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Re-Visioning the World Trade Center

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7. Re-Visioning the World Trade Center

Alexandra Weisman

ALEXANDRA WEISMAN is currently finishing her sixth year as a sixth grade teacher at the Bank Street School for Children. She holds a M.Ed. from Bank Street College and a B.A. in psychology from Bates College. An interest in the emotional world of young adolescents has always influenced her thinking and work in the classroom. She wants her students to make meaning out of their experiences and connect what they do with curriculum to the larger contexts of their lives.

This is a story that takes place more than a year after September 11, 2001. It is about the complex, ongoing ways that this event has affected curriculum. It is also about the thoughtful and ingenious ways that my eleven-year-old students at the Bank Street School for Children came to “re-vision” the World Trade Center site.

In November 2002 we had just finished reading *Where the Truth Lies*, a novel by Lucy Cullyford Babbit about three communities with very different beliefs and world views. One society, the Godslanders, believe in one true god; the Tribers are polytheistic and worship four main gods, one for each of the elements—fire, water, air, and earth. These two societies are at war for religious supremacy, each committed to making all people hold its views. A third society, Sanctuary, teaches that no god exists and values science alone. The Sanctuarians have built themselves a walled city and refuse to participate in the battle between the other two groups.

Each group believes the ultimate proof of its particular world view will be revealed inside a “Sacred Cave.” The Godslanders are certain they will see evidence of their one true god; the Tribers that their multiple gods will be revealed; and the Sanctuarians that absolutely nothing is to be seen in the cave beyond its stone walls.

At the suggestion of the Sanctuarians, a child from each of the three groups is chosen for a secret mission to the cave. A desire to see “where the truth lies” fuels this mission, as these three characters make their pilgrimage to the sacred place each group claims as its own.

This book raised many provocative questions for my students. We spoke often about perspective and the ways that beliefs influence how we act and what we view as being right or true. We began thinking about holy places, wondering, as did the main character in the book, what makes a place sacred.

We talked about places in the real world that are considered sacred, and examined the reasons holiness is attributed to particular sites. These discussions led us to consider the World Trade Center site. The students saw it as a space that was sacred or holy to many people.

We decided to use the three perspectives in the novel—monotheism, polytheism, and atheism—to inform our understandings of what should be built on the sixteen-acre World Trade Center site. The students were divided into three groups, each of which composed a "World View Statement" based on what they learned from the novel. Then they used this statement as the basis for making decisions about their models.

This work represented several weeks of thinking, discussing, planning, and building. The designs didn't necessarily represent the actual beliefs of the students who built them, but rather their interpretation of the three world views described in the novel.

In looking at the models and reading the student descriptions we are left with our own questions: How do our own beliefs influence our reading of these projects? What do we think should be done with this space? What ideas would we want it to communicate? How do our beliefs shape our answers to such questions?



Godslander World View Statement

Vera, Johanna, Kala, Elizabeth, Matt

We believe that there is no God but God. We know that because we feel his presence every day. You cannot hide from God because God sees all. The universe is God's masterpiece; he created people and the world around us. God put us on Earth to follow his laws and to go to God's castle/heaven when you die.

Men and women can know how to know right from wrong by obeying God and having faith. Happiness is when

you're one with God and harmonized with him. The ultimate way to happiness is through God. We'll do anything for God and that's why we're building this structure because he told us to. The human body is simple and something to be ashamed of. The only part of our body that we expose is our ankles as humilia-

tion to God. Our bodies are nothing compared to God. "One heart, One God, One Pulse, One Purpose to life!"

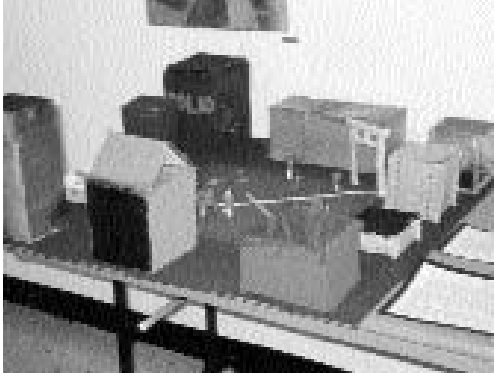
Godslander "Re-visions" the World Trade Center

Our model is what we think a city would be if it were created by a Godslander. There are many buildings in this city. There is a hotel, restaurant, apartment building, a garden/greenhouse and of course the main building. The Worshiping Structure is right in the center of the town. People coming in and praying to God will use the worshiping structure. There will be classes inside for smaller children learning about our religion so they can be great followers when they're older. This building is very sacred. The worshiping structure is valuable because everyone needs to be with God. The hotel will be used for temporary stay, for anyone who just wants to come and stay for a little bit to pray. The apartments will be used for people to live in because a lot of people will want to live in this great city. The restaurant is where people can eat; whether they're staying in the hotel or just stopping by they can have some food to eat without leaving the whole city. There is a garden because a garden has flowers and plants and that is part of nature. Nature is very important to us because God made it and it was also one of the first things God made. There is also a greenhouse there because we need to keep all of God's gifts alive. You will notice that on most of the buildings we have blue and green cellophane as walls, windows, and ceilings. This is supposed to be a skylight so God can see through to protect his true followers and see through heathens. The eye on top of the Worshiping Structure is the Eye of God. This symbol is to show that God sees all. God can see anything at any time in any place.

There are many ways that our beliefs are represented in this city. For example, The Worshiping Structure is where you pray to God and pay respects. We feel that it is very important to be in contact with God because everyone who believes in him, should be in harmony. Our city is gold because gold represents royalty and God is royal. Another example is our eye of God, which goes on top of that structure. It represents that God sees all and God is always watching. God can see anything at any place during any time.

When people look at our structure we want them to leave thinking that we have the best religion. That is our goal, to make everyone believe our religion is right so they will follow it. Heathens should know that God is real and there are signs of him everywhere. Our design communicates the fact that God is everything. This whole structure was practically built for God's love. We

think that people should appreciate how kind God is to them. We hate it when they don't believe in him because he is so kind and they're repaying his kindness with hatred and harsh behavior.



Sanctuary World View Statement

Ciaran, Ewan, Hannah, Sam

We believe in peace and controlling nature with no God. There is no reason to believe in God, except if you want to get killed in a bloody war. Religion is just as bad as God. It has brought killing and war. There is no life after death, and only one life to enjoy. We believe in exchanging individuals' ideas about the rules of science. We have many reasonable

beliefs like, science, books, world peace, and proof. We can find the best life by thinking and reasoning. We value the individual over any homogenous, self-confining community. We believe in freedom, peace, and happiness. We believe in obedience to the rules of science and Sanctuary. All answers come from science and books. The universe was not made from God, it was made by the big bang. Our aim is to stop the horrible war between the Tribers and the Godslanders, and prove to them that there is no God/Gods.

Sanctuary "Re-visions" the World Trade Center

Our model is of what we, the Sanctuarrians, believe the WTC site should look like. We have a lot of important buildings that explain our beliefs. The buildings include a hospital, police station, fire department, science lab, apartment building, library, restaurant, and the Sanctuary council. We also have an important park with a memorial in it.

Our memorial and park represent peace, recognizing the people who died there, and the controlling of nature. The arrangement of the streets and buildings are very orderly because we believe in organization. The science lab, library, and museum represent our belief in books and science instead of religion. People will get much better answers from books and science than from God. In Sanctuary, people are allowed to go where they want within Sanctuary instead of having to toil inside of a building of worship.

Our model communicates that organization and controlling nature is the way to live because if we didn't everything would be chaotic. We want people to come away from Sanctuary with a feeling of organization, peacefulness, and the knowledge that books and science are much more important than religion.

The Tribers World View Statement

Nick, Julia R., Julia M., Caity, Mimi

- Happiness is reaching enlightenment, which brings you closer to the Gods. We must always protect Nabone.
- Beautiful and good nature is a sign of the Gods being happy with us.
- Ugly and bad nature is a sign of the Gods being angry with us.
- Appreciate your surroundings and use them wisely.
- Nature is real, beautiful, and good.
- People that have one God are not protected or strong enough, and people with no God are even weaker.
- But our many Gods are always there for us.
- We kill for peace, we know it sounds weird but our pride is protected.
- When the Godslanders stop killing so will we, but until then we will keep killing in retaliation.



The Tribers "Re-vision" the World Trade Center

This is a model of the sixteen acres where the World Trade Center stood. We made a model of what we want and what should be in these sixteen acres. You can do activities such as praying, eating, working, and just walking around anywhere you want. We also have buildings for all of those things if you don't want to be outside. Our different buildings are an office building for the people who lost their jobs. The market place is like a farmer's market where you can buy food and homemade crafts. The museum is a museum with many different kinds of art, including art from 9/11. Then there is a play area. The play

area has ropes to swing on and bars to climb on. Next to the play area is the worship teepee. This is where you can worship if you want, but you don't have to worship there, you can worship anywhere.

The tower footprints have fires on them to represent that life still goes on and the fires also represent the fire tribe. The footprints also have dirt on them to represent earth. The pond and the monument in the middle of the sixteen acres is a tribute to the people in 9/11 and the firemen who risked their lives for other people. The garden is for nature and beauty and the flowers also represent new life.

Our model represents nature, peace, and freedom. It also represents the four tribes: the fire tribe, the earth tribe, the air tribe, and the water tribe. We want people to know that there is still life after tragedy.