

Literature and the Moral Imagination

Building Empathy in Middle School Students Through Literature and the Moral Imagination

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Author's Note:

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## **Context & Rationale**

### *Student success.*

Engaging students in order for them to be the best they can be is a goal for anyone wanting to be a teacher nowadays, for our generation of students has changed over the past ten years. Currently, the generation of students that we have in our midst need constant encouragement and praise to motivate them to initiate their assignments. COVID-19 has made a negative impact on our society, which includes the school systems. I teach 7<sup>th</sup> grade at Tuba City Junior High School where the incoming class of 7<sup>th</sup> graders for 2023-2024 consists of approximately 80 students. These students are primarily Navajo and Hopi who reside in the vicinity of Tuba City, AZ and get bussed in from Cameron, Gap, the Hopi reservation of Kykostmovi, and Cow Springs, all within less than 100 miles in radius. Regarding guardianship over the students, there has been an influx of other caretakers providing care for our students. For instance, more grandparents and aunts have taken a parent role in the lives of our students. I spoke to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade leader, and he states that this group of 6<sup>th</sup> graders are not as apathetic as the current 7<sup>th</sup> graders. He also made the statement that they care about the progress they are making, and their parents seem to be more invested in the performance of their students. The 6<sup>th</sup> grade Navajo Language Teacher also stated that their Navajo speaking abilities aren't mastered yet, however the students are very much interested in the language.

With regard to demographics, the percentage of Navajo students is higher than the percentage of Hopi students and the same is true with the percentage of males to females. Tuba City Junior High's report card is that of a C-, but initiatives are being made to improve this grade. For example, our staff are receiving socio-emotional training to address the remnants of COVID 19 and LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) training to address reading challenges in our middle school students. According to the Arizona Department of Education's website, 10% of our students are proficient in both areas of English Language Arts and Math, which, as we know, is low. The junior high serves grades 6-8 and receives about 250 students, and Tuba City Boarding School next door also has a junior high as well. The student-teacher ratio is about 17-1, thus, students hardly get individual attention. Moreover, at the junior high level, students do not feel confident asking for assistance nor do they tend to ask questions when they need clarification. Post COVID, all our students received free lunch regardless of the parent's socio-economic status. Tuba City Junior High's daily student schedule is on a rotating schedule where students start their day at 7:40 with a 30-minute Advisory time in which they can ask about their grades, write in their agenda any pertinent information and the teachers are supposed to meet with students regarding any questions they may have. The rest of their day consists of 55-minute classes in Math, ELA, Social Studies, Science and two electives which may be Hopi/Navajo Language classes, Band, Computer Applications etc. TCJHS has a 30-minute time right before lunch that serves as a REACH time which is a time for enrichment or reteach in the areas of Math and ELA. The junior high is utilizing the 'Beyond Textbook' curriculum which consists of teacher made materials and a pacing calendar which outlines when the common core standards should be taught. Beyond Textbook also consists of premade formatives or quizzes that the teacher administers when they have taught the standards. The school district has a year-round calendar with Benchmark test dates, and they are conducted three times a year.

Tuba City in Navajo is called “*To’naanezdizi*” meaning water being tangled around the area and is mostly around the Moenave area where the Hopi people do their planting. According to Jacob Barlowe.com, the written history of the town dates back more than 200 years; when Father Francisco Garcés visited the area in 1776. Garcés recorded that the Indians were cultivating crops.[3] The town was named after Tuuvi, a Hopi leader. Chief Tuuvi converted to Mormonism circa 1870 and invited the Mormons to settle near Moenkopi. Tuba City was founded by the Mormons in 1872. Tuba City drew Hopi, Navajo, and Paiute Indians to the area because of its natural springs. In 1956, Tuba City became a uranium boomtown, as the regional office for the Rare Metals Corporation and the Atomic Energy Commission. The mill closed in 1966, and reclamation of the mill site and tailings pile was completed in 1990 (Jacobbarlowe.com, retrieved June 25, 2023). Currently, Tuba City has 3 schools, the Tuba City Unified School District (Arizona State Public School), Tuba City Boarding School which was constructed before the 1900’s and was known as Blue Canyon Day School and lastly, Moenkopi Day School is a tribally controlled entity affiliated with the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). Tuba City has one medical facility known as the Tuba City Regional Health Care Center, one supermarket (Bashas), two laundry facilities, and a handful of gas stations and fast-food establishments. The town of Tuba City has grown within the last decade with added additions of a Tuuvi Gas Station and the hotel, Legacy Inn, with a Denny’s Restaurant constructed on the Hopi side of Tuba City. Tuba City is unique in that the Navajo side of town changes to Daylight Savings time in the spring to the fall, but the Hopi side of Tuba City stays on mountain standard time throughout the year.

I am a full-blooded Diné woman originally from the Hopi Partitioned Land dispute area of Rocky Ridge/ Dinnebito, Arizona (an area northeast of Tuba City, Arizona). I have emerged from a strong lineage of Deerspring women (maternal clan) who’ve hung onto their land until the United States government enticed my family with a western style home and an acre and a half of land that is still being quarreled upon to this day. My patrilineal side and/or the Red House clan also has a history of strong, resilient women and they have instilled the concept of kinship or k’e stronger than my matrilineal lineage. The convergence of the two clans and the observance of the portrayal of the women in both lines, I believe, has made me a person who is humble, generous and a woman who is reflective of her actions whether they are good or wrong actions and truly tries to right herself.

In early 2020, as our children were on spring break, their world as they know it came to a halt with the global hit of the COVID-19 pandemic and as a society we didn’t know how to comprehend what was happening. During that time, our students experienced first-hand what it means to stay home and not be responsible for homework or what a school’s expectations were; thus, many of the parents allowed this. I, as a parent, observed how my children responded to learning online although Tuba City Boarding School had an excellent platform for their students. The public school on the other hand didn’t have the resources to support all the students, a few may have received MiFis for their iPads, but there were internet connectivity issues and a slew of other technological problems that arose. My children responded passively to their online learning; they’d have other devices that occupied their time and weren’t fully engrossed in the activities happening online. One result of this tragedy is increased student apathy in schools across the country. An important way to combat this negative outlook on learning is to help students cultivate empathy. Students need to be more empathetic to other students and adults

as well. According to Skerrett & Smagorinsky (2023), empathy refers to a person's capacity to stimulate or share the feelings of other people, especially when they are under stress and in need of understanding. To add on to that, the other conception is 'compathy': the ability to feel with someone, which involves more than projecting and understanding. It involves living through another person's emotions, resonating with that person's experiences and responses to the point where they are felt (Skerrett & Smagorinsky, (2023), p.114) I am a member of a middle school ELA (English Language Arts) group on Facebook, and I read posts on how students are more defiant and disrespectful than ever before, and parents have no control over the behaviors that have stemmed from staying home because of COVID 19. According to Reimers (2023, p.30), Most children (83%) and parents (89%) reported an increase in negative feelings due to the pandemic and 46% of the parents reported psychological distress in their children. For children who were not in touch with their friends, 57% were less happy, 54% were more worried, and 58% felt less safe. For children who could interact with their friends less than 5% reported similar feelings. Children with disabilities showed an increase in bed-wetting (7%) and unusual crying and screaming (17%) since the outbreak of the pandemic, an increase three times greater than for children without disabilities. (Reimers, 2022, p.30)

A considerable number of injustices also were manifested or exacerbated during the COVID 19 pandemic, and we are now seeing the trail of problems in its wake; the most affected is our children's mental well-being and parents are grappling with how it has affected them financially while still grieving losses. My goal for this curriculum unit is to expand my students' capacity for empathy through literature. The stories I have selected feature heroes that students will grow to appreciate; through this expansion in their moral imagination via literature, they will also empathize with the people in their lives. This will help them to be better people to whoever or whatever they encounter. As a people we have overcome obstacles and barriers as we have approached the future. There is always resiliency, and we shall overcome the negative manifestations of COVID 19. In consideration of daily interaction with others, the media, inanimate objects, or just the world around us, students need to consider their decision-making skills and account for consequences of their actions whether they are negative or positive. My hope for this curriculum unit is to shed light on tragedy and the real effects such events have on individuals or a nation, while simultaneously demonstrating that through determination and empathy for others we can emerge stronger.

The problem of apathy. How can sharing good literature address this epidemic of students being disconnected or apathetic that has been sweeping through our schools, especially post-COVID? In my opinion, the decency to treat one another with respect has been diminishing in our public school here in Tuba City, AZ. I feel the need to address this by writing a curriculum unit based on selecting literature that will get the students thinking about the choices they make and interactions they have. The opposite of apathy is feeling empathy for one another. Considering how our ancestors have strived through the Long Walk of the late 1800's and through the trials and tribulations of the Holocaust and other struggles by groups of people should make an impact on my students. In consideration of our people and the struggles currently being experienced, students should have a realization of the impact that literature has to offer. Students can experience the lives of dynamic characters in literature to make connections to the

power of resiliency and perseverance that a people can bestow, so therefore, they have the ability to mimic that virtue. I believe that in exposing students to literature that encompasses the resiliency of the people through literature that contains the Long Walk and characters that have bounced back from traumatic events would create more empathic individuals. As an individual, I often share personal stories of my upbringing so connections can be made and for them to see that I am just a being who makes mistakes and tries to learn from those mistakes to better myself.

### **Content Objectives**

Any initiative should have certain characteristics that individuals or stakeholders must achieve to show that the plan is working, and the ends are being achieved. Culturally responsive skills must follow the CRAIS (Core Principles of Culturally Responsive Schooling with/in Indigenous Communities) tool of which there are five principles: Relationality, relationships, and communities; Indigenous knowledge systems and languages; Sociopolitical context and concepts and specifically sovereignty, self-determination, and nationhood; Representation of Indigenous peoples; and Critical understandings of diversity, and specifically, race (Handout given in the seminar entitled CRAIS tool, Retrieved June 25, 2023). This unit will reflect the first principle, relationality, relationships, and communities by: 1. encouraging students to understand themselves within broader communities; 2. Encouraging students to build and sustain relationships; and 3. Building strong relationships within the classroom. This unit will also reflect the use of Home Language which is Navajo when situations lend themselves to explaining key terms or phrases. With regard to the second principle, Indigenous knowledge systems and languages, this unit will: 1. Include traditional and/or cultural knowledge; 2. Value local indigenous language; and 3. Integrate local indigenous language (CRAIS tool, p.1). Four pieces of literature have been selected to implement these principles into the curriculum unit while working to cultivate the capacity for empathy within the students.

The moral imagination is the cultivation of the capacity to imagine multiple moral possibilities and the cultivation of the capacity to imagine the moral lives of others. It is especially linked to compassion and the expansion of one's moral perspective (Julie Piering's lecture, June 27, 2023). This enlarged perspective is critical to empathy in our students and my commitment to it comes from my own background. In May 1982, my world was transformed when my father passed on. My father worked for the Union Pacific Railroad and at that time I was a 4<sup>th</sup> grader at Tuba City Boarding School, and every other Friday night he would pick us (myself, younger brother, older brother) up from our perspective residential halls. We noticed his absence that Friday night but the next morning our aunt and uncle came by and told us the news of his passing. We were shocked and deeply saddened for he was the breadwinner and the NICE one of the parent pair. This left a hole in our lives that was not mended by any other person. We buried our father and that left us with just our mother. Our mother, when she was young, was quick to anger, cantankerous, and would insult us or shame us when a situation would lend itself to it. An example of this that is cemented in my mind is one time we were visiting my sister and that morning she was having a conversation with her when she mentioned something about me that I disagreed with. I popped my head up from where I was laying and told her that I disagreed with what she said about me, and then laid back down. Then out of nowhere, a

wooden broom landed on my back which made the broom break in half. Because of that incident, I left the situation and went to a home that made me feel safe and valued. In the times that I was at home and with time permitting for myself, I immersed myself in novels and imagined a world far away from the situation that I was presently in. An article by Antonia Peacocke states that reading literature can extend the range of your phenomenal imagination—the kind that involves the lived feeling of conscious experience. Literature expands your imagination by giving you experiences of new kinds; with feelings you haven't had before. George Eliot puts the point in terms of enlargement, amplification, and extension (Peacocke, 2021, p.298-300). Moreover, the article also states that literature's expansion is good and important. This imaginative expansion is meant to be socially and epistemically (in relation to knowledge) beneficial, in that it helps us understand and empathize with one another. Phenomenal imagination is imagination of phenomenal properties. This means that it is technically a property of an experience, and this experience and its properties feel some way to its subject (p.300-301). Being an adolescent in this environment caused stress for my siblings and I, but reading novels and acting as a teacher to my siblings spared me from alcohol addiction or forming other habits that aren't good for the soul. Through the immersion of reading, I've observed sentence structure, paragraph formation, spelling of hard words, perspectives, and empathizing with characters in the novels. At that time as well, a magazine called "Sassy" was in publication and in that magazine, teenagers from all around the country would submit stories about their teenage lives. I would compare/contrast their stories with my life and sometimes I would envy their lives because their upbringing was positive. (Even when I envied these other lives, I still found in them a way to better understand my own life and those of others). In the past two years at my school, there has been a pronounced lack of empathy which has led to damaging conduct and ways of being. For example, students insult and degrade one another, create rumors or gossip on social media, use their devices for non-educational purposes, and do not think about the consequences of their actions.

According to Skerrett & Smagorinsky (2023), empathy refers to a person's capacity to appreciate or share the feelings of other people, especially when they are under stress and in need of understanding (p.128). Aside from how I described how my mother was in my young days, I've observed her to be an empathetic person and, consequently, I share that virtue with her. My mother is now 86 years old and no longer drives a vehicle but when she used to drive a vehicle and when she would see a person who needed a ride, she would stop for them even though that person might be under the influence of alcohol. We would ask her why she does this, and warn her that such a behavior is risky as well, and her reply would be that those kinds of people need our assistance to help them get to where they are going because we don't know their situation. One evening we were leaving Flagstaff after a day of shopping, and we stopped at the Mavericks gas station to fuel up and I noticed a male standing on the side of the store with no shoes! I approached the man, and I asked him where his shoes are, and he stated that he lost them during binge drinking and that he was trying to get home to the reservation. So, I took off my size 9 shoes and offered the pair to him and he was more than grateful and accepted it. My family often say to me, why do you do that? Who would do that for you? To those kinds of questions, I simply say to them, that may have been me or you never know what kind of situation tomorrow might bring so be generous or try to walk in that person's shoes. In the town

of Tuba City, there is a man in his 40's, who has an amputated leg and walks with a crutch with a friendly dog that follows him obediently. So, often I would see him walking to the bank or walking back from the bank. One day I stopped for him and asked him if he needed a ride and he politely said that it would be appreciated. He hopped in and started telling me about his habit of smoking weed and the next time I saw him he would be happy to share it with me and at the time my son was with me and to this he started to chuckle. I dropped him off where he needed to go, and I made a remark to my son in which I said something like at least he has a way to deal with what he needs to deal with and it's legal now! There are different ways we are led to empathize with people, but those are even stronger when we do it as a community. Since personal experience is different, the best way to share empathetic experiences is through literature. My goal for this unit is for students to project themselves into the lives and experiences of other people and think about how other people feel about their encounters with those who are different from themselves. They need to consider what makes a person feel threatened, different, and/or foreign (p. 131).

Envisionments refer to the world of understanding that a person has at any point in time. They are a function of one's personal and cultural experiences, one's relationship to the current experience, what one knows, what one feels, and what one is after. Envisionments are also dynamic sets of related ideas, images, questions, disagreements, anticipations, arguments, and hunches when one gains, expresses, and shares thoughts and understandings. An example of this would be what our evening consisted of, our seminar leaders and a few of our colleagues were sharing personal stories about what life can be like and once that experience is shared another person would jump right in and share a similar experience as well. Based on the experiences, emotions of empathy, laughter, and other feelings would be shared. Based on these understandings what has to happen is interpretations and people have a number of options available as they develop them. These options are called stances and they are crucial to the act of envisionment building, because each one offers a different vantage point from which to gain ideas. There are four such vantage points (Langer, 1997, p. 9-15). Stance one is being out and stepping into an environment. In this stance, we generally begin to develop envisionments by using our knowledge and experiences, surface features of the text, and any other available clues. We use this broad search to form initial ideas and suppositions about the characters, plot, setting, situation and how they interrelate, and how they occur thorough a reading, not only at the beginning, when ideas are new. Stance one reminds me of when the class and I were beginning to read "The Monkey's Paw" by W.W. Jacobs early in the school year and at first the students weren't interested in the reading until the visitor introduced the paw to the family. After the paw was introduced, they started to wonder if the paw would grant the wish the father made and were saddened when news of the son's death came the next day. At that point, they thought it was just a coincidence. The class had to step out of the environment they were in and step into this story that had characteristics of plot but not a good resolution. After the reading, the students illustrated a wanted poster about the paw and wrote good or bad qualities about it. Stance two is being in and moving through an envisionment where the reader is immersed in the text-world. The reader takes new information and immediately uses it to go beyond what they already understand----asking questions about motives, feelings, causes, interrelationships, and implications. An example of this would be when the "Monkey's Paw,"

story unfolded, the teacher could hear murmurs coming from the students when the mother wished the son to be alive again and begging her husband to make the wish and when the presence at the door of the house began to unfold. After the reading, several students asked the teacher if she had ever experienced the supernatural and I, as the teacher shared a similar experience as one in the story. Stance three is the reader stepping out and rethinking what they know. The reader uses their developing understandings, their text-worlds, to add to their knowledge and experiences. This stance does not occur as frequently as the other stances because all works do not intersect our lives in ways that we can necessarily reflect on and learn from. One student made a connection to the story by providing an anecdote of her grandfather handling forbidden items from the Navajo culture and how he had to have various ceremonies to get well again. Stance four is stepping out and objectifying the experience and reflecting on the experience. The reader reflects on, analyzes, and judges them and relates them to other works and experiences; the focus is on the author's craft, text's structure, and on the literary elements and allusions.

According to Aristotle, as children, we have the potential to be virtuous but we are not yet able to be fully virtuous because we have not grown into our full capacities. Virtue ethics focuses on how we are able to become virtuous as we grow into the people we will be. Both of these philosophers are interested in ethics, and the way in which we are able to develop virtues within ourselves and in our relationships.

According to Keene & Zimmerman, 2007, text connections, also known as textual connections or connections within a text, refer to the various ways in which ideas, themes, information, or elements are linked or related to each other within a piece of writing. These connections help readers make sense of the text, follow the author's train of thought, and understand the overall message being conveyed. Text connections are crucial for creating a coherent and engaging reading experience. They can be divided into several types:

1. **Text-to-Text Connections:** These connections occur when readers relate the content of one text to another text they have read before. This could involve comparing similar themes, ideas, or characters across different pieces of literature.

In the classroom around Navajo Codetalker month in August, students read an informational article on the Codetalkers. The article introduced how and why the need for the Codetalkers emerged because the Japanese were decrypting radio messages that were being sent by the United States and Philip Johnston (a former WW1) veteran, suggested the use of the Navajo language. Next, the students read the *Unbreakable Code* by Hunter and Miner. This tells a fictional story of a young boy being told by his grandfather the sacrifice he experienced as a Codetalker during WW2. The students were able to differentiate that WW2 did happen and that their people did an exceptional service for our country.

2. **Text-to-Self Connections:** These connections involve readers making links between the text to their own personal experiences, emotions, or thoughts. Readers might connect events in the text to events in their own lives or relate to the emotions expressed by the characters.

For example, using the same literature as the Codetalker piece. Students often start to open up about a brother or uncle who had served in the armed forces and how emotional that was for the family. When their loved ones would come back for visits, they would be received with warm



welcomes and sometimes a ceremony befitting the occasion would occur just like the grandpa in the Unbreakable Code book.

3. **Text-to-Media Connections:** These connections involve linking the text to other forms of media, such as movies, TV shows, news articles, or music. Readers might see parallels between the text and something they've encountered in another medium.

Depending on the age of the students, the teacher can show the movie *Windtalkers*, a 2002 film about Nicholas Cage protecting a Codetalker in the battlefield during WW2. Although the movie is fictional there are parts of the movie that portray what the Codetalkers met as far as the training and how gruesome, and cruel war can be on an individual.

4. **Text-to-Concept Connections:** These connections involve linking the text to abstract concepts, theories, or ideas. Readers might draw connections between the text and philosophical concepts, scientific principles, or cultural theories.

This connection might be too abstract for primary or secondary students, but the teacher might make a link to what happens to armed servicemen who are traditional that their families often summon a medicine man to perform an enemy way ceremony or the Beauty Way ceremony depending on the mentality of their loved one. Too often when someone is experiencing trauma any one of these ceremonies can be implemented to assist with restoring the individual's harmony with self and nature.

5. **Text-to- World Connections:** In this case, readers connect the text to events or concepts in the real world. This could involve connecting the themes of a story to broader societal issues or historical events.

Not all battles are physical or between enemies. A teacher might draw recent events of the COVID-19 epidemic as a way to link the events of WW2 and the Codetalkers to bring to light that if a society comes together that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. We as a nation have lost people in our lives due to this epidemic, but we are still surviving and thriving.

By recognizing and exploring these connections, readers can gain a deeper understanding of the text and its underlying messages. Moreover, these connections can promote critical thinking skills and encourage readers to engage actively with the material.

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### **Text 1: "Cicada" by Shaun Tan**

The Cicada is a short fictional story about a cicada who lives a drab, unfulfilled life of working and being underappreciated. With each page, one can see how he is treated differently than his human counterparts and must walk many cities blocks to use the bathroom. Cicada always must finish his work but humans on the other hand do not have to, and he thusly stays late in his lonesome cubicle. Students would be encouraged to use sticky notes to keep track of where in the story they felt empathy for Cicada and why. Ask questions like who does the Cicada remind you of? Does the mistreatment of the cicada get you upset? What would you say to the cicada if you could have a conversation with him? The metamorphosis of the cicada at the end of the text is phenomenal because of the illustration of how the cicada has lived but at the end he is free of the tyranny of how he lived. The realization of living an unfulfilled life must have felt unrecompensed.

### **Text 2: “The Goat in the Rug”**

This fictional text is about Geraldine, a playful kid (goat) who belongs to a Navajo teenager, tells of what is involved in making a rug from start to finish. The story starts with how a goat’s mohair is needed for the rug by shearing, dyeing and drying out the mohair to finally carding and spinning the mohair. With each step, Geraldine is depicted as the one telling the steps to the rug making process and with each page Geraldine could be portrayed as a victim. The students could be asked guiding questions with each step and to ask themselves if there is any mistreatment involved with the process of completing a rug from start to completion. Empathy could be developed within the students through the process of the story by asking questions such as how did you feel for Geraldine when this happened or when you saw the mohair being dyed and carded? The perspective could be from Geraldine telling her story of how she feels about the process.

### **Text 3: “Navajo Long Walk” by Nancy M. Armstrong**

This is a fictional story of Kee and his family who endure what is considered the Long Walk of 1864 when the government dictated orders to the U.S. Cavalry to remove the Navajos from their ancestral home to Bosque Redondo in New Mexico. As they travel, Kee sees the horrors around him and people dying at the hands of the U.S. Cavalry. Kee, as young as he is resilient and makes attempts to keep the spirits of his family in a positive light by retelling of existing in their homeland used to be. Chapter 10, entitled “Crossing the Rio Grande,” would be the chapter that I would highlight to convey how the people must have felt waking up to the sound of a bugle and being told that there wasn’t enough food to go around, and that sustenance would be replenished until Albuquerque which was days away. The soldiers also told the people that they would have to cross the Rio Grande which brought panic in the people for most of them didn’t know how to swim and on top of that the soldiers used guns and whips to move them forward.

### **Text 4: “Annie and the Old One” by Miska Miles**

This text is also an example of fictional text and portrays Annie as the protagonist and the idea of her grandmother dying after the rug is finished is the conflict of the story. The setting is told somewhere between the four sacred mountains where Annie enjoys her life of taking care of the livestock and making every moment count with her grandmother. Her mother encourages her to weave the rug, but she’d rather do other things.

### **Teaching Strategies**

There is a quote that has been allegedly attributed to both Benjamin Franklin and Confucius which, regardless of its origin, resonates with me when it comes to teaching strategies. The saying is: “Tell me and I forget; teach me and I may remember; involve me and I learn.” This quote resonates within my teaching style through sharing my vulnerability as a human with topics that emerge in our reading material. For example, we have been reading topics on addiction of cell phone use and eating hot chips, so as a teacher I have shared stories of my addictions and that seems to open conversations of what our students deal with in their own families as well. My perspective is that through sharing personal stories you are showing the students that you make mistakes too but reflection of your behavior can have positive results. Tuba City Junior High School uses Madeline Hunter’s Lesson Plan design for lesson delivery.

The Lesson Plan template has eight parts to it to include: the anticipatory set, stating objectives/purpose, input (how are you the teacher going to show what the new learning will be about), modeling (teacher demonstrates what is being learned), checking for understanding, guided practice (the “we do”), independent practice (the “you do”), and lastly, closure ( this could be an exit ticket or a quick way for students to show understanding of what was learned) (Retrieved from <https://www.csun.edu/sites/default/files/Holle-Lesson-Planning.pdf>, June 26, 2023).

### **Activating Prior Knowledge**

When a lesson has begun a teacher must activate students’ prior knowledge and this can be done in several ways, but one strategy that I find that students enjoy is the use of anticipation guides. This is a document that has four to five open ended statements that students could disagree or agree with. I find that anticipation guides spark interest and or curiosity about the upcoming lesson. (Can you give a brief example of an anticipation guide that you would use with one of your texts?) Yes – an example of an anticipation guide would be great!

### **Pre-teaching Vocabulary words**

Beforehand, the teacher has already selected words that the students may not be familiar with especially words that will lend to context and have a suffix, root/base word and prefixes. I would use a graphic organizer where the students separate by affixes and write the meaning of each part as well. As the lesson progresses, the teacher will repeat the process with additional words. The teacher will also support vocabulary development with premade games or vocabulary online games like Kahoots or Quizlet.

### **Modeling Think-Alouds through the Readings**

Another strategy that works well with my population of students is using the think aloud strategy. While I am introducing the term “empathy”, I might start reading the text, “Cicada” by Shaun Tan much like how it was modeled for us during the seminar. A cultural connection might be to tell the students that the cicada is called a “wiineesh’chiidi” in Navajo and that when hard times had hit our people the cicada was used as food. The people would catch them and take the wings off and eat it whole. An extra credit activity might be to have the students interview an elder and ask them questions about foods that were once eaten but not anymore. I would compose thought provoking questions beforehand for students to reflect on and have them either answer when asked or have them think, pair, share their answers with others. For the vocabulary during reading, often, I would stop upon a word that the students might be unfamiliar with and try to figure out the meaning while the word is used in context. We would also ponder if the word had a positive or negative connotation as it is used in context.

### **Modeling Text-self, Text-world, Text-text Connections**

Through the selected readings, I often model what does this text make me think or what other reading does it remind me of through questions like: Oh, I just remembered this other reading that I read that this part reminds me of, or Oh, one time I felt sorry for this lady that was hitchhiking and I thought of when I was stranded and how I longed for someone to stop for me. The think-alouds for making those connections is important and will get our students to think of a situation that will lend an opportunity for conversations that will embrace empathy. (Can you briefly say why you think this will help them embrace empathy?)**Classroom Activities**

**Week 1:** Begin with a class discussion on empathy. Ask students what their thoughts and experiences related to empathy. Tell students of your own experience with empathy when you had to give your shoes to a person who didn't have any at a gas station. Tell the students that my mother was the one who showed empathy to passersby on the roadside by providing a way to get them to where they needed to go. Write student responses on the Promethean Board and have those who are willing to share, share their experiences. Teacher can define empathy by saying, that empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of another person or it means to put yourself in someone else's shoes and to imagine what they are going through. Teacher input of reading the "Cicada" by Shaun Tan and "The Goat in the Rug" by Charles L. Blood & Martin Link. As the teacher begins to read the Cicada provide students with five sticky notes and as the teacher stops a question will be posed and students must record their responses on the sticky notes. At the end of the read-aloud, students will illustrate the part of the story and write in their responses from their sticky note to correlate with the illustration. They will be encouraged to read their responses and their illustrations as part of a class presentation. Students will also be provided a list of character traits words since students aren't familiar with other feeling words other than being happy, sad, frustrated, and excited. The teacher needs to research several short films that illustrate the concept of empathy that students can respond to. The lesson can follow the same format with the Goat in the Rug by Charles L. Blood & Martin Link.

### **Week 2 of Classroom Activities**

Week 2 activities could consist of the reading of "Annie and the Old One" by Miska Miles. Pre-reading strategies will include a discussion on losing a loved one and the consequences that can follow. Recently, we had a reading on The Monkey's Paw by W.W. Jacobs and students had to answer an inquiry on what wish they would have if they were given one. Most answered that they would like a loved one to come back to them because that person fulfilled and enriched their lives. I shared the loss of my youngest brother due to AIDS and how devastating that was on our family. Losing a loved one always has a deep impact on families and our students had to overcome losses during COVID-19. The discussion would follow the same format as before where the teacher would stop at key points in the text and ask how empathetic Annie (the protagonist) must have felt when her mother told her that when the rug is taken off the loom that her grandmother was to return to Mother Earth.

### **Student Assessment Plan**

Final assessment will be a comic strip that they illustrate and write that has a character & story structure and includes a distinct point of view to develop empathy.

Reflection: explain why the reader should feel empathy.

## **Alignment with Standards**

### **7-8 DINÉ Culture Standards**

Concept 1: I will develop an understanding of Diné way of life.

PO1: I will engage in activities that will increase my sense of self-worth.

Concept 4: I will apply and practice the Diné way of life with confidence.

PO1: I will live by the fundamental standards of living in harmony.

### **4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Grades: DINÉ Character Building Standards**

Concept 1: I will express critical thinking to establish relationships with the environment.

PO2: I will demonstrate respect and value for my immediate family and others.

Concept 2: I will maintain the sacredness of self-identity.

PO3: I will display and safeguard my thoughts.

### **4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> Grades: DINÉ Character Building Standards**

Concept 3: I will have self-respect.

PO2: I will show respect to my peers.

PO3: I will cooperate with my peers.

PO4: I will refrain from bullying.

### **English Language Arts: 7<sup>th</sup> grade, Arizona's Common Core Standards (2<sup>nd</sup> quarter)**

Standard: 7.R.RL.03 Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot). The Highly Proficient student can analyze and explain how the elements of a narrative or drama interact.

Standard: 7.R.RL.06 Analyze how an author develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters or narrators in a text. The Highly Proficient student can analyze the effectiveness of how an author develops the point of view of different complex characters in a text.

## References

<https://www.beyondtextbooks.org/>

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