



Yale-New Haven
Teachers Institute®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2008 Volume III: Pride of Place: New Haven Material and Visual Culture

Breaking Down Fences -- Revealing The Past

Guide for Curriculum Unit 08.03.03
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Young learners take an adventurous look at New Haven history through material culture in the form of fences. This interactive journey will help students learn that different types of fences were not only used as utilitarian objects to delineate agricultural zones or articulate property lines but also as implements that structured class relationships.

Students will use an inquiry research-based form of discovery: How do fences and gates speak to the history of New Haven? How far back can they be traced? For what purposes were they made, and how did their creation impact the New Haven community? What resources and types of labor were used to create them? Who contributed to their creation, and how were they crafted? Are cultural and socio-economic diversity in any way reflected in these functional objects? Can this look at material culture be carried over into other communities? These questions and more will be explored and evaluated in this eight-week curriculum unit study. Several excursions to New Haven landmarks are incorporated into the unit. Because of the interactive nature of this unit study coupled with CMT prep and follow-up final exams, implementation between April and June is strongly recommended.

In keeping with the literacy focus of our school district and the different modalities with which children learn, the unit concludes with student creations of a three-dimensional fence design, accompanied by a historical fiction journal-writing piece highlighting how and why the fence was created. Through this interactive experience, students will reinforce and internalize their understanding of material culture as it pertains to community, culture, and New Haven history!

(Developed for Social Studies and Language Arts, grade 3; recommended for Social Studies and Language Arts, grades 3-6, with additional research component through grade 8)

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