which has one morning and one afternoon class, there are three or four classes on each grade. Most classes have 25 to 30 students. Since we have approximately 550 students, we are comparatively small for a N.Y.C. public school. Our newly revised school day runs from 8:40 to 2:40. Twenty minutes were shaved from lunch in order to relieve the burden of lunch duty from the teacher and aide who were responsible for at least four classes at a time. The lunch period which used to be fifty minutes is now a half hour, and as a result, students do not get to go outside at all and have no recess.

The neighborhood of our school consists mainly of three-family houses. There are some burned out buildings and abandoned lots filled with garbage, but other houses and entire blocks are well-maintained. There are a number of construction projects going on within a three-block radius of our school. There is a bodega diagonally across the street from our school which gets a great deal of traffic from students, parents, and teachers. Although quite small, it is stocked with such a variety of products, many people depend on it as their main grocery store. Since Brownsville is not very densely populated and is made up of poor and working class families, there aren't too many businesses in the immediate area. However, I've begun to notice a number of small businesses sprouting up recently in response to the new construction.

This is the first year since I've been teaching at P.S. 137 that the school has created a homogenous class of above-average students in grades three through five (as evaluated by their teacher from the previous year). Since I've been teaching this "top" class, I've noticed a difference in the socio-economic background of my students this year compared to the classes I've taught in past years. While families from our school range from very poor to lower/middle income, I have more children from working families this year and no children who show the outward signs of severe emotional or material neglect that sometimes is a result of poverty or family trauma. In past years, I have spent a significant amount of time worrying about the social problems of the two or three needy children I would usually have in each class. While I am not overburdened by these kinds of problems, I have two students who have exhibited severe "acting out" behavior and this has caused considerable disruption in our classroom life. Although there have certainly been enjoyable aspects of teaching a more capable class, many children from this year's class seem to have an unusually low tolerance for other children's difficulties. I wonder if this is because the children do not need to depend on each other for help as often as children from other classes since almost all of them are relatively strong academically. I have always believed that one of my strengths as a teacher is an ability to create a warm, cooperative environment in the classroom. Of course, this group of children has shared a number of harmonious experiences, many of which have come doing the work of this curriculum. I am trying to evaluate both the cooperative and uncooperative times, and enlist the children's help in reversing the tide.

In a class of 29 students, the majority are African-American, five or six are Caribbean-American, two are from the Dominican Republic and one is from Thailand (she is the only Asian student in our school and step-sister to another girl in our class). The children in this class are more talkative than most of the other classes I've taught, but they are also more lively, more creative in their art and language, and more willing to take risks with their thoughts. All of my students will turn eight before the new year, and (to my knowledge) only one of my students is nine. Because this class is large and active and has only one teacher, new activities such as taking the class turtle out of the tank for

an observation sometimes have to be altered mid-way. Some activities can become so frenetic and exciting that they have the potential to lose their educational value.

While our school has no clearly stated philosophy that I know of, there are many routines and practices evident in our school that suggest an implicit philosophy . Every morning, all of the classes in our school line up at 8:40 in the yard. In unison, students say the school motto, “Believe, Achieve Succeed!,” and sing the school song, “Everybody’s Talkin ‘Bout 137” which was written by one of our teachers. Maintaining classroom and schoolwide discipline is important to parents and teachers alike. Students are expected to follow rules designed to promote safety and good behavior, and school uniforms are encouraged. While many teachers teach traditionally in the sense that students are most often seated in their desks and teachers at the chalkboard, there are many exceptions to this and most teachers incorporate some elements of progressive education in their teaching. The principal (who is tall and authoritative) allows for differences in teaching style, but has recently required teachers from each grade to meet and submit a monthly curriculum for science, social studies, English, reading, math and spelling. Our lesson plans are expected to reflect the stated monthly curricula. While this structure may appear stifling, it has increased grade-wide cooperation among teachers and I believe it has achieved its goal of encouraging accountability. I would say our school philosophy is education by any means necessary (within the structure established for teachers and with an expectation of social control for students).

Unfortunately, our school has recently come under fire for low test scores and this has put added pressure on the administration and teachers. While I believe that most of the teachers in our school welcome an equitable standard of accountability, we receive no additional funds or resources to teach students who often need additional educational support. This creates a somewhat stressful environment which makes it hard for administrators, teachers, and children to flourish.

Introduction

When I first began thinking about the social studies curriculum I wanted to do with my class, there were a number of competing ideas and concerns that factored into my decision and I felt a responsibility to carefully consider them all. One consideration was the third grade social studies curriculum which calls for a study of world communities. With the new nationwide emphasis on standards, the administrators in our school directed us to follow this statewide curriculum. If I had been advised to do this when I first started teaching, I might have argued with my supervisors over whether the standards were appropriate or question why they had to be imposed on us. However, when I was instructed to do so in the beginning of this year, I saw no reason why it would restrict me from creating the kind of curriculum I wanted to create. It seems reasonable to me that all third grade social studies curricula be expected to have something in common. In this case, "Communities of the World" was such a horribly large category, it was hardly a limiting framework to work within. The debate over whether a standard curriculum is what is needed to salvage American education seems to pit those who believe it is more important for children to experience learning as a process against those who believe it is more important for children to become familiar with a specific body of information. However, as I see it, it is the children who lose out if the discussion about content and process is framed in an either/or ultimatum. In this social studies curriculum, I expected my students to learn significant historical, geographic and cultural content. However, at the same time, I planned to give them time to ask questions, or discuss and explore the subject matter in ways that would foster meaningful and developmentally appropriate education.

My main concern with following the curriculum guidelines was that most of my students did not yet have a firm understanding of their own community. Since I believe it is advantageous for students to use the familiar as a bridge towards understanding the

unfamiliar, I knew a neighborhood study needed to be integrated into the curriculum. At the same time, I didn't want my students to be limited to a study of their neighborhood. Third grade children can conceive of places larger than their immediate environment and they can begin to understand the usefulness of maps as representations of real places. When I first started teaching, I often unnecessarily restricted my planning because I was worried about what my students would be capable of doing and understanding. Although well-intentioned, there was something patronizing and perhaps racist in this worry about how much the children in my class could academically handle. It was greatly influenced by the difficulties I knew many of my students faced at home. By example, the other teachers in my school helped me see how I was accepting what the students were offering instead of encouraging them to realize the full extent of their abilities. Therefore, when I was creating this curriculum, one of the conditions was that the subject itself be one that would inspire my students to reach their academic potential.

Another idea I was grappling with was the possibility of tracing family roots with my students. Reflecting on my own education as a public elementary student has been an important source of inspiration for me as a teacher as well as an important part of my professional development. I remember the lessons, books, and projects that stimulated my mind as well as the ones that simply kept me busy. One of my more memorable experiences from grammar school happened during the fifth grade when my class did a study of heritage and family history. I remember interviewing family members for my report and feeling both pride and interest in the stories of how both sides of my family came to America. I had always been interested in doing a similar study with my own students, but I had a number of questions and concerns about how to develop this idea. When I was a student in the fifth grade, our class consisted mainly of immigrant or first and second generation ethnic, white children. I wasn't sure how or whether a study of family histories would be different with a class that was mainly African-American. When I conveyed my questions and concerns to my advisor for this study, Sal Vascellaro, he suggested we trace the different paths of migration each family followed before coming to Brownsville. This provided a way to connect our neighborhood explorations to an investigation into the students' cultural and familial history. After generating a

pool of ideas and activities to draw from, one by one, I began to try them out with my class.

The first activity I actually did with my students from this study was a neighborhood walk, and I planned to follow it up with visits to neighborhood stores, etc. Although I nagged myself to make appointments for places to visit on our next neighborhood walk, we got so caught up in the students' family histories that I didn't want to disrupt the excitement of our family visits and interviews. For this reason, the family history piece of our curriculum comes before our neighborhood study. While I considered the idea that students should start with the here and now (their neighborhood) as a bridge to understanding more abstract ideas (other places and the past), I am satisfied with this sequence for a few reasons. First, all students are interested in themselves and the first extension of themselves, their families, and this can also serve as a concrete starting point. Second, the migration and the reasons for migration come chronologically before the families' relocation to Brownsville, NY. Finally, I thought the students would ask better questions of the business owners and neighborhood workers if they were more informed of the ways culture, environment, and work are related.

Since I was not experienced at developing this kind of comprehensive curriculum, an important part of the process was evaluating its progress in the classroom and altering my plans. This study not only documents how my students interacted with a study of culture, history, and environment, but also my own exploration/evaluation process as a teacher.

Family and Cultural History

In the first part of our curriculum study, we interviewed certain family members and school staff from different cultural backgrounds about their stories of migration and how they came to Brownsville. We read about, explored through activities, and discussed those backgrounds and journeys. The children also did individual research to discover their own family stories.

Students Chart Their Families' Migration On Maps

In their first homework assignment, children were required to ask their families two questions, "Where did your family come from before they lived in NY?" and "Why did they come here?" The next day, I planned to record the information on chart paper and then discuss the findings with the children. This plan did not work out well. With nothing concrete to focus on (the chart was facing me most of the time while I was writing on it), the class as a group lost interest quickly. Individually, each child was very interested in getting his/her name and family on the chart, but was woefully uninterested in listening to other students. A few students said, "my family just [only] came from NY" or "we always lived here." We did not even get to the reasons why their families came to Brownsville.

As I was reflecting on this after school, I realized that we would have to divide the students up into regions. It is not practical for 29 children to tell their family histories in one day. By organizing the families' origins into geographical regions, I could make sure each student had a turn and thought students would be more settled if I assured them I had everyone's name on the list. The three main categories I saw when I looked at the places where my students families were from were: other United States, Caribbean

countries, and other countries outside North America. I was curious whether the students would see the same categories.

The next day I displayed two maps on the bulletin board in our meeting area. One depicts the United States and its position in North America. Since some of the islands in the Caribbean are tiny, I drew in any of the countries that were missing to make sure all of the children's families were represented. The other is a map of the 48 continental United States (See Appendix A). I was happy to find maps that you could write on (and wipe off) because I wanted the children to physically trace the path their families took to come to NY so they could become more familiar with their country on a map and get a sense of the distance their families traveled (I acknowledge that map scale is a concept they are still developing, but we had done a considerable amount of map work earlier this year).

I explained that I wanted each child to be able to trace the route his or her family took to get to NY, but that we had too many children to do it in one day. On the first day, I called on the Caribbean students to come to the map. Each child drew a line from his or her country of origin to NY and wrote his or her name on the line. Since many of these children are immigrants themselves, they had interesting ways of describing their homelands.

Theo said, "In Guyana, they have a lot of beaches, and they have a lot of small towns." Christine said, "In Panama, it is hot and you can build your own house." Samene responded to both Theo and Christine, "In Grenada, we have beaches too, but they're not like the beaches here...and you can build your own house too. They can be built fast, but they can also come down fast." "If there is a storm?" I asked her. "Yes," she nodded, "and when you have to go to the bathroom, there are no toilets. You have to go outside and dig a hole." This was quite amusing to the children around her. Although I wasn't sure everyone heard this, I did not repeat it. While I'm not shy of bathroom talk, I did not want the students to get the impression that everyone in the Caribbean goes to the bathroom in a hole in the ground. I later realized that this impulse to sanitize, while well-intentioned, was wrong. If I have faith in the intelligence of my students, I remember that my students can make up their own minds about whether one person's

experience is representative of all. Of course, it is my responsibility to see that they are exposed to other images of Caribbean life, and they will be exposed to those images in time. When we come back from vacation and review what we have learned so far about each region, I will make sure to read Samene's experiences aloud.

At our next meeting, I called on the students from the southern United States. On the map of the continental US, these children drew a line from their families' home state to NY. [I asked three students (who are from countries outside North America) if they could wait until we put their countries on the map, and they said yes. I initially planned to put their countries on one of the American maps in boxes to designate they would be out of scale. However, this would likely lead to confusion between distance and location and I later realized that a third map would be better.] Many children in our class have spent summers "down south," and were eager to share stories of their home state, but I had scheduled a visit for the next day and wanted us to have time to consider the questions they wanted to ask Ms. Vines, our first visitor.

Before we thought up questions, I asked the students to look at the information we had recorded on the maps so far. I asked them if they could think of a way we could put the places their families were from into groups. Many students made a distinction between families from the countries below or south of the US and families from other states in our country. I am planning to revisit this discussion again. As children become more and more familiar with their own cultures and the cultures of their classmates, I believe these cultures will become more and more distinct in their minds. I am hoping that after adding the world map to our bulletin board, and tracing the lines of the families from Africa and Thailand, children will categorize these countries either individually by continent or together as countries outside North America.

Ms. Vines is an educational associate who works in one of the kindergarten classes in our school. I explained to the class that like many of their families, Ms. Vines lived in the southern United States before moving to NY. I told them that she would be talking about her life in North Carolina and what it was like for her to move to Brownsville. When I asked the class to think up a few important questions they'd like to ask Ms. Vines, they came up with these:

1. Why did you come to NY?
2. What was it like in North Carolina?
3. Did you drive to NY or take a ferry?
4. Did you like North Carolina?
5. What was the weather like in North Carolina?
6. Were you born in North Carolina/ In what part were you born?

Although they might seem simple, I was pleased by these questions, because they reflected an awareness of a different time and place. A crucial step towards understanding history and an awareness of other cultures is the ability to distinguish between the “here and now” and a different time and place. In this third grade class, almost all of my students are eight. Although a certain approach to the study of history must be reserved for older students, as David Elkind (1981) asks, “Does this mean that nothing in the way of history can be taught... until adolescence? Not at all”(p.436). While it is not developmentally appropriate for my students to study history in the traditional sense, their questions reflect certain basic premises that are building blocks towards the more complicated understanding of history they are capable of when they reach adolescence. These premises include: different places can have different weather or climates, northern and southern states are separated by a certain distance, older people were young once, and a belief that they can learn about a place by listening to another person’s experiences. While these are not earth-shattering breakthroughs, they are premises that when combined with more experience and information, will hopefully create fertile ground and motivation for a more in-depth historical study when they enter junior high and high school.

A Visit from Ms. Vines

A number of students in our class were familiar with Ms. Vines before she came to visit, but she is such a warm, open-hearted person that all of the children seemed to be comfortable with her almost immediately. She is also a very animated speaker, and the children sat in rapt attention as she told them about her girlhood in North Carolina (See Appendix B). I took notes on chart paper as she spoke so the children could see the

process of writing short phrases as a way to take notes while someone is speaking. She told the children about the work her family did on the farm, the animals they had, and how they grew all their own food. She spoke about picking cotton and brought in a cotton stalk for the children to see. [Like my students, I also grew up in New York City and remember being amazed when I saw a cotton stalk for the first time several years ago when I worked with Ms. Vines. Cotton always seemed so synthetic to me; it is remarkable to see it as part of something that was once alive.] Ms. Vines said that while “life in North Carolina was hard, we had a lot of love in our family.” She mentioned that her mother was a preacher, and told them how skilled her father was at farming and how well their crops grew as a result. She explained that although her father didn’t know how to read, he was a smart man and didn’t need a ruler to measure.

Since I used to work with Ms. Vines when I taught first grade, it was very comfortable for me to be with her in the classroom. I asked her to tell the story she told me about her father’s land. She said that it made her too emotional, but that it would be all right for me to tell it. I told the class that Ms. Vines’ father owned the land on which they lived and farmed, but because he could not read or write, he was tricked into signing away his land to a white man for very little money. Ms. Vines added that her father was born shortly after slavery and consequently was not allowed to learn how to read. While maybe unable to grasp the entire historical context of this story, the students’ faces reflected a sense of the seriousness appropriate to this story. Ms. Vines explained that there was good and bad in every race and that not all white people would try to cheat you just like not all black people looked out for each other.

Ms. Vines and I had asked students to hold their questions until the end, and at this point, the children were ready to engage in conversation. Shaquana told Ms. Vines that she too “used to live down south.” Aaron said that he and his grandmother had once tried to plant vegetables, but they didn’t grow. “How did you get your vegetables to grow so good?,” he asked Ms. Vines. She said, “I can’t tell you much because it was really my father who knew just what to do.” Nia asked, “How long did it take you to get to NY?” Ms. Vines told her that they traveled through Raleigh, North Carolina, and Washington, DC, and that the whole trip took 10 hours. “Did you like it when you came to NY?,”

Christine wondered. “No,” Ms. Vines responded, “there were too many people. When I came here I stayed in a small apartment when I was used to so much space in North Carolina. I felt like I was in a...” “In a cage,” Jalissa supplied. “Yes, like I was in a cage,” Ms. Vines agreed.

I asked Ms. Vines if she would answer the questions we prepared for her visit. After she responded to our questions, Ms. Vines moved on to the pile of felt and threaded needles I had put aside for her visit. She folded a piece of felt and took a needle threaded with yarn and told the children they would be learning how to sew a pouch. She taught the students to tie a knot in the yarn, then stitch the sides to create a pouch (See Appendix C). The children were too excited and tired of concentrating to pay attention to the explanation. At first, I was worried that our discussion went on too long, however, I realized that sewing is really a skill that one needs to teach oneself. Some of the children moved the needle in upward and downward strokes as Ms. Vines showed them, while other students stitched around the sides of the pouch. In time, all of the children learned how to sew - if not on that day, then over the course of the next several days. Fortunately, before Ms. Vines’ visit, a parent happened to drop by and helped me thread 29 needles so all the students could begin sewing relatively quickly. Unfortunately, new sewers have trouble keeping the needle threaded. Since Ms. Vines had to leave shortly after the students began sewing, many children were forced to struggle with the painstaking task of threading a needle for the first time. This was good practice in self-reliance, and many students taught each other how to do it.

Reflections

A wonderfully calm aura swept across the classroom throughout Ms. Vines’ visit and it remained after she left, while the children were working on their pouches. The teacher from across the hall came in and remarked that it seemed like such a beautiful lesson. I felt that it was beautiful too, and expected that all of the visits would go this well (they didn’t). Upon reflection, I think there were two main reasons this meeting went so well. One was Ms. Vines herself. Many teachers that work with older children have developed a business-like approach to children, but Ms. Vines, who works in

kindergarten, is the opposite of business-like. She has a natural ability to talk in a way that is funny and interesting to adults and children alike. The second reason for the success of this visit was sewing. I had asked Ms. Vines if she would teach the children to sew, because she learned to sew while she was growing up in North Carolina, and still sews to supplement her income. I anticipated that the children would like it and I appreciated that it would be a useful skill for them to know. However, I didn't anticipate that sewing would have such a relaxing affect on the children and that both boys and girl would enjoy it so much. The children have since embroidered a pattern on their pouches and took them home before the holiday, but I'm planning to continue to involve sewing in our classroom life.

In Passing...

Over the next few days, as the interest in curriculum grew, three students who had answered the question of family origin with, "we've always been in NY" or "I don't know" came to me to amend their answers. Enrique said, "Ms. Gerrity, we aren't from NY, we're from Virginia." Cherease asked me, "Remember when you asked where my family is from... we came from South Carolina." "Can I put it on the map?," she asked. The person most brimming with new cultural information was Nia. Almost everyday she tells me about a relative who have recently emigrated from Africa. She told me that they know how to walk on hot coals without getting burned. While this information would certainly interest her classmates, I'd like to verify it with her family before asking Nia to share it with the class. African-American children (and perhaps all children) have such a mixed mental image of both true and untrue information about the African continent that I want to make sure they get at least a few accurate accounts of Africa to balance the fiction.

The People Who Could Fly

I was so happy when I remembered Virginia Hamilton's (1985) collection of folktales, The People Who Could Fly, because it fit so well into our investigation of African-American history and was such good literature. From time to time I forget that

classic literature produces such a different quality of discussion among students than do books that are merely good. The complicated language and situations in good literature encourage discussions that are about great ideas, and the meaning of life; they encourage the children to engage in philosophy.

One thing I have learned about leading discussions with children is that you have to let them go on long enough. The first few remarks children make are potpourri - some are good, some are not so good, but it is the second wave of remarks which usually contain something substantial. There is often one or two students who ponder what the first students have said and want to respond. These students frequently see a diamond in the rough that I have overlooked. Their comments can inspire four or five students to wonder about something they didn't think of earlier, and these students cause a chain reaction. Together, the class is capable of a great exchange of ideas that they wouldn't have been capable of individually.

Over the winter recess, I asked the students to read the story, "The People Who Could Fly." This African-American folktale tells the story of a certain sect of Africans born with the ability to fly, who were enslaved and brought to America. They recapture their special gift with the guidance of a father-like figure, Tobie, who teaches them the words that invoke flying and return them to their homeland.

After we returned from break, we didn't get a chance to discuss the story for a few days and I was afraid the children would forget the story. To the contrary, the class' discussion touched on every important theme I would have wanted to discuss had this conversation stemmed from my questions, except that it was all the more powerful because it belonged to my students. The following is an excerpt from our conversation about the story.

Henry: Tobie was too wise, he just put his hands up and people flew.

Cherease: You know what Henry said, that wasn't true, people needed to know magic words.

Me: Do you think the story was true?

Nia: No, because how could people fly?

Nicola: I think it's part true and part fable, because slavery was true, but flying is not.

Susannah: I think it was true, because it was the magic that made people fly and magic could make people fly.

Enrique: I think it was not true....no, true becauselike David Copperfield could make the Statue of Liberty disappear.

Sari: Some parts are true, because people did try to escape from slavery.

Eric: If people could fly, how come people don't fly today?

Dewan: They probably didn't fly, they probably really ran away.

Richard: They could've flew in a way, because they could've died and became an angel and then flew.

Michelle: I agree with Andre because in the story it said they flew over the gates.

Me: You mean like the gates of heaven? (Michelle nodded.)

As their teacher, when I do insert myself into my students' conversation, it is important for me to ask sincere questions. Although it may seem hard to imagine, the reason why I asked my students, "Do you think the story is true?" was because that question kept surfacing in my mind as I was reading it. I began to believe that if something so horrific as slavery was possible, then something as miraculous as people flying to their freedom was also possible. I'm not sure if this was because of my belief in God, magic, and witchcraft, or because I was so engrossed in our study of slavery, but I was curious how my students, most of whom are even more faithful than myself, would respond.

Nia's question, "[it's not true] because how could people fly?," reflects the fact that she often reads situations literally. Eric extends Nia's idea to the question that would inhibit most of us from believing, "If people could fly, how come people don't fly today?" Susannah and Enrique present the option that seemingly impossible things can become possible through the power of magic. Sari and Nicola dissect what is historical context from the fantasy of folktale. And Dewan and Richard give us folktale as a metaphor for historical reality; either they gained their freedom by running away, or they gained their freedom through death. I don't think a group of adults could have had a better conversation.

The other story that produced the most intriguing discussion was called, "Wiley, His Mama and the Hairy Man," which I admit originally interested me because of the title. The story is about a boy, Wiley, who lives with his mother. Before the story begins, we learn that Wiley's father disappeared after he fell off a ferry boat. It was believed that the Hairy Man somehow prevented him from swimming to safety. Wiley lives in fear of this mysterious man until, aided by his conjurer mother, he tricks Hairy Man the three times needed to permanently evade his threat.

The comments from the children after we read this story completely surprised me. This is part of our conversation:

Mary : How did the Hairy Man twist his body to turn into the other animals?

Aaron: How can the Hairy Man get out of the sack if he was that big?

Mary: You know that question I just asked?... that's a fake question, because no one can do that.

Shanice: How come the Hairy Man is scared of hounddogs if he was magical and could turn into anything?

Dewan: Maybe because the Hairy Man is the father

Shaquana: ...and he was scared the hounddogs might rip off his suit.

Samene: I think the Hairy Man is the father and maybe the father taught his wife magic and his wife knew how to destroy Hairy Man because she already knows it's Wiley's father.

Henry: The father was probably testing the wife to see how much magic she knew.

Tommy: When he twisted himself into the animals, he cut himself into pieces and he never died because he is a magician.

Stanley: Why would the Hairy Man go after his own son? [Me: Why do you think?]

Probably when he fell off the boat, he lost his memory

Susannah: Maybe he wanted his son to live with him.

Enrique: Maybe he was mean, and he turned on her after he got married...he could have waited on purpose.

Richard: Maybe he's not his father, maybe the father just died!

Derrick: How come Hairy Man is scared of hounddogs and not the boy?

Dewan: Probably he was gone so long and wants to see him.

Reflecting upon our conversation about “The People Who Could Fly,” I was so engrossed in my students’ remarks because they contemplated the same question I contemplated. While reading back the Hairy Man dialogue, I was equally captivated for precisely the opposite reason - I never even considered the possibility that Hairy Man was Wiley’s father. As I said earlier, the first few comments in a class discussion are usually unrelated, however, quickly a theme emerges that many students feel the need to respond to. I wondered why so many children grabbed onto the idea that Hairy Man was the father. Freudian interpretation of children’s stories is such a cliché, but here were my children breathing new life into the oedipal relationship between mother and son. Richard was the lone holdout, and he seemed almost emotional as he blurted, “Maybe Hairy Man is not the father - maybe he just died!”

Since so many children today grow up without a father at home, it may be easy to read some of the quotes from these children as representative of their home life, but I believe we have to be very careful about making (often mistaken) assumptions about our students. It underestimates the imaginative powers of children to presume that their dialogue merely stems from their direct experience. Although I try not to fall into this trap, I admit I didn’t expect Enrique, whose extremely caring father is his primary caretaker, to say, “Maybe [Wiley’s father] was mean, and he turned on [his wife] after he got married...he could have waited on purpose.” Situations like this remind me not to jump to conclusions about the drama of children’s dialogue.

Ms. Barnes

I invited Ms. Barnes, Michelle’s mother, to speak to the class because Ms. Kuumba, Michelle’s second grade teacher told me that she had traced her family several generations. I didn’t know Ms. Barnes very well so I wasn’t sure what instructions to give her. When she agreed to visit, I asked her if she would talk to the students about what she learned about her family. I also asked her to make her comments brief because it is difficult for most of the children to concentrate for a long period of time.

Since our class had both discussed and practiced taking notes, and I had modeled it the day before during Ms. Vines' visit, I told the children to take notes as Ms. Barnes spoke. I reminded them not to write everything she said - only what they thought was interesting or important. "You should not be writing in complete sentences for notes," I instructed, "notes are like a first draft."

Ms. Barnes told the class that she was a college student, and one of her classes had required her to research her family history. Ms. Barnes found out about both her father's and mother's family. She first told the children about her mother's family. Ms. Barnes found out that her great great grandmother was a Native American named Sari. She was a Crow Indian and her people originally came from Montana. Ms. Barnes said she was unsure how she ended up in South Carolina, but eventually she had a daughter, Mariah, with Ms. Barnes' great great grandfather who was African-American. Ms. Barnes also told the children that she was a descendant of Charles Smith who is famous for being the longest living slave. He was born in Africa, brought to America, and died sometime during the 1890's at the age of 128. Ms. Barnes explained that her grandmother came to NY to make a better life and worked as a seamstress.

Like Ms. Vines, Ms. Barnes' father's family came to NY from North Carolina. Ms. Barnes said that her family was poor and there weren't a lot of job opportunities in the south, so they decided to move to NY (See Appendix D). While they both came from NC, Ms. Barnes' grandparents met in Brooklyn. She told the children that her grandparents met in a bar on Atlantic Avenue that is still there to this day.

Ms. Barnes concluded her talk by sharing some of her college papers with the class. She showed the children some of the pictures she found when she researched the Crow Indians. The children were very interested in these pictures and started leaning on each other to get a better view. She also read part of what she wrote. Derrick asked, "How did you find out about your family?" Ms. Barnes told him that she found out most of her information by asking other family members.

Reflections

Ms. Barnes is a pleasant woman who I've noticed has a wonderful way of interacting with her own children. She talks to them and listens to them a lot, and as a result her daughter, Michelle, is quite thoughtful. Michelle knows a lot about current events, and has an ability to process information beyond her years. While most of my students have been assessed as possessing average or above average intelligence (by their previous year's teacher), unlike Michelle, their ability to concentrate appears only to be average. Although the class was quiet during Ms. Barnes' visit, she is such a calm speaker (in contrast to Ms. Vines who is so animated), that I thought many of the students weren't paying close attention.

However, if the students whose notes I took home to read were representative, they actually took in a significant amount of information. Out of the four, Cherease and Wichita seemed to best understand the idea of notes, and appeared to have written their information quickly. Wichita wrote:

gr. grandfather	
gr. grandmother	K.N.C.
grandmother	
grandfather	

(I assume this means they came from North Carolina). Cherease wrote an entire page of accurate information, one line read, "great great grandmother was Native American great grandfather famous slave." While Kahlil, who is a neat and careful student, couldn't let go of the idea of writing in complete sentences and didn't write very much, his two sentences at least pertain to important pieces of information. He wrote, "Ms. Barnes' father came from North Carolina. He came to NY for a job." Edward was so interested in the Barnes' Native American background, that he came up to me the next day and asked if he could show me the pictures he drew.

I didn't intend for Michelle's mom to visit the day after Ms. Vines, but because of a scheduling conflict, it worked out that way. Regretfully, I didn't have time to prepare the children for Ms. Barnes' visit and we didn't think of questions in advance. This was not the best of circumstances, because a class visit is both exciting, somewhat disruptive, and requires the children to exercise a considerable amount of self-control. It

is also important for me that the visitor gain something from the visit, particularly when the visitors are parents. One way to retain the specialness of guest visits is to space them out so they remain a novelty. On the other hand, it is important for a teacher to be able to adapt to the unexpected since the unexpected often happens with children.

If I could do this visit over, aside from letting more time lapse after the last visit, I would discuss the visit more with Michelle's mom beforehand. This was not as apparent with Ms. Vines or Ms. Kuumba, but they are both teachers and are used to interacting with large groups of children. I would have like to have planned an activity with Ms. Barnes for her to do with the students, because although they are beginning to be able to process information from listening or reading, learning by doing still has a very strong impact on eight year olds.

Afterward

Because I regretted that the children didn't get to do an activity with Ms. Barnes, and because a number of students expressed interest in Native American culture, I found the book, What Do We Know About the Plains Indians? (1992) to share with the class (See Appendix E). [At least one other child in our class also shares a Native American heritage which I've learned is not uncommon among African-Americans.] This book contains pictures, print and drawings of the Crow Indians in addition to other tribes also located in the Great Plains. The children found many of the photographs and illustrations fascinating, but the pages that drew the most attention were the ones dealing with teepees. When one student suggested, "Oooh...can we make teepees?," the idea was widely popular with other students. The idea wasn't as popular with me for a few reasons. First, I couldn't see much potential for learning and it seemed unconnected from much of the other work we had been doing. Secondly, the students wouldn't be able to make historically accurate teepees and they wouldn't have an opportunity to develop an understanding of how and why teepees were constructed. Third, teepees are just one form of shelter used by Native Americans and although they were used by Plains Indians, I was not positive they were used by the Crow Indians (from whom Michelle's

family descended). However, I forged ahead with teepee construction anyway, both because my students kept nagging me and because I couldn't think of a better alternative.

As a sign of my lack of enthusiasm for this project, I offered students the alternative of making teepees during their choice time. Faced with the other options of playing games and building with blocks, I was surprised to see at least seven or eight children still interested in making teepees. I laid the book on the table among the paper and pastels, in case anyone wanted to use it for a reference. The children sat contentedly coloring their papers, some tried to copy Native American designs, others made designs of their own. All was going smoothly, until the first student was ready to turn his flat, rectangular paper into a three-dimensional teepee. As he twisted the paper into a cone, there were a number of problems. Much of the design was lost as one corner of the paper was wrapped around the other. Also, it was hard to get an even-shaped cone, the bottom wouldn't sit flat on a table, and there was a conspicuous hole at the top. I was actually quite familiar with these problems, because the night before I had encountered the same problems myself when I had tried to make a teepee at home. I'm not sure if other teachers do this, but sometimes I think I plan for a miracle. I have no other explanation for the reason I expected the problem to disappear overnight. I did entertain the possibility that one of the children might be able to solve the problem, but instead these children were looking to me for guidance. They were also, understandably, not so willing to experiment on a sheet of paper they had spent considerable time decorating.

While we were grappling with this problem, a number of children had gravitated from their game playing and expressed interest in making teepees, too. I thought to myself, "Can't they see this isn't going very well?," but evidently they were undeterred. Since it was near the end of the day on Friday, I handed out paper to every student in the class and invited them to try to make a teepee at home with their family over the weekend.

On Monday, when we returned to school, six or seven children came bearing teepees. Christine brought an elaborate model that she had constructed with her mother's help. It was lovely, but it was out of the realm of what most of the children could do on their own. Wichita's teepee showed potential for a class project. She had folded two

triangles on both sides of the center of her paper and attached them together, making a perfect cone at the top. The bottom of her teepee was uneven, but I saw a way we could cut it so it would lay flat on a table.

We dedicated our next session of choice time to teepee-making and this time I was prepared. Instead of designing their teepees first, students sat in the back with me as I instructed them (very slowly) hold to fold two triangles out from the center of their paper. Next, we traced a line with chalk around the bottom of our teepees so we would know what to cut off. As I demonstrated this to the class, I asked them to guess what shape the paper would be after I cut off the bottom and unfolded the cone. There was a chorus of “oooh”s as I displayed the fan shape that we had created. The children also used the chalk to trace down the line of the triangles that would be folded under the cone. This way, they would know which part of the paper would show *before* they began coloring. Some children had trouble folding their paper in the correct way, but enough students got the idea so that they were able each other solve their problems. Shortly afterwards, a substitute teacher came into the room to relieve me for the preparatory period that I get once a day. While I would normally be wary of letting them continue a project with a substitute teacher, the children seemed so calm and capable that (with the teacher’s agreement), I allowed them to complete their projects on their own. When I returned, the room was still relatively serene and most of the children wanted to show off their newly constructed teepees.

Reflections

Although I was initially disappointed that my students didn’t enhance their understanding of Native American culture as I had hoped, they didn’t exactly come away empty-handed. Learning to construct a three-dimensional shape is difficult and a skill they can use in math, in life, and in future projects I have planned for our class. At the same time, however, I’m afraid that by reducing this culture to the realm of arts and crafts, I may have marginalized a culture which has a history of being marginalized.

Slavery Discussion

As it had surfaced in Ms. Vines' and Ms. Barnes' visit, many African-American have ancestors who were born in Africa, enslaved and brought to the Americas. The children were curious about slaver and the early African-Americans and I wanted them to gain an understanding of this tragic and significant part of their cultural history. I selected pages from the book, The African-American Family Album (1995), to show the class during our next meeting. The children gazed with interest at the pictures of a 19th century Zulu family and a picture of warriors from the country that is now called Benin (p.10,11). We then examined a disturbing photo of an African man who is bound and held in a net (p.18). When we had read the story of Phyllis Wheatley the week before, my students were struck that "the Wheatleys treated her like family." Last year, after reading the same story with my students, I took out a book from the library to see if I could find out any other information about her life. I learned about the more rebellious poems she wrote, her marriage to a free African man, and the difficulties she faced later in life when she was no longer the darling of white society. In order to expand my students' understanding of Phyllis Wheatley, I read them a few lines from a poem where she speaks of "being snatch'd from Afric's fancy'd happy seat." This contrasted the simpler, more docile image of Wheatley who was portrayed in the book (p.21). It is important for me that the children understand that the early African-Americans fought against slavery in many different ways. The children looked out a picture of Frederick Douglas (p.47) and they cried out his name in recognition. I read them the caption describing him as an "anti-slavery crusader."

The photograph most stirring to the children and myself was of a former slave who had multiple scars on his back caused by whippings. "Why was he whipped?," a number of children wanted to know. "Because he didn't obey his master," one child answered. I mentioned that there might be many important reasons a slave wouldn't obey his master, including trying to escape from slavery.

Although I have grown more comfortable over the years discussing the difficult issues of race with my students, responses do not always come naturally to me as they do in most other conversations. Slavery is a hard piece of history to make sense of; it is

much more difficult for me to teach than the civil rights movement. When it has surfaced in class conversations over the years I've been teaching at this school, I often struggle over what to say and how to present it to my students. For this reason, it was helpful for me to watch Ms. Kuumba (an African-American teacher in our school who traveled to Africa last year) speak to my class about slavery.

At first, I asked Ms. Kuumba if she would speak to the children about contemporary Africa, but most of the children's questions for her focused on slavery. A few days before her visit, she asked me what kind of questions the students had for her. I believe she geared her conversation with the children towards these questions:

1. Is it true that in Africa black people hate white people and call them white devil?
2. Who was the first person who decided they should take slaves?
3. What made you decide to go to Africa?
4. Were there white slaves?
5. What part of Africa did you go to?
6. Were there other tourists there?

Ms. Kuumba's Visit

Ms. Kuumba teaches second grade and had some of my students in her class last year. Instead of meeting in the back of the room, she asked the students to remain seated at their desks. Ms. Kuumba wrote the words "slave" and "slavery" on the board and asked the children what the words meant. Michelle said it was when white people took black people from Africa and made them work for them. Cherease said slavery happened because white people were jealous of black people because they had a lot of gold in their country so they treated them badly. Wichita said slavery is when someone makes someone else work for no money. Ms. Kuumba said that all of those answers were right. She also told them that slavery is for one person to own another person like he might own a cow or a piece of furniture.

In the front of the room, she displayed two large maps. One was a colorful world map and the other was titled, "African-Americans - Unwilling Immigrants." It showed the trade routes that brought human cargo to North and South America from different points of origin in Africa. Ms. Kuumba spoke in a loud, convincing voice as she

announced to the students, “slavery was a business.” She explained that slavery has existed throughout history, “there were white slaves, Asian slaves, Native American slaves - all different kinds of people were slaves.”

Ms. Kuumba told the class that slavery existed in Africa before Europeans brought slaves to America and that Africans enslaved other Africans. These people were often enslaved because they were either prisoners who were captured during war or criminals. Ms. Kuumba explained that these people were sold to Europeans by Africans and constituted the first wave of African slaves. However, as the demand for slaves grew, Africans from all walks of life, including kings and queens, were enslaved. Ms. Kuumba said that Africans slaves in Africa were not treated as brutally as the ones who were brought to America; some were eventually able to work for or buy their freedom. She also informed the students that although it was not widespread, slavery still exists in a few countries in Africa.

Ms. Kuumba spoke briefly about the different African countries where slaves were taken from, which European countries had colonized them, and where they most likely brought the slaves to be sold. While this history is quite complex for third graders, Ms. Kuumba spoke with such force and emotion that it seemed to engage the majority of the children in our class.

The most powerful picture she showed the children was one she took on Gory Island which is where many slaves were warehoused off the western coast of Africa. The picture shows the “door of no return” - a stone doorway that leads to an inlet where slave ships would dock to load chained African men and women (See Appendix F). When we asked Ms. Kuumba the interview question, “Were there other tourists?” she said, “Yes, I traveled with a tour group.” She explained that in the group were a few teenagers who often didn’t pay attention to the tour. However, on the trip to Gory Island, when the teenagers saw the door of no return, Ms. Kuumba noticed they were crying just like she and many of the other tourists were. This was a powerful impression to leave with our class. The children had many more questions for Ms. Kuumba and she promised to come back and visit another time.

Reflections

In our original discussion, when Richard asked the question, “Were there white slaves?” for some reason that I’m not even sure of now, I had a twinge of doubt whether to include that question with the others. It wasn’t merely the mention of the word, “white.” I would not have hesitated had Andre asked the question, “How did white people treat black slaves?” After thinking a moment, I told the class I would give them my answer, but Ms. Kuumba may have a different answer and we’d ask her during her visit. I informed the children that there were white indentured servants who were also not paid for their work and punished if they ran away. My frame of mind was recent American history, instead of taking the long view of history to answer his question. When I heard Ms. Kuumba mention the different kinds of people who were enslaved throughout history, I thought, “Of course it is important for the children to know that there were slaves of all colors.” This made me realize that no matter how familiar I am with black people, and how much I educate myself about racism, I always have something else to learn. While I know that I have other things to offer my students, it still sometimes surprises me that I can’t truly think of things from a black perspective.

Another point I found interesting was Ms. Kuumba’s mentioning that slavery still exists in certain parts of Africa. Although I also knew this to be true, I didn’t share it with the children. While it wasn’t a conscious decision, I thought about the reasons that might have kept me from bringing it up in our discussion. Maybe I thought it would confuse the children, since we were speaking of slavery as it relates to their family’s history. Maybe I thought it would make the children more comfortable if they thought that the horrible condition of slavery is a thing of the past. Whatever the reason, I was keeping something that was true from my students.

I had also noticed Ms. Vines’ frankness when telling the children about her life. While she could have easily invented another reason for coming to NY, she told the children the main reason she left was that a man was bothering her in North Carolina. Although one always has to consider what is developmentally appropriate, concealing the truth from children is something I generally don’t agree with. In my experience, many black people seem to instinctively expose children to reality whereas many white people

seem to instinctively shelter children from reality. Perhaps these are merely different strategies for preparing children for the difficulties they will face later in life. Deciding what and how much we tell children about a certain subject is a question worthy of serious consideration, and it is part of the values that get expressed to children when we teach them.

Ms. Franklin's Visit

Next year, I am going to put a sign over my desk that reads, "Never plan a parent visit two days before Christmas vacation." During the week before vacation, my class was very hard to manage. Since I have spoken with Franklin often and she has escorted us on two class trips, I had little hesitation scheduling her visit on the last full day of school and the day of our party. Since we had planned for Ms. Franklin to make dumplings with the children during her visit, I thought it was a good idea to make them on the day of our end of term party. While it is an ordeal to have food in a classroom with no sink, we would already be having food at our party anyway, and I thought we might as well get the food over with at once. I did not anticipate how hectic this would be.

Wichita and her mom, Ms. Franklin, are from Thailand, but Ms. Franklin is also the stepmother of Nicola, another girl in our class. Ms. Franklin sat on a chair in the back of the room which is our meeting area and the children sat on the rug or on individual mats in front of her. Since I had placed a world map in the back of the room where Ms. Franklin spoke, she used it to show the children where Thailand is located. I drew a line from Thailand across the Pacific Ocean to NY and Wichita wrote her name on it.

Ms. Franklin worked as a tour guide in Thailand and told the children what she used to tell the tour groups, "There are three seasons in Thailand - hot, hot, and hot." A few of the students got the joke and chuckled. [Third graders are just beginning to be able to understand the humor in jokes.] She explained that for most of the year, the temperature in Thailand is about 95 degrees Fahrenheit, except for three months when it is the rainy season. During the rainy season, temperature in Thailand is about 70 degrees Fahrenheit.

The students' interest peaked when Ms. Franklin told the children that although Thailand was governed by a prime minister who is like our President, the king and queen still remain as figureheads. "Do they have maids?" Eric wanted to know. "Yes," Ms. Franklin said. "Is the king mean?," Nia asked. "No," Ms. Franklin told her, "this king has helped a lot of poor people." "Can the king die?," Dewan was curious to find out. "Of course. He is human like you and I," Ms. Franklin stated, obviously amused by the children's fascination with something that was ordinary to her. As was apparent by their questions, to most of the children in our class, kings and queens are the stuff of fairy tales. Wichita was proud of her knowledge of the subject, "I went to a big parade for the king," she announced, "I think it was for his birthday."

The conversation changed to food. Ms. Franklin told the children that most of the people in Thailand are farmers. She said that people in her country eat rice the way people in America eat bread. "Do you eat with chopsticks?," Stanley asked. "Only when we eat Chinese food," Ms. Franklin answered. She explained that in Thailand, people always ate with the first three fingers on their right hand since they considered the right hand to be clean. However, about 70 years ago, the man who was then king went to Europe and introduced the spoon and fork which is what people use to this day.

During Ms. Franklin's visit, one student in our class, Derrick, began arguing loudly with a student who was sitting near him. Since this was not Derrick's first outburst of the day, I told him to sit at his desk, away from the rest of the class. While at his desk, he began to stomp his feet loudly. After a very stressful week with the entire class, and a particularly hard time with Derrick and another student who also exhibits "acting out" behavior, I had reached my boiling point. I asked Ms. Franklin if she would answer the questions the students had prepared for her visit, and I took Derrick to the principal's office. While I do occasionally send children to the principal's office to reinforce my reprimand when I think the infraction is serious, I have never brought a child to the principal's office myself in complete exasperation as I did on this day.

When I returned to the classroom, Ms. Franklin had finished answering the interview questions. We moved the students to the front of the room to make dumplings. Class projects such as cooking can be so frenetic, and I had no energy to make sure it was

orderly. For the rest of the day, I let go of the certain level of control I usually have in my classroom. I concentrated on the idea that I really wanted all of the children to learn and participate in a Thai cooking experience. This was difficult for me, but was something I believe I had to accept unless I wanted to cancel the activity which I wasn't willing to do.

The students left the room a few at a time to wash their hands. While this was going on, Ms. Franklin mixed a large amount of ground pork with eggs and what she called, "Oriental spices." The children were ready to work. She cleaned off a large table and told the children to spread flour around the table so the dumplings wouldn't stick together. About ten children were able to fit around the table at a time. I told the other children to form a line so they could go next. Ms. Franklin showed them how to put the circular dumpling paper down and place a spoonful of meat inside. She placed a small bowl of water in the center of the table, then demonstrated how to dip your finger in water and trace around the edge of the dumpling. Next, she showed the children how to fold the dumpling in a 1/2 circle, press along the edge to close it together, then refold the top of bottom of the 1/2 circle to make a triangular pattern that looks somewhat like bowtie pasta. Needless to say, the children loved making dumplings and I was even able to relax enough to make a dumpling or two myself. Miraculously, every child was able to get a chance to make a few dumplings, wash their hands, and was on line for lunch just a few minutes late (See Appendix G).

Reflections

Because Wichita is the only Asian student in our entire school, it was important for me to have her mom visit our class. Wichita is well accepted by the other children in our class, and she is not shy about participating either academically or socially. However, she has only been in this country for two years and I'm sure the change affects her in ways I cannot see. One day when she was helping me clean after school, she voiced some discomfort about her mother making her speak Thai. There is no way to avoid the difficulties that surface when one person is different from the majority in some way. Yet, I hope that exposing other children to Thai culture in a positive way, Wichita will continue to cherish her culture even as she becomes more American.

On the same day as Ms. Franklin's visit, I also asked Ms. Encarnacion, Susannah's mom who is from the Dominican Republic, if she would cook plantains and bring them to the party in the afternoon. Although Ms. Encarnacion was not making a formal visit to our class and she would be making the plantains at home, I thought it would be nice for some of the children to be introduced to a Caribbean food in the relaxed setting of our party. We could refer back to this taste of culture when a Caribbean parent visits (as I am planning) and also when we speak about fruits and vegetables from different regions (as I also am planning).

While studying Japan with my students last year, we made sushi and I was so surprised by the students' willingness to try it and almost universally favorable reaction. I anticipated that my class from this year would have the same reaction to the dumplings they themselves had created. Since the plantains were sweet and at least some of students had probably already tried them, I also thought they would go over well. One problem with both the dumplings and the plantains, however, was that they were displayed on a table with cookies, cakes, chips, and soda. Not only were the children faced with the choice between familiar and unfamiliar foods, they were also faced with a choice between real food and junk food. While most of the children at least tasted the dumplings, it would have taken an act of divine intervention for my students not to have favored the cookies, cakes and chips. I didn't realize that part of the reason my students from last year were so willing to try something as unfamiliar as sushi was because it was the focus of the day, and the children did not have a more attractive and familiar alternative. On the day of a class party, it is hard for anything other than the party to be the focus. My children clearly realized this; next time I will too.

Ms. Samson's Visit

As I became more experienced with classroom visits, I learned how important it was to speak to the parent beforehand. Although it is my intention to create a calm, informal environment during classroom visits, I know they can be intimidating for parents. While I have a list of hopes and expectations for a classroom visit, many parents have no idea what they will be asked to do. This became clear to me as I spoke with

Ms. Samson on the phone the night before she was to come to school. I was pleased when she told me her family had just been speaking about the visit over dinner, because one of my hopes for classroom visits is that they spark family conversations. However, when I asked if she could speak to the class for a few minutes about her native country, Trinidad, she told me that lately she hadn't been following the politics too closely. In my mind, a political news brief was exactly what I didn't want and would have most likely bored the children. Her remark made me see how her expectations were so different from mine because I hadn't communicated with her at all before that night.

I explained to Ms. Samson what I've found to be the most successful format for the type of classroom visits involved in this curriculum: (1) a brief personal history from the visitor, (2) a question and answer period (of both spontaneous and prepared questions), (3) an activity which can serve to connect the children to the culture of the visitor. Ms. Samson seemed comfortable with that schedule, and I asked if there was any craft or activity she could think of from Trinidad that our class might be able to do in school. She told me about a ball game she used to play with her friends that involved tossing a sewn bean bag. Since my students were already in love with sewing from Ms. Vines' visit, I knew this would be a popular activity. Ms. Samson told me she would make a bean bag to show the class, and I could complete the craft with the class during the next week.

Jalissa's mom, Ms. Samson, was a captivating figure as she walked into the room with colorful clothes and long dreadlocks. She told the class that she was born in 1955 and said, "Guess how many years old that makes me?" The children called out, "55...32," a student sitting near Jalissa said, "41." Ms. Samson explained that she was from the island of Trinidad which shares a twin island with Tobago. Like other tropical countries, her country has rain for half the year and sun for the other half. Ms. Samson has a Trinidadian accent and a wonderful soft way of speaking. I wondered if some students were having trouble understanding her, but they didn't seem to. "A big holiday we have in Trinidad is Carnival," she said. A few children voiced their familiarity with Carnival which is celebrated in a number of different countries.

“Times were rough growing up” she informed the children, “Some of my friends didn’t have shoes, but I was fortunate.” Ms. Samson explained that she was one of eight girls and what fun she had living with seven sisters (See Appendix H). It was the custom in her family that the first child finished with dinner had to help clean up, and she grew animated as she related how they all ate slowly during meal times. “We played games like jump rope which we called skip rope, bean bag, and we took a piece of wood with wheels and made something like a skateboard. We had lots of fun,” she told us.

One student asked, “Is anything the same here as it was in Trinidad?” “The houses aren’t as big,” Ms. Samson explained, “but we have bathroom inside like here. A big difference is the weather.” “How did you come to NY?,” Gregory asked. Ms. Samson answered, “Ten years ago, I wanted a change of life so I got a ticket and came...I wanted a better life for me and my children.” A number of students raised their hand to say that their father or grandfather was also from Trinidad. Ms. Samson was extremely patient and spoke to each child as though he or she was the only child in the room. She had a particularly meaningful exchange with Wichita, who is the only Asian student in our class. Wichita asked Ms. Samson, “Did you like Trinidad?”. “I love my country,” Ms. Samson responded, “In my country, we have all different racesChinese, Black, Indian, but we’re all mixed together like the dish we have called Calalu. We have all different races, but we have what we call **one love**.”

Before Ms. Samson left, she showed the bean bag she had made which would serve as a model for the bean bags the children would be making during the following week. She threw it around the room to a few children in order to demonstrate the game they would eventually be playing with it, and she gave the beanbag to Shanice who answered one of her questions correctly (“What is Trinidad’s twin island?”). I asked the children to bring material and dried beans to school next week so we could begin our projects. Ms. Samson told the children to bring any old material they had, and that she would supply material if anyone couldn’t find some at home. She promised to come back to help us with our sewing.

Making Beanbags

Although Ms. Samson tried hard to come back to help us, because of her work schedule, she was unable to get to our school until 20 minutes before dismissal. This meant that I would have to do most of the sewing with the children alone. Since the class already had some experience sewing, I didn't anticipate this to be a problem.

Before we began sewing, the children cut out two 5" x 8" rectangles from the material they brought from home (See Appendix I). It seemed to work out that the students who weren't able to bring in material were able to bring in dried beans (and vice versa), so many students worked out a mutually beneficial agreement to share. I found extra material for the few students who needed. For many children, cutting material was quite difficult. Since I am almost neurotic about not wasting supplies, it was painful for me not to be able to supervise this as closely as I had hoped. A number of children were more concerned with getting a neat-looking rectangle than with getting the measurements right. As a result, many rectangles were pared down to a size too small to work with. Originally, I planned for us to cut material the day before we began sewing, but because there were so many errors, the cutting of material really took two days and overflowed into the time I had allotted for sewing.

By the time we began sewing, all the children had two pieces of material which were reasonably close to 5" x 8". I had planned for us to begin sewing for about a half hour before Ms. Samson arrived, but before fifteen minutes went by, a number of problems erupted. Firstly, putting thin, cotton thread into tiny needle holes was significantly more difficult than threading large yarn darners with colorful, weighty yarn. One student, whose thread kept slipping out of the needle, became teary with frustration, but it was hard for me to spend much time with him when so many other children needed help too. Secondly, I tried very hard to make sure the children were able to use whatever material they brought in, but this turned out to be a mistake. Some polyester material was too slippery and did not adhere to the second piece of material as easily as cotton. Third, the felt pouches we made with Ms. Vines didn't need to hold anything, so imperfect seams were perfectly acceptable and not very noticeable. When sewing bean bags, however, the stitches need to be very close together and tight or else beans will fall out. Although they were instructed to wait, students who had three sides of their bag

sewn began pouring bean inside to test their durability. The pitter-patter of beans could be heard simultaneously at different locations in our crowded classroom. For some reason, Andre, a student who is sometimes sensitive to criticism, caught my eye. He was cutting new material from the middle of a bolt of fabric and I yelled for him to stop what he was doing. He went back to his desk and cried. It was time to bring this sewing experiment to a halt.

Reflections

Since I do not have much experience sewing, much less teaching sewing, the problems we experienced were hard for me to foresee before we actually encountered them. In hindsight, I was asking my inexperienced sewers to do too many new tasks at once, each requiring a good deal of skill. New tasks can be frustrating and need to be broken down into small, manageable parts. I decided we would start over from the beginning. I bought new material for the class, and implemented three changes to make the project run more smoothly: (1) Similar to the way dressmakers use a paper pattern to help them cut material precisely, I realized my students could practice cutting rectangular patterns from newsprint paper (which I wouldn't be so worried about wasting). They could then hold or pin the paper to the material in order to get an accurate measurement. (2) The children needed additional practice sewing small, orderly stitches and threading needles. Instead of practicing on our good beanbag material, I cut small swatches of material for students to work on. Before students get a chance to work on the new material, they need to show that they can sew small stitches that are sufficiently close together. Students who need extra practice will get another swatch to work on. (3) The last important realization I made as I reflected on our sewing experience is the one most emotional for me - I needed help. Twenty-nine new sewers encounter too many problems for one adult to handle. It is disheartening that I do not have an assistant teacher when I know that my students and I need one in times like these. This is the reason a lot of public school teachers hesitate to do complicated, involved projects with their classes. The adult/teacher ratio can make these projects almost impossible to complete successfully. Although Ms. Samson's work schedule makes it impossible for

her to be there the amount of time we'd need her, there are other adults who are available to help. Since a parent usually comes to school to help out with art on Fridays, I can dedicate one or two Friday art periods to sewing. Ms. Vines has also offered to come back if we need more help.

The Class Book

After displaying our notes from each classroom visit on the wall, I assigned groups of two and three children to one section of the notes in order to create a book containing accounts of our experiences with each guest. It was important for me that every student work on the book, but this was a difficult task to manage. Every paragraph the students wrote had to be proofread and rewritten for the final copy. Illustrations and first drafts were lost, and it took me a long time before I was eventually able to assemble the students' work into a book. When I have created class books in the past, my students did not seem to appreciate them as much as I did. This may be because the books weren't prominently displayed in our library. Like all of us, children do what is easiest for them, and class books can easily be forgotten when sitting among a crowd of other library books. Currently, we are in the process of rearranging our class library, and I'm hoping we can find a special way to display our class book.

Keeping A Weather Graph

Listening to stories from the children, their parents and other guests made me notice how many similarities there are between the cultures. First, weather is remarkably similar in the southern US, the Caribbean, and Thailand. All three climates are warm weather climates, although the southern US is not tropical. One of the first things said by both Ms. Vines (who came from North Carolina) and Ms. Franklin who came from Thailand, was how hard it was to get used to the cold weather in NY. One way to allow the children to explore these similarities and differences was by charting the temperatures on a graph. I chose Raleigh, North Carolina, Panama City, Panama, Lagos, Nigeria, Bangkok, Thailand, and New York, New York as the locations we would use for our graph. Once a month, we chart the temperature of each city and record it on our graph.

Culminating Project

Although all families did not have a chance to visit our classroom, it was important for me that all children have a chance to listen to their own family stories. As a final project for our family history study, each child was required to interview a family member and find out five facts about the country or state his or her family migrated from. The children were also expected to compile their findings in a report (See Appendix J). Although the directions for this report (see below) are complicated, I fully expected family members to help the children complete this assignment. If I did not see the high level of parental involvement that I've seen this year, I would have greatly altered this project. When necessary, I helped students revise their reports and took some children to our school library for books. There were very few children who did not complete this assignment.

Ms. Gerrity - Class 302

Family History Research Project

Carefully read the directions for all three parts of your report. When you are finished, put a check next to each number on the checklist to make sure you have finished everything.

Cover

Make a cover for your report and write your full name on it.

Part 1

Interview an older family member (grandparent, aunt, uncle, or cousin) about where they are from and what it was like when they came to NY. Before you talk to them, write down 5 questions you want to ask. When you speak to the person, write down their answers to your questions. Check your spelling, then copy it over neatly.

*When you copy it over, at the top of the page, write the name of the person you are interviewing and how they are related to you (Ex: Ms. Smith - grandmother).

Part 2

Go to the library and try to find a book about the country or state where your family is from. If you can't find a book, ask the librarian to help you look it up in the encyclopedia. If the words are too difficult, ask an adult to help you. Write down 5 facts about the place where your family is from. If you want to draw a map of the country or state, you can use that as one of your facts. Check your spelling, then copy it over neatly.

*When you copy it over, at the top of the page, write the name of the place you are writing about and the title of the book or encyclopedia where you found your information.

Part 3

Draw a picture of what you think your family's life was like in the country or state where they came from. You might want to look at photographs for ideas if you have never been there.

Ms. Gerrity - Class 302

Family History Research Project Checklist

1. Before you copy over your report, ask someone in your family to proofread your writing. Proofreader's Signature _____
2. At the top of the page, did you write the name of the person and how they are related to you?
Example: Mr. Smith - grandfather
3. Did you write the 5 questions you asked and their answers?
4. At the top of the second page, did you write the name of the place you researched and the book or encyclopedia where you found the information?
5. Did you write your 5 facts about the place where your family is from (or 4 facts and a map)?
6. Did you draw a picture of the place where your family is from?
7. Did you make a cover for your report with your name on it?

Final Reflections

Journal writing and sharing was an important part of our classroom in the beginning of the year, but with my focus on our social studies curriculum, I had forgotten about it. On the last day of school before vacation, I needed some quiet time. I asked the students to write in their journals. Sari asked if she could share what she wrote. She read to the class that she was sad that she wouldn't get to see some of her family over Christmas. I asked if anyone else felt like Sari did. Nia talked about being sad that her parents passed away. Mary talked about living with her father and not being able to see her mother, and Theo nodded in sympathy. In one of Theo's stories, he had written about his mother forbidding him to see or call his father.

Somehow, the conversation shifted to the hurt feelings that follow name-calling, and one student brought up that some people call other people, "white boy." Montell said that there was a boy on his block who was constantly teased because he was light. Montell and his brother were the boy's only friends. Jalissa talked about having a friend who was Jewish. Jalissa said her friend "said that she wanted to be black, but I told her you shouldn't want to be black, you should be happy with the color that you are." Many students added their experiences with people treating other people differently because of color and how they didn't think it was right.

I intuitively felt that this conversation was connected to our social studies unit, but I was not sure how until someone pointed out that my students were talking about respecting people who are different, and wasn't that what I intended for the curriculum. When I first started focusing on cultural/family history and considered the question, "What do you want your children to remember after they have forgotten everything else?," this was the answer I came up with. It is highlighted in "A Teacher's Handbook to Elementary Social Studies": "To help students understand themselves and their fellows as completely as their individual capacities permit."(p. 9) I am trying to help my students get a clearer sense of their own story, to listen to the stories of other children, and to respect them both. I hope my students remember it well after this curriculum is over.

Part II - Exploring the Neighborhood

Since my students now had a basic understanding of the cultures that are a part of their community's history, I wanted them to examine how these cultures changed and were changed by their new environment. A major part of this next phase of our curriculum would entail making observations of the blocks surrounding our school, visiting some of the institutions and small businesses which play a significant role in the community, and interviewing the people who live and work there.

In my first few years of teaching at P.S. 137, I would walk the seven or eight blocks it took to get from the school to the subway and I would notice how many things the neighborhood was missing. It needed a wider variety of stores, there was no supermarket, vacant lots and buildings needed to be cleaned up, and the park needed to become more park-like. After I started venturing out in different directions, however, I began to notice houses and some entire blocks that were clean, green and otherwise well-maintained. Although I was initially blind to them, I became aware that there were quite a few signs of life in the community worth exploring with my students.

One of the problems I've encountered when trying to discuss the neighborhood with this class and other classes I've taught, is that they don't know a lot about it. I imagine a number of teachers who work in New York City experience this same problem. Many parents keep their children inside or limit their play to directly in front of their house for safety. One of the assistant teachers who lives in the area told me, "I buy every new video or computer game as soon as it comes out so I can keep Tommy [her son] from wanting to go outside." While completely understandable, the practice of keeping children indoors has shielded the students in our school from the enlightening, spontaneous discoveries that happen when children have the freedom to investigate the area in which they live.

In the beginning of the year, the other two third grade teachers and I took our students out for a walk in the neighborhood. In total, we walked only three blocks, but we spent a considerable amount of time on each block so the children could have an opportunity to write down and discuss their observations. The highlight of our first neighborhood walk was the newly constructed houses located on Marion Street. Many

students had never seen the new buildings although some of them live right around the corner. The houses are attractive and have wrought iron gates on the windows and doors. All of the children noticed the old-fashioned mailboxes located in front of each house. As one student wrote, "We saw beautiful mailboxes. We saw beautiful houses. We saw beautiful gates." The children also noticed the gas and electricity line outside each house and were able to direct their questions to a construction supervisor who happened to walk by. The children in my class were quite impressed by these houses and their reaction made a strong impression on me. That afternoon confirmed what I had suspected: how much my students could learn and be stimulated by a study of their immediate environment.

Neighborhood Visits

When I started making a list of places in the neighborhood for us to visit, "Carolina Country Kitchen" was at the top. Located about ten blocks from our school, the restaurant is a Brooklyn landmark. It is often written up in newspapers and magazines for its famous soul food cuisine. Before we left for our trip, I directed the children to count how many businesses we saw on the way to the restaurant. Although there are a number of new small businesses in the area, none of them were situated along our path to Carolina Country Kitchen. The children counted only one store, the bodega, which is located across the street from our school. After the store, the children pointed out the junior high school, a burned down building, a construction site, and an abandoned lot. When I asked the class to compile what I knew would be a disappointing list, I intended for the children to see Carolina Country Kitchen juxtaposed with the lack of commercialization in the area. I assumed that this would help them realize the restaurant's significance in the community. After the trip, however, I realized that the children didn't pay much attention to the contrast. My advisor pointed out that this exercise would be more appropriate for older students who were more likely to comprehend the historical and political reasons for the lack of neighborhood businesses in Brownsville. [Some of which I learned through a documentary I saw on public television which chronicled the number of factories that once had a thriving business in Brownsville, but were forced to leave due to zoning regulations which were abruptly enforced during the 1960's.] This understandably sailed above the heads of the students in my class. While not producing the results I expected, this exercise was still a constructive experience for me because it forced me to examine and re-think the goals of this study. Should I encourage my students to pay equal attention to all aspects of their neighborhood or was it more important that my students become familiar with the success stories?

To answer this question, I tried to think about who my students were and what I wanted them to gain from this curriculum study. Although this particular group of children is in many ways more privileged than other classes I've taught, they still deal with the struggles of living in an economically depressed neighborhood. Some of them have an inordinate amount of responsibility in their family - including taking care of

themselves and younger siblings. Many children have a family member or know someone who has been a victim of serious violence. Because it affects families so drastically, the violent crimes that happen in the neighborhood have a way of demanding attention, while parks, libraries, stores, and role models have a way of fading into the background. Unlike children who live in more middle class neighborhoods and may not learn about the problems in their communities until they are older, many of the children in my class are already familiar with Brownsville's problems because the problems reside so close to the surface.

In planning neighborhood trips, I decided it was more important for my students to become acquainted with the people and places in the neighborhood that signify hope for the community. Of course, this did not mean I would encourage my students to ignore the difficulties people face living in Brownsville. I am not a censor, and I am interested in discussing everything my students want to discuss about their neighborhood. However, this experience did help me become more aware of a larger purpose behind these class trips. In addition to learning about history, culture, and environment, I want this curriculum to help the children in my class build a foundation for their hopes and aspirations.

Carolina Country Kitchen

In order to prepare for our trip to Carolina Country Kitchen, I asked the children to consider what they wanted to find out about the restaurant. The class came up with these eight questions:

1. How did you first start Carolina Country Kitchen?
2. Where did you learn to cook?
3. When you first started did a lot of people come?
4. Where do you get the food to make the meals?
5. How did you name the store?
6. What year did you start your business?
7. Who owns and manages Carolina Country Kitchen?
8. Do the servers cook the food?

Since it is hard for eight year olds to record answers very quickly, I asked half the class to copy the odd numbered questions on the top of their trip sheet and the other half of the class to copy the even numbered questions. I explained to the class that we would alternate asking even and odd questions during our trip. This way, although all of the children were expected to listen to each question asked, they would only be responsible for recording four answers. On the bottom of their trip sheet, the children copied these two categories for their observations: Describe What You See and Describe What You Taste (See Appendix K).

On the day of our trip, we walked to Carolina Country Kitchen and were led past the main cafeteria to a room in the back. Although I had been to the restaurant before, I had never noticed the extra room and was relieved to find out there was a space for us where we wouldn't interrupt business or disturb customers. On the periphery of the room was a picture of Martin Luther King, Jr., a fireplace, a large basket of pine cones, and a small model of the restaurant. As we waited for Ms. Lee to join us, the students wrote down some of their observations and the room buzzed with excitement. The children were intrigued by the hot sauce and hot peppers on every table and wanted to touch everything. When Ms. Lee came into the room, I asked her if she could briefly tell her story before the students read their questions. [This was the formula that I found worked well with the parent visits: ask the person to briefly tell their story, allow the children to ask questions, then engage in a related activity. I wanted to maintain this routine with the neighborhood visits because I thought it would help the children see one as an extension of the other.]

Ms. Lee spoke with a Southern accent and had a demeanor that was more down to earth than businesslike. She explained to us how she grew up on a farm in North Carolina and learned about work from both her mother and father. Ms. Lee told the class that after she graduated high school, she attended Norfolk State University in Virginia and majored in business. Armed with her diploma and agricultural experience, she came to Brooklyn in 1968 and opened a store called North Carolina Country Store. As her business grew, she began selling food that she cooked from a grill in the back of her store and eventually earned enough money to open a restaurant across the street. Early in her

talk, Ms. Lee noticed how eager the children were to ask their questions, so she began calling on the students who had been raising their hands.

Dewan wanted to read the question exactly as it appeared on the page, so he read haltingly, "Where do you get the food to make the meals?" Ms. Lee explained that some of the food for the restaurant came from farms in New York and New Jersey, but other food such as the sweet potatoes came from her father's farm in North Carolina. I asked Ms. Lee if she could pick one vegetable and give us some idea of the quantity she ordered for the restaurant every week. "Take, for example, the sweet potatoes," she said, "we get about 24 boxes every week from a truck my father drives up from North Carolina." She held out her hands to show us how big the box would be.

I told Ms. Lee that the children would be writing down her answers, and she patiently waited until most of them were finished. Theo inquired, "Where did you learn to cook?" Ms. Lee told the children that her mother taught her to cook while she was growing up in North Carolina. Cherease asked the question she had contributed to our trip sheet, "Do the servers cook the food?" "No," Ms. Lee replied, "the cooks cook the food and the servers serve it." A number of students raised their hands to tell her about their Carolinian relatives or their summer vacations there and Ms. Lee listened attentively.

After all of the questions had been asked, a man and a woman entered the room carrying two large trays of sweet potato and apple pie. Before the trip, Ms. Lee had asked me what kind of pie the children would like or if they would rather cake. Not sure which would be the better choice, I consulted two families and was ready to call a third when one of my students told me she would like cheese cake if possible. This made me realize that one of the goals of the trip was to give students an authentic Southern cultural experience, so I made an executive decision and told Ms. Lee we would be eating pie. Taking the advice of one of the parents, I decided on two sweet potatoes and one apple, but I was unsure whether everyone would be satisfied. Most of the children got their choice of sweet potato or apple, but the last few students chose between sweet potato or sweet potato. There were hardly any complaints even among those children who didn't have a choice. Many of the children voiced their appreciation to myself and to Ms. Lee.

Before the pie was served, Ms. Lee asked me if I would rather the children drink milk or soda. Since I had only asked the children to bring \$1.50 for pie, I explained that we didn't have enough money to pay for drinks. Ms. Lee told me not to worry and explained that she would only charge \$1 per child. When I protested, she instructed me to use the leftover money to buy something for the class. I related this to my class, and many children seemed genuinely grateful. Looking back on this experience makes me realize how agreeable and good-natured most of my students are.

After the pie, the children were supposed to complete the "Describe what you taste" section of their trip sheet. However, I looked at the clock and realized that we were behind schedule and needed to leave in order to be back at school in time for dismissal. Unfortunately, the rush to leave coincided with the excitement of the visit (which probably clashed with the sugar from the dessert and soda) and the children became somewhat disruptive as we left the restaurant. Although Ms. Lee told me she understood because she had spent some time as a substitute teacher, I really felt bad that the visit which had been so ideal up until that point, didn't end on a positive note.

Reflections

After we left Carolina Country Kitchen, I told my students that I was disappointed in their behavior, especially because Ms. Lee had been so patient and generous. While my main goal for these neighborhood visits is to encourage my students to understand, appreciate, and feel responsibility towards their community, I strongly hope that the community workers and business owners will gain something as well. It is important to me that my students take seriously what I see as their responsibility -- to represent themselves and their school in a positive light. If I could not get my students to show respect for the places and people we visit, I would rather cancel the trips. Although a few students in my class had been exhibiting behavior problems prior to our trip, I allowed all of my students to participate in this neighborhood visit because it was a central part of our social studies work. However, since I cared very much about leaving a favorable impression on the places and people we visited, I told my class that students who did not show self-control would not be accompanying us on neighborhood visits.

This was a real consequence, not a threat, and a few students remained at school in other classrooms during our next trip. Although I didn't want any children to miss out on the neighborhood visits, I realized all of the children might miss out if these students didn't experience consequences for their behavior.

The day after the trip, we wrote thank-yous to Ms. Lee and the staff of Carolina Country Kitchen (See Appendix L). In their letters, a number of students remarked on the room we sat in. Jackie wrote, "Thank you Ms. Lee for the pie and soda and thank you for the special room." Christine inquired, "Did you always since you started have a special room for your guests?" A few students apologized for the noise they made as they left the restaurant, "I'm sorry my class was noisy. Maybe we should come back and say sorry to you." Almost all of the letters reflected how much the children enjoyed the trip, yet each student found his or her own way to say thank you. Henry wrote, "I loved the room you made up and the story you told me about your father." Shavonee said, "We thank you for telling us where you grew up. And at the end we thank you for cleaning up for us." Latoya closed her letter with the thought, "I love Carolina Country Kitchen and I hope people always come."

Mr. William's Barber Shop

Since all of the people the class had interviewed up until this point were women, I wanted to make sure men were better represented during our neighborhood visits. Comparable to the way hair salons serve as a social gathering place for African-American women, barber shops often serve a similar purpose for African-American men. Although I remember the barber shop located in the neighborhood where I was raised, and I believe my father got his hair cut there, I couldn't remember ever being inside of a barber shop before. Consequently, I didn't know what kind of reaction I would get when I walked into the barber shop that is located just around the corner from our school. I asked the owner of the shop, Mr. Williams, if he would mind we came to the shop for a visit to ask a couple questions. Mr. Williams suggested he could tell me the answers to their questions and I could relay them back to the class. I explained that the children would benefit much more hearing it from him directly and he hesitantly agreed. I told Mr.

Williams I would pay for one of the boys in the class to get a haircut so the children could observe the process from beginning to end.

As we walked to the barber shop, I asked the students to predict what they thought they would find there. Upon entering the shop, Enrique, who predicted we would find hair spray, said, "Yep, I knew it - there's the spray." I introduced the class to Mr. Williams, the owner of the shop, and Mr. Shields, a young barber who works there. Mr. Williams said hello to Dewan and explained, "He comes here to get his haircut, and so does his father and brother." Dewan smiled shyly. In the front of the barber shop was three old-fashioned barber chairs facing three large mirrors. In the back of the shop was a row of seats to wait in. There were plants in each of the two large windows and music was coming from a stereo near where Mr. Williams was standing. One man was waiting to get his haircut, and the children all piled onto the chairs next to him. About half of the class was able to sit on the chairs, the rest of the students remained standing.

Since it didn't appear that Mr. Williams would be comfortable talking off the top of his head, I told the children they could begin asking questions. Samene asked, "When did you open your shop?" "Well, I had been cutting hair for 40 years, but just bought this shop in July," Mr. Williams answered. Shaquana asked, "How did you get to own this barber shop?" "Last year, when Mr. Lynch retired, I saw an opportunity so I moved in." Stanley told him that he used to go to Mr. Lynch to get a haircut. "Hmm,mmm," Mr. Williams nodded. "Where do you live?," Theo asked. "I live here in this neighborhood, but I was born in Georgia and came to NY in 1962," Mr. Williams said.

Since Mr. Williams was working on a customer's hair while he was answering questions, I asked Mr. Shields if he was ready to cut Stanley's hair. Before the trip, I asked Stanley if he would mind getting his hair cut in front of the class. He told me he wouldn't mind, but we called his family first to get permission. When Stanley stepped up to the barber's chair, the students shifted their attention to Mr. Shields who began cutting Stanley's hair. Shavonee picked up a piece of Stanley's hair that fell to the ground, "Look what I found!" she said. After Mr. Shields had been cutting for a while, he picked up a different razor and began using it. "Why did you change razors?" Edward

wanted to know. “The blades are changed because they cut hair differently. The first razor cuts hair, the second razor shapes up your hair.” Mr. Shields explained.

Noticing the empty chair in the middle, Camille asked Mr. Williams if she could sit in it. When Mr. Williams nodded, she sat in the chair and a line formed so that each child would have a chance to sit in the chair. Mr. Williams chuckled at the children and turned the music up louder for their benefit. When Mr. Shields was finished cutting Stanley’s hair, we paid for the cut and the children thanked Mr. Williams and Mr. Shields for allowing us to visit. Mr. Williams smiled and handed me a business card to show the children.

Reflections

On the morning of the day we were scheduled to visit the barber shop, the district gave a mandated practice reading test. In the past few weeks, the children had been inundated with so many practice tests, they were physically and mentally tired. Although I planned to prepare questions and a trip sheet for our class visit, the children were unable to concentrate so we did not prepare for the visit beforehand. The questions the children asked of Mr. Williams were impromptu and only two students (who expressed interest) recorded answers to our questions. My intent was that the children would have a relaxing visit at the barber shop without the stress of having to record information. The problem with my plan was that without paper to document their observations, some students lost the motivation to pay attention. Although the children did seem to have a relaxing and enjoyable afternoon at Mr. Williams’ shop, it was not relaxing or enjoyable for me because I had to keep reminding the children to pay attention. A better solution would have been to direct the children to draw their observations only. This would have given them a less taxing way to concentrate, yet it would have still provided a way to process their impressions of the barber shop.

The day after our trip, in lieu of thank-yous, I suggested that we make personalized business cards for Mr. Williams instead. The children were very excited by this idea. I showed the class five or six different business cards and asked them to notice what information was on a business card and how it was presented. Aaron’s card depicts

a customer proclaiming, “Thanks man” after his cut. (See Appendix M) Ian turned his card into an advertisement, “Please come to Mr. Williams barber shop he only lives on Bainbridge and Decatur. If you like your hair nice and smooth, then call (718) 452-5500. Many students were so enthusiastic about the project, they began making business cards for themselves. Jackie’s card read, “SHOE SHOP, Jackie Singleton, owner and manager.”

A few days later, I stopped by the barber shop after school to take a picture of it. Although I would rather take pictures during our actual class visit, so far I have been unable to manage the task of taking photos and manage my students at the same time. When I went inside the shop to say hello to Mr. Williams, he remarked that he wished he had a camera to take a picture of the children during their visit. I promised we would stop by again to take a picture and he asked me to let him know when. Despite his initial reluctance, it was apparent that Mr. Williams appreciated the children’s visit very much. While we were at his shop, I heard him comment to one of the customers that “taking them to the source” was the best way for children to learn.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Since I am writing this curriculum as it happens with my class, I need to conclude the writing of this study before the study is actually completed. Although some of the neighborhood study will be amended and altered in ways I can’t predict, I have outlined some of the ways I’m planning to continue this curriculum with my class.

I. Future Trips

As the weather gets warmer, I would like to take the children out for some open-ended exploratory walks in the neighborhood. We have not yet studied much of the physical geography of the area, and I’m hoping these investigations will help my students become more attuned to the way geography and climate affect a community.

Churches play an important role in many of my students' lives and they have a noticeable presence in Brownsville. I would like the children to have an opportunity to interview a clergy member so they may be better able to consider the role religion plays in their community.

Although there is no supermarket in the immediate vicinity of our school, there is a supermarket in walking distance. Since people who live in large, urban areas are so disconnected from the way food is grown and produced, I'd like to take them to the supermarket to watch a large produce delivery. I'm also planning to help my students examine the way a food store accommodates the cultures of a specific community.

II. Projects

Although it wasn't planned as part of our curriculum study, the children in my class were uncharacteristically engrossed when we read the story Roxaboxen (McLerran, 1991) and it produced a lively discussion. I believe it was the idea of children creating a community without rules imposed by adults that so amused my students. After my students become more familiar with all the different elements of a community, I'd like to give them an opportunity to make their own model of an imaginary community.

After I noticed how much of the information we were collecting involved dates, I thought a timeline would be a useful way for students to see the way neighborhood history progressed. We have begun to use a "Practice Time Line" as a way for each student to chronicle the events we've learned about through our interviews (See Appendix). Our timeline begins in the 1902, the year our school was built, and I asked the class what year they thought the timeline should end. "In 1997," Gregory called out, "We can call it 'Class Neighborhood Walks'," Nicola suggested. Eventually, each of the students will add their own family's arrival to Brownsville on the timeline, and continue adding to it as a way to record our neighborhood visits. As a final project, interested students could use these practice timelines as a guideline for creating a giant timeline that we could display on the wall in our classroom.

Since we have already completed a book narrating our classroom visits, a different kind of class book would inspire the children more than a second edition of the book we've already created. If I can arrange for a small group of children to take

pictures each time we take a neighborhood walk, perhaps we can tell the story of our neighborhood through a photo journal. This would entail a second trip to the places we've already visited so that the journal would be a complete record of our experiences in the community.

III. Culminating Projects

One way I can imagine concluding our neighborhood study is for the children to become involved in some kind of project outside the school that would benefit the community. It doesn't make sense for me to expect my students to feel a responsibility towards their community if I don't allow them to practice that responsibility the way they practice reading and writing. After studying all of the people, places and things that have impacted the community in which they live, I want my students to see that they too can have an impact on their community. I would like the class to collectively decide which community need we should address. Perhaps we can spend a day working in a community garden, or repair books for the library, or collect food for a neighborhood food shelter. This project would also be a way for my students and I to express our appreciation to the people in the neighborhood who spent time with us.

In many ways, the community we've been studying is the school community, and it would be nice if we could contribute an expression of what we learned to our school. Since so many of our strongest observations are visual, a mural would be an effective way to capture all of the people and places we visited. If my students and the school administration agree, we could hang it in the auditorium as a way for the children in my class to share their experiences with the whole school.

Conclusion

In this curriculum study, the goals I have set for my students are: the beginnings of historical understandings through an exploration of family and neighborhood history, an awareness of their environment, a curiosity about the people in their community, a pride in one's culture, respect for other cultures, an understanding of the way maps represent the world they know, and a sense of responsibility towards one's self, family, and community. While I sincerely hope my students will achieve all of these goals, they will undoubtedly need more than this curriculum to achieve them. Children need support from the adults in their lives, they need teachers who will build on their knowledge and experience, they need to be exposed to books and subjects that will "inspire them to reach the furthest extent of their intellectual ability," and they need people to listen to their wonderful ideas.

Although some of these goals are intangible and difficult to measure, there were a number of ways I could see my students making progress towards these goals over the year. In contrast to years past, the children who are in my class this year have a much clearer understanding that foreign countries are real places with their own distinct culture and environment. When we read stories that are set in another part of the world, it doesn't seem as faraway or unimaginable for these students as it has in other years. Recently, while reading a book that was set in Japan, Gregory said, "That's near where Wichita is from." After reading a Caribbean folktale, one of my students said, "You know how I know that was the Caribbean? It was hot, they had tropical fruits, and it looked just like Trinidad."

I have also noticed what keen observers of their environment my students have become. As we walked to the neighborhood library, Camille told me she wanted to show me a pine tree, "like the ones that grow in North Carolina." At first, I thought she was mistaken, but when we passed by a church that is right around the corner from our school, there was sure enough a pine tree in the front yard. "See and it has pine cones like the ones we saw in Carolina Country Kitchen," Shaquana pointed out.

However, what impresses me most about the students I have this year is their improved ability to communicate. When teachers are absent in our school, we can not

always get substitutes to cover the classes. If no substitute is available, the teacher's students are split up into different classes, each class receiving two or three children. One day during January, a fifth grade teacher was absent and her class was split up. One of the students who was sent to my class was a girl named Clarissa who had spent some time living and going to school in Jamaica. Although Clarissa was sitting in the back of the room at the time, she must have heard us discussing the Caribbean, and she took the opportunity to join our conversation. She moved to a chair in the center of the room and began telling the students about life in Jamaica. "In Jamaica, sometimes when they talk, you can't understand what they're saying," she said. "In Belize, people speak like Jamaicans and I couldn't understand them either," Nicola sympathized. Clarissa continued, "We had to walk four miles to school and there was no such thing as a half day.... The schools are real strict, and the teachers can beat you." "It's almost like down South" Montell said, "If we didn't do our homework, we got hit with the switch." "Did you go on any trips?" Theo asked. "Not a lot," Clarissa answered, "but sometimes they might go to the beach" Henry asked, "Were there any cars?" "Punchbuggies," Clarissa answered, "and people there don't drive like they do here, they drive on the left side of the road." "In Trinidad, people drive on the left side of the road, too." Gregory added. "And up here we eat different food than we eat down there ... food like frogs' legs, and pigs' ears." Clarissa told the class. It was as if she had stored up all this knowledge and was finally given a chance to let it out. I was about to interrupt this exchange of information until I noticed that not one of my students looked bored. Later, as I was reflecting on that day, I realized that these students were much more responsive to the people around them than my students from years past. They paid attention, they asked meaningful questions, they were respectful, and most importantly, they seemed to enjoy listening.

Along the same lines, in years past, I had often been frustrated by the questions asked by the children in my class about whatever subjects we were studying. The questions students raise are a good indication of how much students know, and the depth of understanding they have achieved in a particular subject. Perhaps I wasn't as successful with providing my previous classes with the background information they

needed to ask more meaningful questions. For example, during our trips to Carolina Country Kitchen, if my students had asked: "How did you build this restaurant?" or "What's your favorite kind of pie?," it would have reflected that my students didn't understand our purpose for being there. In contrast, the questions my students did ask: "What year did you start your business?" and "Where do you get the food to make the meals?" reflects an understanding of history and some awareness of the process involved in operating a restaurant. My students had become so accustomed this process of asking relevant questions that even during our barber shop visit, a trip we didn't get to discuss ahead of time, the students asked, "What supplies do you need to order for your shop?" and "How many customers do you have in a day?" These questions demonstrate an understanding of the needs of a business and request information that is applicable to our study.

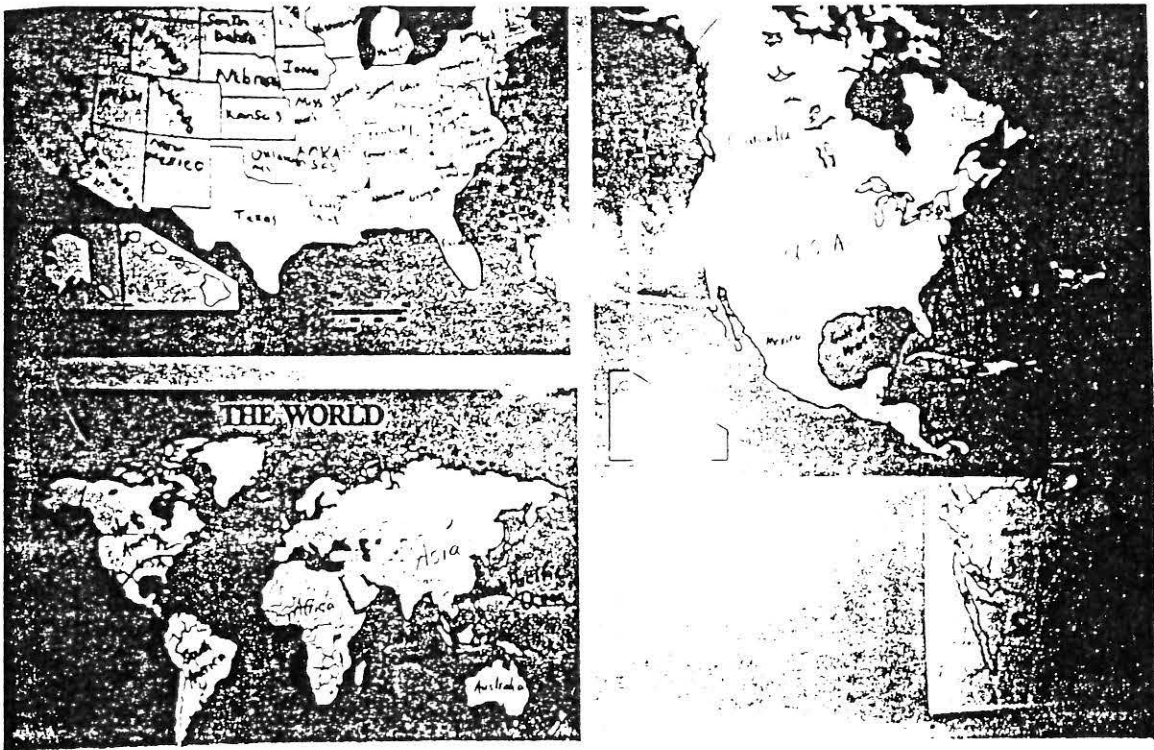
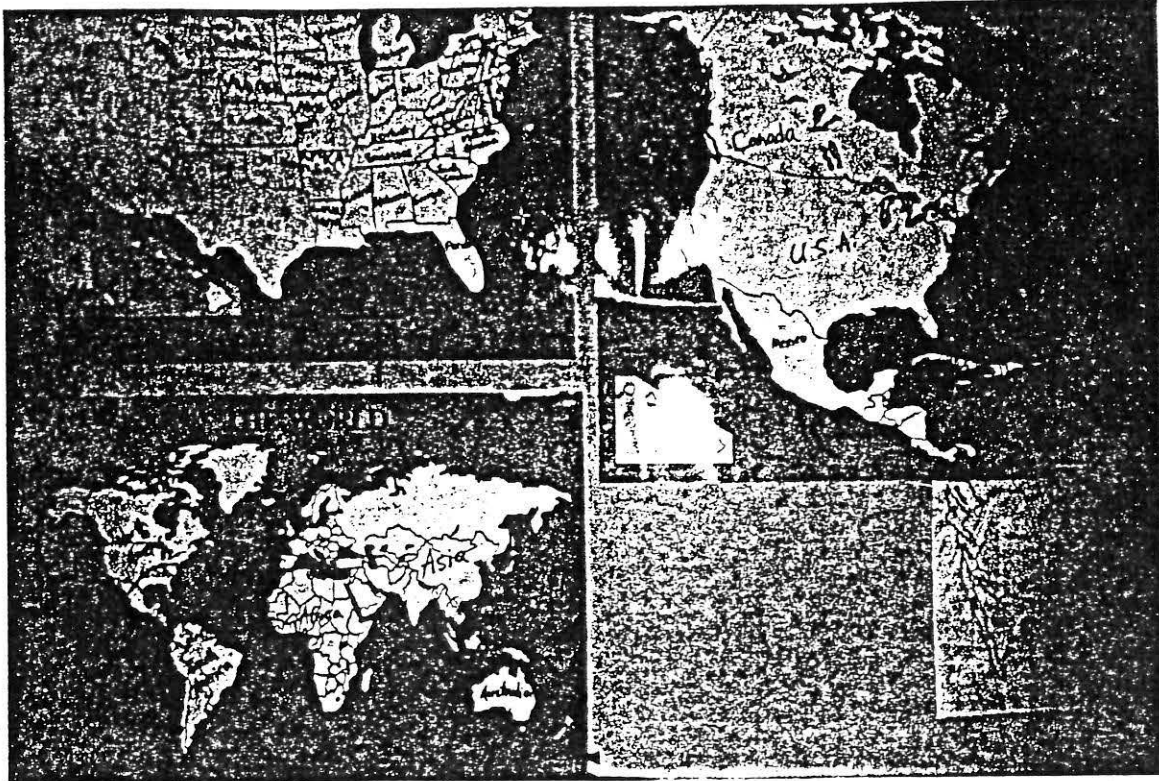
Aside from the goals I had in mind for my students, as the curriculum progressed, I realized I also wanted our classroom and neighborhood visits to have an impact on the people we interviewed. Every year, I have grown more and more comfortable with inviting parents into the classroom and every year, more and more parents come. Children need to see that their families care about what they do in school, but it is equally important that parents feel welcome in the classroom, a place where they have only been encouraged to visit under extremely controlled conditions. For better or worse, I believe my students' families from this year's class have a more realistic idea of what goes on in my classroom than any other year that I've been teaching. While I usually want to involve the children's families in our curriculum, this is the first year I have reached out to community members and it is the most exciting part of the curriculum for me as a teacher. I did not expect to get the warm reception my students and I got when we interviewed the construction supervisor, the restaurant owner, and the barber. This was not only touching, but also countered the notion that New Yorkers are isolated and have lost all sense of community.

In order for the philosophy "it takes a village to raise a child" to work, the community must first know the children they are supposed to have a hand raising. When no one speaks up to help a child who is obviously being abused, I think the assumption

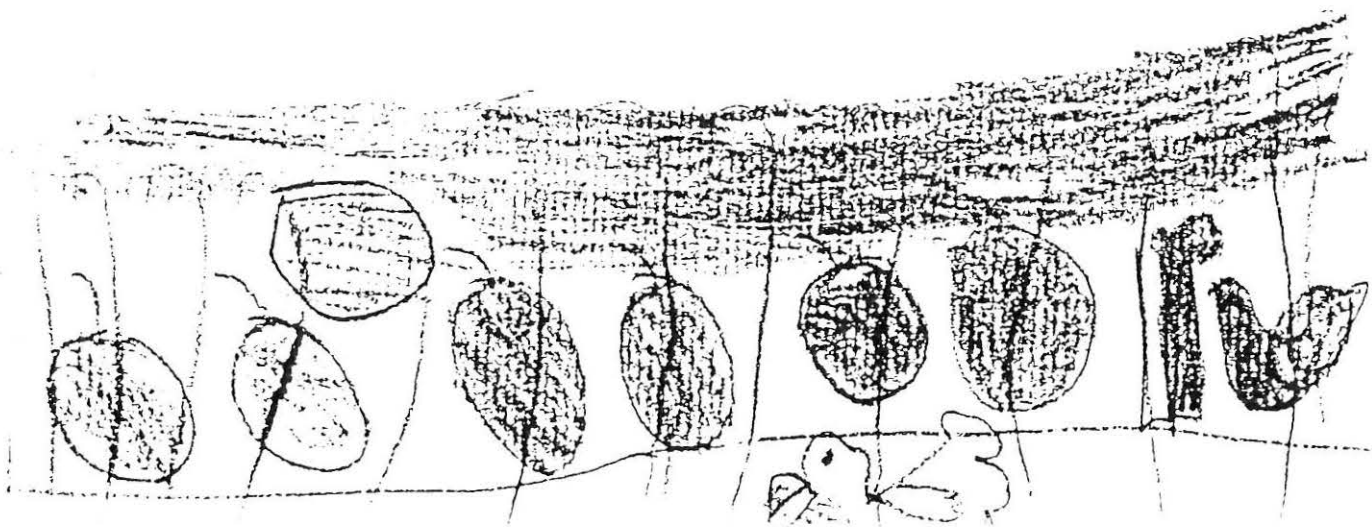
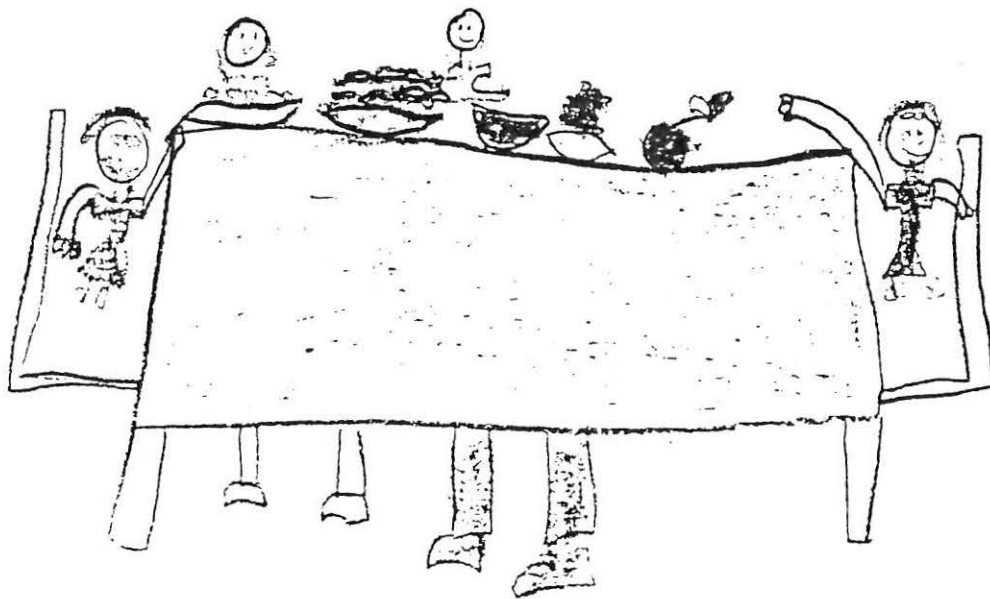
often implied is that no one cared enough to act. In my experience of working, living, and growing up in New York City, I have met many more people who care about the state of the world than people who don't. However, I do acknowledge that many people in communities don't take the risk involved in getting to know their neighbors and most children are taught "don't talk to strangers." People in every community must first know each other before they can show concern for each other, address the needs of the community, and advocate for the community's children.

In a small way, neighborhood studies that reach out of the classroom and into the community at large can serve as one way for children and other community members to get to know each other. Only then can they feel part of each other's lives and a responsibility towards each other.

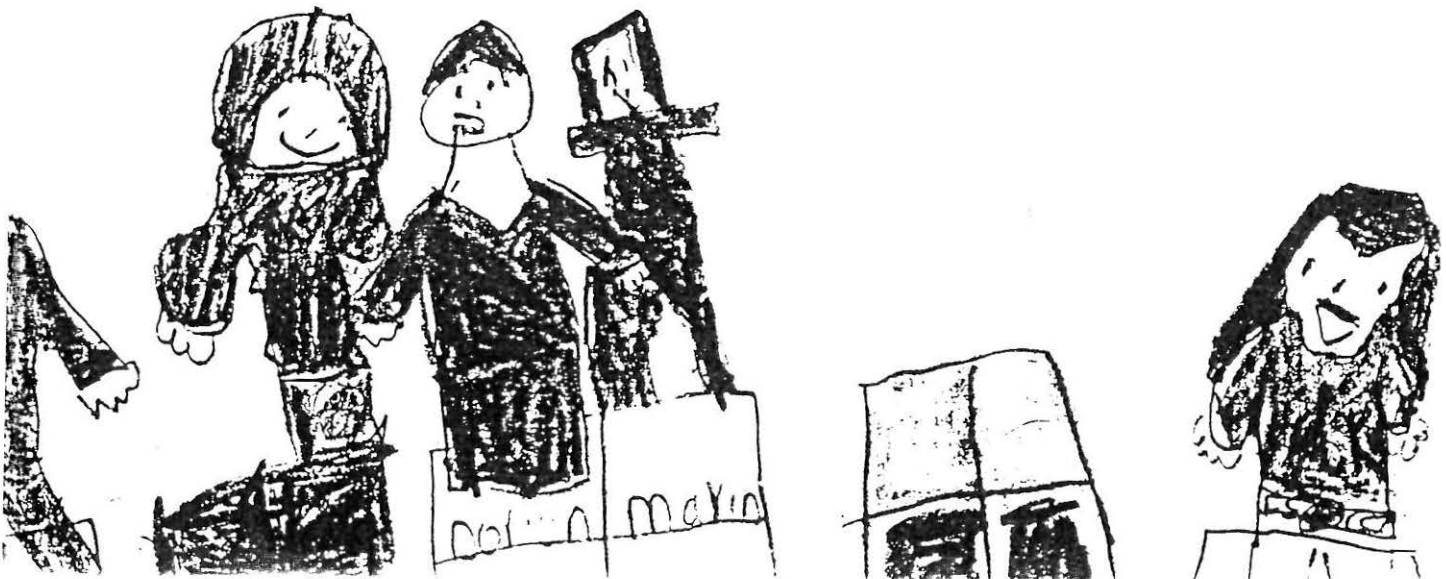
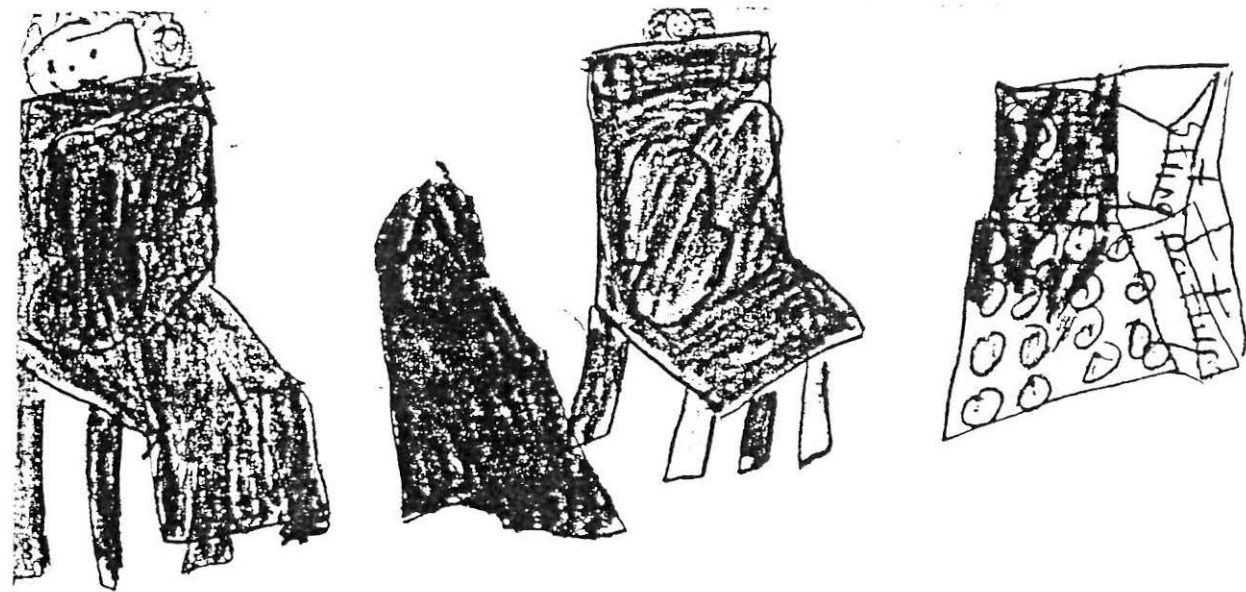
APPENDIX A



Ms Vines Family had a lot of love in them. Ms Vines said that 1 boy died 1 girl died at birth. They never got h.w. because they had to work on a farm. Their father couldn't read. Their father got tricked into selling the Land. Their mother taught the girls how to sew. Ms Vines family always ate together.



We learned to sew
our initials on our pouches. We
learned how to use needles
and thread to sew our
pouches we learned to sew
the ends together. Ms Vines
taught us alot of stuff.
We learned how to sew
our pouch with decorations



APPENDIX D

Ms. Barnes' Father
Was the First to come to New
York. Both parents grew up in North
Carolina. Her Father came to get
a better life and get a job.
Ms. Barnes' great great grandmotha
was a Crow Indian. Her mother
had five kids.

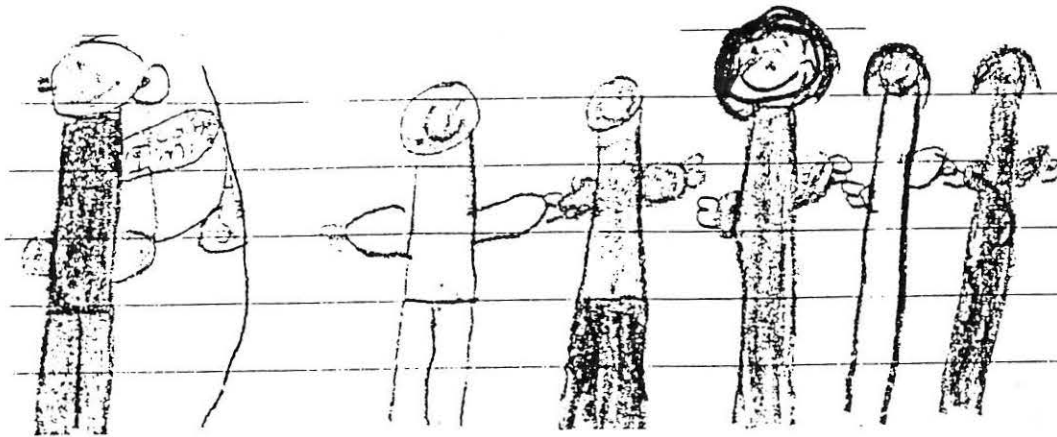


APPENDIX E

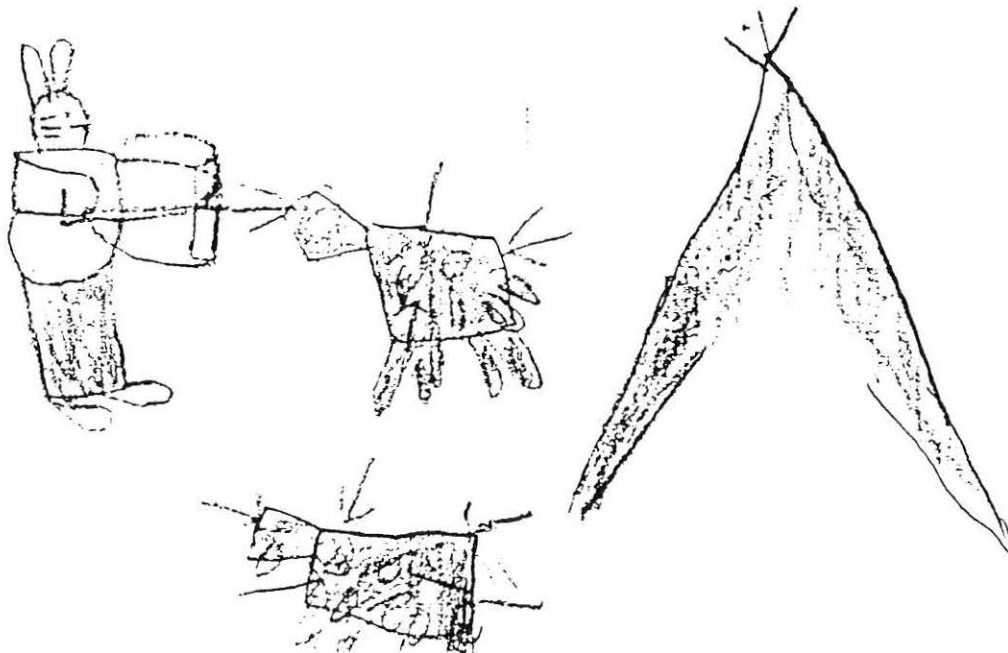
Ms Barnes' Father came to N.Y for a better

life. Her father had 5 children.

Ms. Barnes' Father came to
N.Y. and got a job!

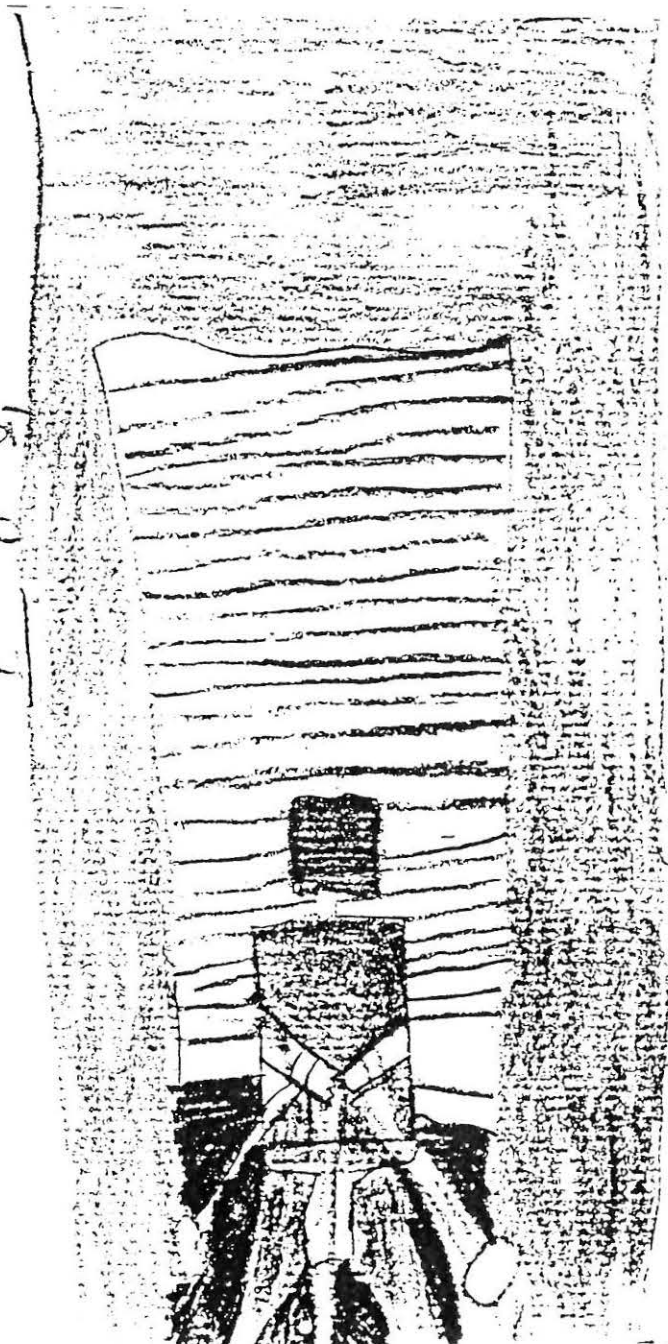


Her grand mother was and Native Amer
Did Ms. Barnes go to the Indian
Reservation?

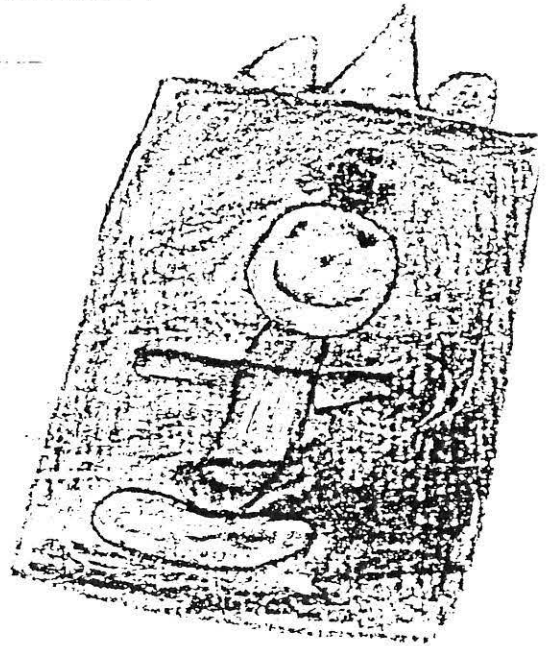


MS Kuumba said when she went to Africa she saw a cave where they put the slaves chained up. When MS. Kuumba went to Africa she was no slave. MS. Kuumba saw the place where the slaves had to sit in the hall. When MS. Kuumba went to Africa she the door of no return.

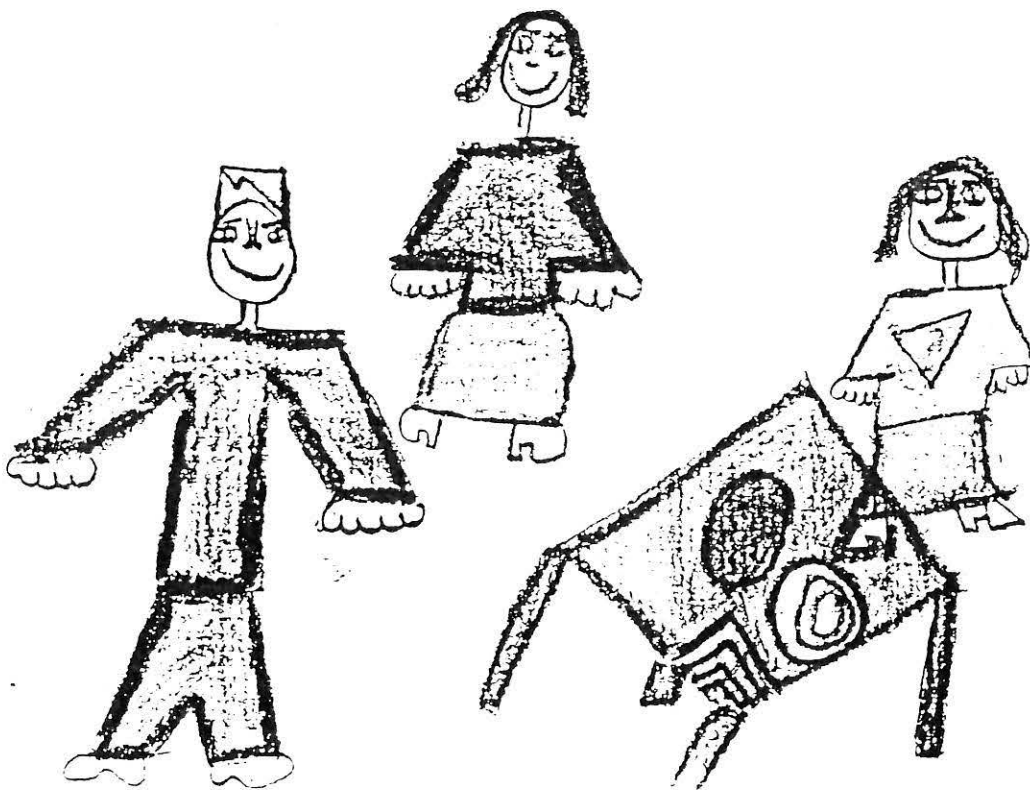
The
Door
of
no
Return



In Thailand, they speak Thai.
They get food from the market.
They have nice houses. There
are a lot of temples in Thailand
that are nice our churches.

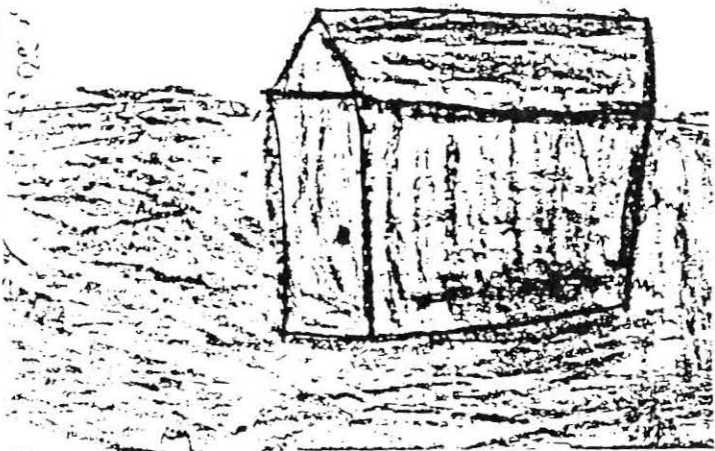


When we made dumpling, first we took
dumpling paper, then we put the egg + meat
in. We folded the dumpling paper, and put
it in water. Mr. Franklin boiled a big bowl of water,
and cook the dumpling.



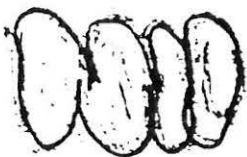
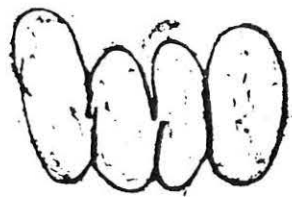
Ms. Samson's Visit

Ms. Samson comes from Trinidad which is an island in the Caribbean. Ms. Said that she had a rough time when she was growing up. She had seven sisters and also she said when she was coming to New York she felt like she was in a cage. She didn't get a good education, because she had to help her sisters out. The first girl they called a sweetheart, because she always got to go everywhere with her grandmother.



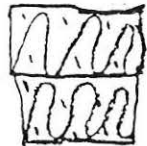
Ms. Samson and sisters





Ms. Samson's Visit

When Ms. Samson came she told us about making beans bags. We had to bring in beans and cloths to make the bean bags. She told us to sew 3 sides, then put the beans in and sew that side. Then you can play a game. The game goes when you have a line of Boys and a line of girls and you throw it back and forth. If you don't catch it, you will be out of the game. She told us we can make it at home all you need is needle, thread, cloth and beans, so you can have something to do



M.S. Roy - Grandmother
 M.S. Roy is related to me because
 she is my mother's mother.

Did you use the same kind of money
 like we do? In Panama, they use
 la balboa and dollars.

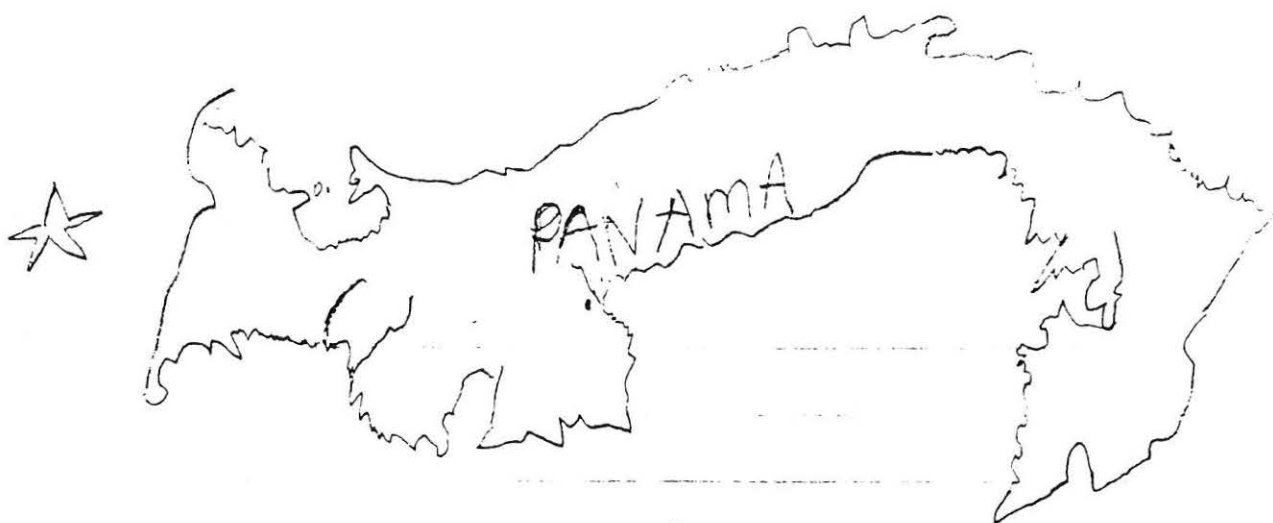
What are different traditions in
 Panama?

February - Carnival
 Music - Merengue, Salsa
 Instruments - drum and guitar
 Food - tortillas, tamales, arroz con
 pollo.

How did the dress in Panama? They
 wear light clothes because of the
 hot climate.

Do you like New York? Yes she likes
 NY a lot.

How did you feel when you came to NY?
 She felt scared and strange.



fact 1. PANAMA is a country.

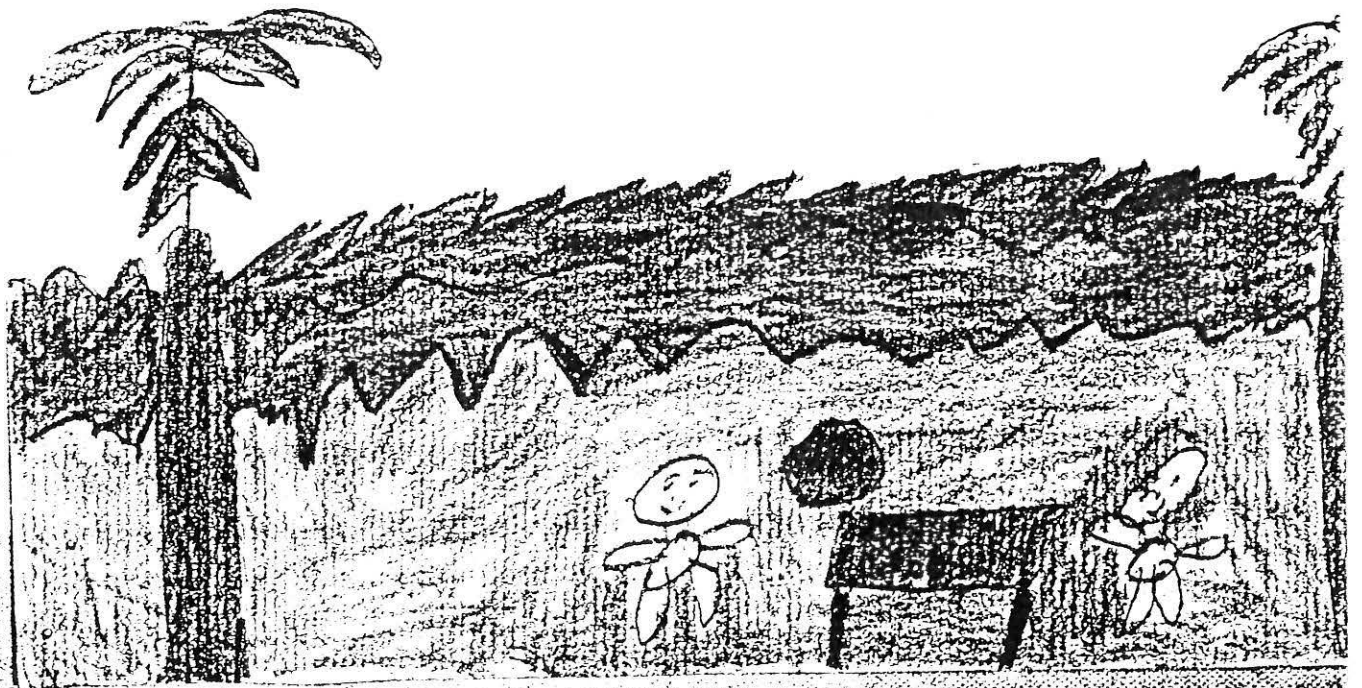
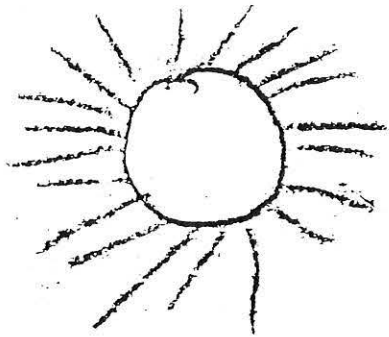
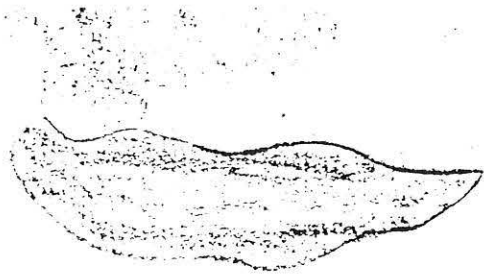
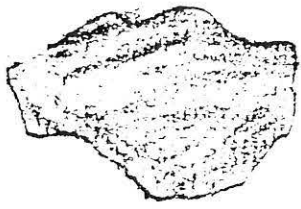
fact 2. PANAMA is a neck of land joining central America.

fact 3. PANAMA is next to COSTA RICA.

fact 4. IN Panama they speak Spanish.

fact 5. Panama has a flag.





Samuel French - Uncle

1) Where were you born?

I was born December, 13, 1945 in Bay Minette, Alabama.

2) Did you like it there?

Yes, The neighbors were very respectful and friendly.

3) How did you feel when you first came to N.Y.

I was 27 years old, I didn't like New York.

at first. But about 2 years later I began to adjust to N.Y. and I have been here for 20 years now.

4) Why our last name is French?

Our last name is French because my Grand Father Father was a slave and his slave owner name was French when a slave owner have slaves all their last names become his.

5) If I wanted to go to Alabama what is the first thing you would show me?

The first thing I would show you is Red Eagle and his mother grave which is Little River and the Teepee and where they put the Indians all together and buried them is in the Fort of Tensas.

The French and Indian war started in Tensas, Alabama. Both sides lost a lot of people and the French defeated the Indians. When Red Eagle saw this he took his mother and ran and tried to get to Hawthorn where they would be safe. When they jumped in the Little River waters the French saw them and killed them both and that is how these graves stayed in Little River.



At Home From Webster's Family Encyclopedia

- 1) Alabama South East of the United State became a state on December. 14, 1819.
- 2) The population is about four and a quarter Million.
- 3) At the time of Columbus, Alabama was inhabited by 4 main groups of Indians. Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw.
- 4) Civil right leader Rosa Lee Parks was born in Tuskegee.
- 5) It had many industries including iron and steel, oil, metal goods, Chemicals, Plastics and cotton.

APPENDIX K

1. How did you first start Country Kitchen?
There was a store called North Carolina store. Mrs. Pat Lee worked there so she made
C.C.K.

3. When you first started, did a lot of people come?
They first opened people got excited
and every body came to Carolina Country
Kitchen.

5. How did you name the store? She choosed
several names for the store so she just
Carolina instead of North Carolina. Country
Kitchen.

7. Who owns and manages C.C.K.?
The person who own the store is a woman
Name Pat Lee she owns and manages

Carolina Country Kitchen.

Describe what
you see

We see people eating
food, we see pictures,
dolls, lanterns, paintings
on the walls. People
are getting their own
food having a nice
time. I have been
here a lot of times.

Describe what you
taste

We will be having
sweet potatoe pie
with a little bit of
soda, it milk and
it taste sweet and
it taste very good.

4. Where do you get the food to make the meals?

5. What year did you start your business? ✓

3. Did the servers cook the food? ✓

10. What you see

4. Describe what you taste

2. From north E. Live on farm

4. get food North C., N.J., N.Y.

6. start resor on year 1988

8. they didn't cook food but servers

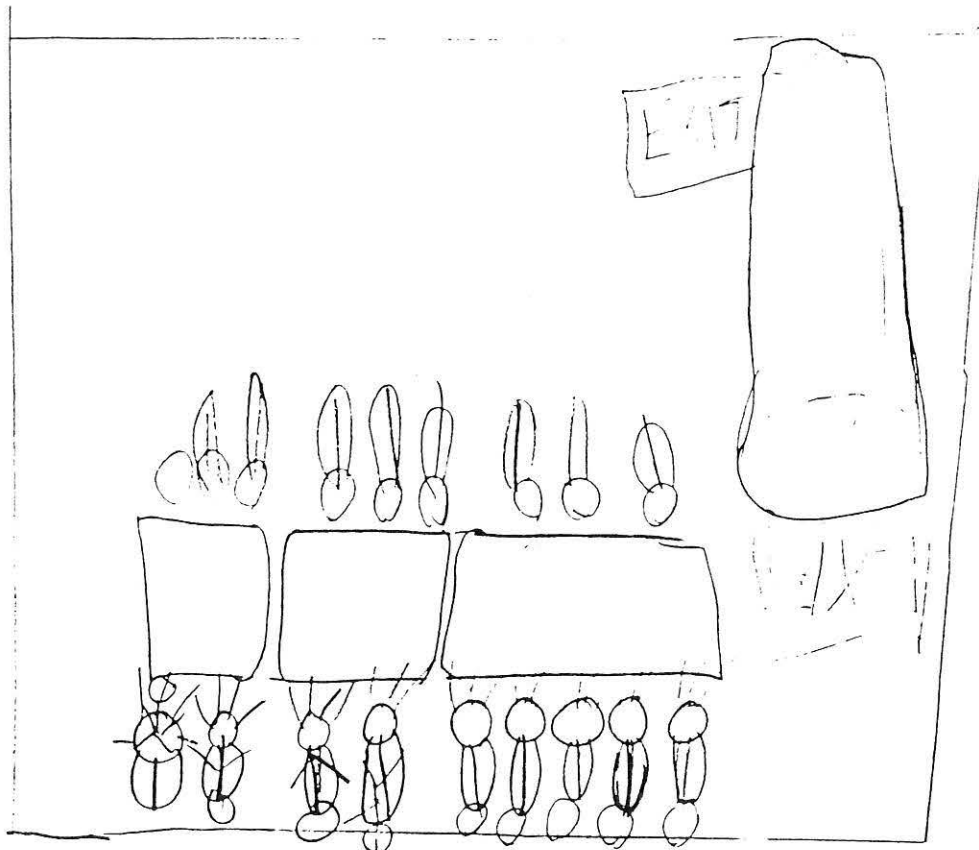
01. I see a lanton

2. I see lots of people

3. I see martin L.K. picture

4. I see a motel house

11. - - -



3/21/97

Dear Ms Lee,

I loved your apple pie it was so good. Anyway I thank you for the soda and the pies that you gave the class and I like the model that you did for Carolina Country Kitchen. I took the orange soda to match with my pie. Did you always since you started this store have a special room for you geust:
from

Christine



Professional unisex Barber
Shop

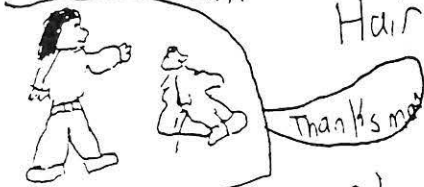
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Decatur Sun. 7 to 10 Tues 5 to 8

Phone (718) 853-1800



open Tues-sat. Professional
8:00 am. - 7:00 Hair styling



prop. Luther Williams Phone (718) 452-5500

Please come to Mr. Williams
barber shop he only
lives on Bainbridge and
Decatur. If you like your



hair nice and
smooth then call
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