



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2002 Volume I: Survival Stories

Child Survival Stories: Hope To Cope

Curriculum Unit 02.01.08
by Kevin P. Inge

Introduction

The Yale New Haven Teachers Institute has provided me an excellent opportunity to present this unit to you. I'm a first year teacher and this is my first unit for the Institute. The Yale New Haven Teachers Institute has helped me develop as a teacher. Having survived many of the things inner-city kids go through I welcomed the challenge of putting this unit together. The Child Survival Stories: Hope to Cope unit is the result of many hours of hard work. I hope you find it useful for your classroom.

School Profile

I teach sixth grade at Jackie Robinson Middle School in New Haven, Connecticut. Jackie Robinson was named after the first black baseball player to compete in the major leagues. The school was built in 1977 as an architectural prizewinner. Our school mascot is the jaguar. The school colors are maroon and yellow. Jackie Robinson is an inner-city school in the Dixwell/Newhallville section of the city. It has a student population of about six hundred students. The student population at the school is about 90% Black, 7% Spanish-speaking, 3% other. Most of the students who attend Jackie Robinson come from impoverished backgrounds. I grew up in the Newhallville section of New Haven and can relate to many of the struggles inner-city children encounter. Many of the students are faced with tremendous obstacles in their lives. They often do not know how to successfully approach or handle the adverse situations they find themselves in. Some students are not even aware of their plight. Frustration and anger are often a part of their daily lives. Single parent families are the norm. Drugs and alcohol are commonplace. Sexual activity, illiterate homes, low self-esteem, peer pressure, and racism are typical issues. Gangs and violence is a way of proving one's manhood. School, for many, becomes mainly a place to socialize. Most of these students cannot see beyond their circumstances or environment. Many of the students have no positive hope for their future and they are discouraged with their present. How can we expect these children to learn properly when they are dealing with so many issues?

Overview Of Unit

My Child Survival Stories: Hope to Cope unit focuses on how children cope with adverse situations in their lives. It was designed with middle school students in mind but can be adapted to meet the needs of any student. The projected time to complete this unit is eight weeks (or one school marking period). My unit will allow students to study various ideas and perspectives on survival that they can apply to their own lives. Because of their own "survival stories" students will be motivated to explore this area of study. This unit will help release students from self-defeating habits of mind and develop a hope to cope with life's issues. This unit will begin with students brainstorming about what people survive. I will record student responses on the blackboard using a semantic map. A semantic map contains a visual representation of a certain concept. Usually an oval is drawn with the concept written in it. Lines are then drawn to words that depict some kind of relationship to the concept. A square, star, or any other shape would serve the same purpose. As the brainstorming slows I will guide students to more responses by giving them clues. The semantic mapping process taps students' prior knowledge and gives them a purpose for learning. It also helps me as a teacher to evaluate where students are on a particular concept. Students will complete a "Survival Branching Exercise". In this exercise students will work in pairs. This lesson starts out with each student writing down something they have survived. After writing their statement they exchange papers with their partner. Students are to read their partners survival statement and then write down a question for him/her to answer. Without talking students are to repeat this cycle for fifteen minutes. This lesson concludes with students writing a summary of their partner's responses. They check with each other to see if their summary is accurate. Full instructions to this lesson can be found in the lesson plan section of this unit.

Students will then write a survival story poem. To write this poem students will use "story impressions" from Langston Hughes's poem Mother to Son. Story impressions are words or short phrases taken from a particular story. Selecting key words and verb phrases from sentences seem to work best with this exercise. These words or phrases can be recorded on the blackboard or overhead projector. Students will use these words to create poems. The students are not required to follow the story impressions in order, but they must incorporate all the words in their poem. When students finish their poems they will read them aloud to the class. After the poems have been read and discussed I will read Hughes' poem to the class.

Students will write another survival poem without the story impressions to conclude the poetry segment of this unit. These poems will be typed and displayed on a hallway bulletin board.

Students will write a short survival story by analyzing a photo. The photo that I will use for this unit is a picture of a black teenage girl sitting in a regular classroom. Students will view this photo from an overhead projector. This writing exercise should take no more than fifteen minutes. The students will read and discuss their writings with the class afterwards.

I have selected four novels to be used during this unit. Each book reveals different survival issues to be addressed by the class. These books vary in their reading levels to meet the needs of middle school readers. I will display these books in the classroom for students to examine and select. Students will be grouped according to the book they select. I would like to have two small groups for each book. As students read and discuss their books I will move from group to group to monitor discussions. Each student will have to do a book report on the selected book. Students will do a lot of reading, listening, writing and discussion during this unit. Students will also compare and contrast their books with the other books being read in the class. This will often be done using a Venn diagram. A Venn diagram is a graphic organizer that reveals the similarities and

differences between different topics. They generally consist of labeled circles that overlap. Where the circles overlap the similarities are placed. The outer parts of the circles are where the differences are recorded. This will allow students to visually see the similarities and differences between their books. I will use a "Survival Stories" Venn diagram to record student responses on an overhead projector. This diagram will display titled circles of the four book selections the students are reading. I will use color markers to distinguish between the books. Copies of this diagram will be given to students for them to record information. After the completion of this segment the students are to find a "survival story" book that they can read on their own. The school librarian can be very instrumental in helping students locate books of interest. All books selected most contain a least one hundred pages. When students finish reading their selected book they are to write a book report on it. The students are to complete two book reports as a part of this unit. Each book report must be three pages long and double-spaced. The double spacing will allow ample space to make comments to the students. The students must follow specific guidelines to complete their book reports. I will use a rubric to grade each book report. The guidelines and rubric points can be found in the lesson plans section of this unit. When the book reports are finished students will read them to the class. The unit will continue with the students creating their own "survival story" books. Students who feel comfortable sharing their book may discuss or read their book to the class.

Students will complete a Bible as Literature lesson as part of this unit. The students will explore the life of Joseph in the book of Genesis.

As part of the art segment students will work together to create a survival stories mural. The instructions for this activity can be found in the lesson plan section of this unit.

The Bible As Literature (The Story Of Joseph)

I've selected the story of Joseph because of the positive attributes he reveals while surviving persecution. Joseph grew up in a large family. He was one of twelve siblings. Joseph's mother died when he was in his early teens years. Joseph becomes the favorite son of his father because he is the son of his old age. His father gave him a coat of many colors to distinguish him from his other brothers (half-brothers). This increase the jealousy and animosity his brother had toward him. When Joseph tells his family about his dreams even his father gets disturbed. Joseph's dreams indicated that his father and brother would bow down to him.

One-day Joseph's father sends him off to check on his brothers in the field. The brothers saw this as an excellent opportunity to get rid of Joseph. They stripped Joseph of his coat of many colors and sold him into Egypt. After the brothers dipped the coat into animal's blood they deceived their father into thinking Joseph was dead.

His own brothers sold Joseph into slavery. He was wrongfully accused of sexual misconduct and put in prison. He had to live many years without seeing his father, who loved him so much.

Through strength of character and his belief in God, Joseph overcomes all obstacles to become the Governor of Egypt. Joseph saves his family from the famine that overtakes the land and is reunited with his father. When his brothers bow down to him as Governor of Egypt he realizes that it was God's plan for him to be there. He had no intentions of getting revenge against his brothers. What his brother meant for bad...God

meant for good. Through all the good and bad times Joseph learned to be happy in his circumstances.

Students will read aloud Joseph's story in class. After reading his story students will work in small groups to write down three things that Joseph survived and three things that made him successful.

Activities:

- Students will watch a video about Joseph called, "King of Dreams."
- Students will complete artwork of a scene in the story.
- Students could act out the story in a play.

Indian Captive

During the settlement of Europeans in America during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries Indians periodically captured their children. Sometimes these children were allowed to return to their homes after a short duration. Some of the children did not return. Indian Captive is about a twelve-year old girl named Mary Jemison. She was born of Scotch-Irish parents. Mary was captured along with her parents and other siblings from their Pennsylvania farm in 1758. Two of Mary's brothers were able to escape the captivity. Her parents and remaining siblings who were taken with her were killed shortly after their captivity. The French and Indian War was the main reason for the captivity of the Jemison family.

But why was Mary allowed to live? Mary learns the true meaning of her captivity during an Indian ceremony. The Indians were mourning the loss of a son and brother. He was killed on the Pennsylvania frontier. It was because of his death that Mary was captured. The ancient religious custom of the Indian tribe was to fill the place of the one who died. Mary Jemison was brought to the Seneca tribe to fulfill this purpose. Her golden yellow hair was a major reason for their selection of her. Her hair fascinated the Indians. They gave her the name "Corn Tassel" because her hair was the color of the tassel on corn. Being held captive was devastating for Mary. She longed for her family and former way of life. She cried often, but she was strong. She often heard her mother's voice in her head, saying: "Have courage Molly, my child, be brave! It does matter what happens if you're only strong and have great courage." These were the last words Mary heard from her mother. She used them often to cope with the hardships she would face. She was forced to work and do things around the tribe. The things she learned about the Seneca tribe did not reflect what white society had informed her. They were supposed to be cruel, wicked, and savage animals. This was not the case. Most of the Indians were nice to Mary. They cared for her and she learned to care for them. They taught her how to speak their language, prepare food, grow corn, make clothing, to tan skins, and to care for the younger children. More than anything else her ordeal with the Indians made her a great woman of courage. Mary uses this courage when an Englishman comes to the Seneca tribe to purchase her freedom. At her hesitation the Englishman presented her with this argument: "Don't let their fine words blind you to the crime which they committed against you, in destroying your family, in stealing you away from your home, from white people.

Don't fool yourself, or let them fool you into thinking that you could forgive them. You may at the moment, but later you will come to hatred. You will never stop hating till you have had your revenge...they will marry you to an Indian whom you cannot love; your children will be Indian children, who will be hated by white people." When Mary pondered his words she found some truth o them. Maybe she should hate the Indians for the crimes they committed against her and her family. But she had no hatred or revenge in her heart for them. What she did hate was war. She hated the French and Indian War. It was this war that deprived her of her family. The Indians had suffered similar losses over and over again. Was her loss any greater than theirs? And if she went back...what would she go to? All that she had suffered at the hands of the Indians would make the rest of her life easy by comparison. "I cannot go!" she said, in a clear, steady voice. "I wish to stay. The Senecas are my people. I will live and die with the Senecas."

Many inner-city youth feel resentment and discouragement toward their past, present, and future in North America. Through Mary Jemison's story I want students to focus on how she overcame her circumstances. Students will focus on cause-effect development throughout the story. Hopefully students will realize that they can become successful even in the midst of what can often be a hostile environment.

Activities:

- Students will visit an Indian museum that contains many artifacts from the Seneca tribe.
- Students will watch a video on the French and Indian War.

Scorpions by Walter Dean Myers

Scorpions is a fiction novel about a twelve-year-old African-American boy named Jamal Hicks. Jamal lives in Harlem with his mother and little sister Sassy. The story takes place in the late 1980's. Jamal is a junior high student who constantly gets into fights at school. He believes that everything is against him. Hi teachers, the kids at school, and even his dad seem to be against him. His older brother, Randy, is incarcerated for murder as the leader of the Scorpions gang. Jamal becomes pressured to be the leader of the gang in his brother's absence. Finding his circumstances hard to bear, he decides to join the gang. After joining the Scorpions his problems escalate even further. Jamal discovers that his enemies start treating him with respect when he begins carrying a gun. He also learns that guns can bring major problems into a person's life. Belonging to a gang is a survival story within itself. Jamal never wanted to really join the Scorpions. But how else was he going to get his brother Randy out of prison? This was one of the main motivations for him joining the gang, to make bail for his brother. Jamal's friend, Tito, tries to help Jamal through his problems. When two of the Scorpions challenge Jamal's leadership of the gang, it is Tito who prevents him from getting stabbed. Jamal, in time, relinquishes his leadership role of the Scorpions and drops out. The story ends with Jamal's life still in doubt.

I read the book *Scorpions* this year to my sixth grade class. The students were excited every time I read it to them. The book really hits home with the students and brings out many survival issues. It's during the middle school years that many of youth are contemplating joining a gang. Our society does not seem to be doing enough to educate youths about street gang. Students need to know more about gangs so they can resist the temptation to join one. Telling children that gangs are bad is not enough. This book reveals many of the dangers gang members may face.

Most of the characters in this book do not speak standard English. I use this book often as a source for displaying my daily oral language lessons. Each morning I put two sentences on the board for students to correct. Getting my sentences from *Scorpions* sets the stage for me to read them the story. As we're making corrections the students reflect on the story with interest. It taps their prior knowledge as they are having a grammar lesson.

Activities:

- Students will watch a video depicting the hazards of gang life.
- Students will look up reasons why adolescents join gangs on the Internet.
- Students will listen to an ex-gang member who has been rehabilitated.

Website:

- www.streetgangs.com

Black Boy by Richard Wright

Black Boy is Richard Wright's autobiography. Richard Wright was born on a Mississippi plantation in 1908. He writes about his struggles for equality during the "Jim Crow" era. The United States Constitution states, "All men are created equal." During the Jim Crow era blacks were constantly being harassed because of the color of their skin. Wright's autobiography demonstrates a realistic picture of challenges faced by black males in the South. In the early 20th century, the South, especially, was a place where blacks were looked upon with racial prejudice, discrimination, and hatred by most whites. Unjust arrests, beatings and hangings were commonplace for blacks during this era.

After losing one of his jobs Richard writes:

"I knew what was wrong with me, but I could not correct it. The words and actions of white people were baffling signs to me. I was living in a culture and not a civilization and I could learn how that culture worked only by living with it. Misreading the reactions of whites around me made me say and do the wrong things. In my dealings with whites I was conscious only of what was happening at a given moment. I had to keep remembering what others took for granted; I had to think out what others felt." Wright goes on to say, "I had been coping with the white world too late. I could not make subservience an automatic part of my behavior. I had to feel and think out each tiny item of racial experience in the light of the whole race problem, and to each problem I brought the whole of my life. While standing before a white man I had to figure out how to perform each act and how to say each word. I could not help it. I could not grin. In the past I had always said too much, now I found that it was difficult to say anything at all. I could not react as the world in which I lived expected me to; that world was too baffling, too uncertain."

This is how life was for Richard Wright in the South. Yet, despite the odds, he was able to survive and achieve success. It was his perseverance, rebelliousness and intelligence that delivered his success. Though he received fame as a writer, he never really found his rightful place in society.

After writing *Black Boy* in 1940 Richard Wright became somewhat of a spokesman for black people. His work is still valuable in confronting racial issues today.

Activities:

- Students will watch Richard Wright's documentary on video.
- Students will interview a relative who live during the "Jim Crow" era.

Gifted Hands by Dr. Ben Carson

Gifted Hands is the autobiography of Dr. Ben Carson. Dr. Carson grew up as a poor ghetto kid in the streets of Detroit. His father left the family when he was eight years old. His mother, Sonya, seemed to work constantly to support the Ben and his older brother Curtis. Up until fifth grade Carson's report cards were horrible. He had very little interest in schoolwork. He also had a problem with his anger that kept getting him into trouble. With the motivation of his mother, and a few of his teachers, Carson develop an interest in education. Carson's mother knew how difficult I would be for her sons if they did not acquire a good education. Even though she was illiterate she demanded that her boys read two books a week. To make sure they read the books she had them write book reports for each book. They didn't realize at the time that she couldn't read. This helped establish the boys as good readers and writers. It was during this time that Dr. Carson discovered his interest in science.

After converting to Christianity at an early age Ben Carson's life started taking a change for the better. He learned to manage his anger and excel at his schoolwork. While at the bottom of his class in grades, Carson wakes to the reality that it did not have to be that way. He goes on to accelerate to the top of his class in elementary, middle and high school. His grades became so good that he received a full scholarship to attend Yale University. After struggling in his class work at Yale, especially chemistry, Carson wonders if its God's will for him to become a doctor. After praying to God and having the chemistry test revealed to him in a dream, he realizes that his dream of becoming a doctor was ordered by God. One of the reasons Carson struggled in his early years at Yale was the way he studied. He was a crammer. He usually waited until the night before an exam to study. This information he studied was usually soon forgotten after the tests. Carson applied himself not only to pass tests, but to learn the information as well. He graduated from Yale in 1973 with outstanding grades. Carson went on to medical school at the University of Michigan where he was awarded a variety of honors for his clinical work. Within a year of Carson's appointment at John Hopkins he faces one of the most difficult surgeries of his life. The girl's name was Maranda. She was having about one hundred seizures a day. Carson had no way of knowing the influence she would have over his career. It was such a difficult procedure that it rewarded Carson world fame. He performed his first hemispherectomy. A hemispherectomy is a complicated surgical procedure on the brain for the treatment of traumatic epilepsy.

Activities:

- Students will watch "Gifted Hands: The Ben Carson Story" video from Zondervan.
- Students will play the game "Operation".
- Students will draw, color and label human brain parts.
- Students will meet Dr. Ben Carson in person.

Lesson Plan I

Objectives:

- Students will work in pairs to write statements and questions about personal survival issues.
- Students will summarize information recorded during this session

Materials:

- Pencils
- Paper

Anticipatory Set:

- Students will be asked to think with their eyes closed about something they have survived in their life. (Students should be asked not to talk throughout this survival branching exercise. As the students are thinking with their eyes closed the teacher passes out paper for the next segment.)

Survival Branching Exercise

1. No talking is allowed during this exercise. All communication must be done in writing.
2. Students are to write a sentence about something they have survived. (Something that they would not mind sharing with another student.)
3. Students exchange papers with their partner once their sentence is complete.
4. Students write inquiring questions on their partner's paper to find out more details about what their partner survived. (Students should refrain from asking yes or no questions.)
5. Students keep exchanging papers with their partner in this fashion for about twenty minutes.
6. Students are to write a summary of their partner's survival story information. They can check with their partner at this time to make sure their summary is accurate, making the necessary adjustments. (Students should be given ten minutes to complete summaries.)

Closure:

- Students who feel comfortable will read the summary their partner wrote of them to the class. Teacher will make comments, stressing to importance of not giving up in tough situations. (Students may use their survival stories as memorials to help them survive other difficulties.)

Assessment:

- Assessment will take place through teacher observation.

Lesson Plan II

Objectives:

- Students will create their own survival storybooks.
- Students will read their survival storybooks to other classes.

Materials:

- Construction paper
- Paint
- Color Markers
- Scissors
- Book covers
- Computers
- Stapler
- Yarn
- Glue
- Sprinkles
- Letter tracers

Anticipatory Set:

Teacher will show students examples of storybooks students have created. Teacher will encourage students to be creative and sincere in creating their survival storybooks. (Students do not necessarily have to write their books about themselves. They can interview a relative or a friend if they feel more comfortable doing that.)

Guided Instruction:

- Students will receive a handout stating the guidelines for the survival storybook.
- Students will write a first and second draft before creating their survival books.

The handout will display the following information:

1. Each book must have a creative cover with the title of the book and the author's name. (10 points)
2. Each book must consist of at least 10 pages. (20 points)
3. Each book must consist of at least 500 words. (30 points)
4. The words to the story must be typed on a computer. (10 points)
5. Each book should contain 4 illustrations inside. (20 points)
6. Students will read their stories to other classes (10 points)

Closure:

- Teacher will tell each student what he liked about his or her book.

Assessment:

- Students will be assessed according to the guidelines of the lesson.

Lesson Plan III

Objectives:

- Students will select and read one of the four classroom survival books.
- Students will write a book report on the survival book they have read.

Materials:

- Indian Captive by Lois Lensky
- Scorpions by Walter Dean Myers
- Black Boy by Richard Wright
- Gifted Hands by Dr. Ben Carson
- Pencil and paper
- Computers
- Book report covers

Anticipatory Set:

The survival books will be displayed on a table for students to examine and select. I will answer any questions the students may have about the books. Black Boy by Richard Wright will probably be the most difficult for the students to read. It also has many more pages than the other books. I would present two options for students who want to read this book: 1) Students would be given extra credit points for reading the whole book.

2) Students can read the first seven chapters of the book and then do a book report. Hopefully, after six chapters, the students will want to finish reading the book.

The students will follow the following guidelines to complete their survival book reports:

Format (15 points)

1. Book report must have a cover
2. Student's name should be located on the upper right hand corner of the cover
3. All book reports must be typed.
4. The title of the book and the author's name should be located in the center of the cover.

Setting (10 points)

1. Discuss the time, place and mood of the survival story.

Plot (25 points)

1. Write a summary of what happens in the story. Focus on the action contained in the story as you write. How did the child survive?

Character Analysis (25 points)

1. Identify the protagonist(s) and the antagonist(s) in the story.
2. Explain who each major character is and their relationship to each other.
3. Choose two characters and discuss them in depth.

Theme (10 points)

1. Discuss the theme of the story.
2. Relate the survival story theme to everyday life.

Evaluation (15 points)

1. Write a paragraph of at least 5 sentences describing why you would or would not recommend the book.

Upon completion of their book reports students will be encouraged to read them in front of the class. Students will be able to analyze and discuss what others have written on the same book.

Evaluation:

Teacher will use a rubric utilizing the point system displayed above. Students who read the whole book of Black Boy will receive an additional 10 points to their grade.

Lesson Plan IV

Objectives:

- Students will create murals depicting survival story information.

Materials:

- Paint
- Color markers
- Paper
- Scissors
- Glue
- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Camera

Anticipatory Set:

The teacher will ask the class to describe what a mural is. Teacher will show the class pictures of murals to help their understanding. Teacher will encourage students to be very creative and to work as a team.

- Students will work in two large groups to create one large survival story mural.
- This mural will reflect what they have accomplished or learned as a result of the survival story unit.
- There is no set way for the students to design the mural.
- Teacher will take pictures of the students as they work on the mural.
- Students will hang their survival mural outside the classroom for people to view.
- Students will speak to the local TV station about the mural and their survival story knowledge.

Indian Captive Bibliography

The following selections were located in the bibliography section of the book *Indian Captive* :

Curtin, Jeremiah-Historical Collections of Ohio, 1902

Parker, Arthur C. - Analytical Study of Seneca Indians, 1926.

----- -----Life of Ely S. Parker, 1919

----- -----Seneca Myths and Folk Tales, 1923

Phelps, Martha Bennet-Frances Slocum, The Lost Sister of Wyoming, 1916.

Quaife, Milo Milton (Editor)-The Indian Captivity of O. M. Spencer, 1925.

Seaver, James Everett, M.D.-Life of Mary Jemison, 22nd edition, American Scenic & Historic Preservation Society, N.Y., 1925.

Severance, F.H.-Gilbert Captivities, 1904.

Tome, Philip-Thirty Years a Hunter, 1854.

N.Y. State Hist. Ass'n Pub.-History of the State of New York, N.Y., 1933.

Buffalo Historical Society Publication Volume VI.-The Life of Horatio Jones. By Geo. H. Harris. Buffalo, N.Y., 1903.

Standard works on the American Indian life; publications of Buffalo Historical Society; Rochester Historical Society; New York State Museum Bulletins

Captivity stories of New England and the Middle West.

Student Bibliography:

The Great Gilly Hopkins by Katherine Paterson Published: New York: Crowell, c1978 This is the story of a spunky 11 year-old girl who spends her life going from foster home to foster home.

Maniac Magee by Jerry Spinelli Published: Boston: Little, Brown, c1990. This is the story of a kid who losses both of his parents in a car accident. Not being able to tolerate his aunt and uncle, he decides it better for him to survive on his own.

Julie of the Wolves by Jean Craighead George HarperCollins Publishers Inc., c1972 This is a story of how a young girl survives in an Alaskan wilderness.

Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry by Mildred D. Taylor Published in Puffin Books, 1991 A black family demonstrate unity and courage as the confront Southern racism during the Depression.

Teacher Bibliography:

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Edwards, Audrey. *Children of the Dream: The Psychology of Black Success* , 1994.

Fraser, George. *Success Runs In Our Race* . Morrow, 1994.

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Hopson, Darlene. *Different and Wonderful: Raising Black Children In A Race Conscious Society* . Prentice Hall, 1990.

Powell, Colin. *My American Journey* , Random House, 1995.

Vauzant, Iyanla. *Value In The Valley* . Simon and Schuster, 1995.

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