



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
2014 Volume II: Exploring Community through Ethnographic Nonfiction, Fiction, and Film

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## **Where Are You From? Who Will You Become?**

Curriculum Unit 14.02.04  
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### **Introduction to the Unit**

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What is a community? Who makes up a community? What do you contribute to the community that you are a member of? Can you be a member of more than one community? These are all essential questions to ask a class full of students who do not have a sense of identity and lack an understanding of who or what they will become in the future. "Community means where you live" said an eight year old third grader. "We live in the New Haven community" said another student in response to my question: What is a community? When you ask twenty seven third graders about community, almost everyone thinks about a location and where you live in a town. They acknowledge that a community has people living together; however they cannot tell you what it takes to be a part of a community or what it takes to build a sense of community. My students know that they live in the "Hill" or "Ville" sections of New Haven and that these different communities do not typically get along with each other. This is the main reason why I set out to gather information on the communities that my students are a part of and to provide my students with an alternative outlook on who or what they are capable of becoming.

Young children in the inner city are exposed to many of the negative factors of community including drugs and violence. But they are often not exposed to the beautiful structures, community helpers or the endless possibilities to transform the community into a better place to grow up in. As a teacher, and as a New Haven native, I feel it is my responsibility to enable and encourage my students to gather information about where they are from and use this knowledge to guide their decisions about their contributions to the community from which they came. In order to prepare my students to contribute in a positive way to their community and feel a sense of connection with others, I will provide them with the history, landmarks and demographics of their community. This unit will engage students in meaningful conversation and action planning in an effort to build upstanding citizens and active learners from young students who are normally combative, defensive and disruptive in school.

Within the past four years that I have been teaching, the Social Studies and Character Education curriculum has been lacking substance and failing to appreciate a very important key factor in education, the social capacity of the students. There are so many disruptions in the inner city classroom because students do not know who they are and they do not appreciate each other's differences. Students in inner city classrooms are more likely to argue and fight and cause trouble in the school than those students in suburban schools. There

are more suspensions and disciplinary actions against students from demographic areas similar to New Haven, CT where I teach than more affluent towns across the state. To add to this, students do not know what resources are available for them in their community and they think that the only way to communicate is through fights and disagreements. It is a known fact that when in a learning environment, students score higher and achieve more when they are comfortable and being friendly to each other. This unit will build a bridge between the classroom and the community and allow teachers to teach their students about where they come from and allow the students to decide where they are going to advance to in the future.

Through this unit, my students will be engaged in activities that include "real life" interactions and inquiries within the community. In turn, students will retain the new information in order to make connections to the texts we share in class. My experiences in the inner city classroom have allowed me to realize that although I am responsible for my students' learning, there is a barrier that many of them face on a daily basis that is detrimental to their learning. Often, students' interactions with other children can determine how well the teacher can get their teaching points across to the students and vice versa. When students cannot verbally agree or agree to disagree, it causes friction and discomfort. The Common Core State Standards push for student discourse and conversations among peers to solve problems together. When teaching this unit, students will be held to their best behavior as the teacher adheres to the Common Core State Standards. This unit will promote higher level conversation between the students in school and in their community. Think, pair, share and "turn and talk" will constantly contribute to pushing the students to think more deeply about topics that are frequently discarded or taken for granted.

Initially, I set out to find why young students in the inner city public school systems lack confidence in themselves and respect for others, hand in hand. My questions were: Why can't my students say nice things to each other or about each other? Also, why do we teachers spend so much educational time trying to teach students how to work together? In order to learn together and ultimately live together in the community they share, students need to be engaged in this "research." Students in my class, and many others, lack prior knowledge of the history and meaning of community. They do not see what they can learn from each other and their surroundings to become upstanding citizens. They do not know what it means to be an upstanding citizen. They do not believe in themselves because of the mean things their peers might say or do to them. In many cases, the siblings and family members contribute to the negative interactions that damage the students' self-esteem. This causes students to fight and combat everything that is different from what they know. I wondered what I could do to help my students over these hurdles and in what ways could literature and film help me do this.

I began my research online, trying to find ways to expose my students to the past history of the community where our school is located. I wanted my students to know where they are and what it takes to be a part of a community. I found old news reports and movie titles that relate to this small yet divided community we live in. It seems that the smaller the community is, the more diverse it is and the more differences arise in response to that, as communities that are smaller have more power struggles and the need for more organized and strict policies to maintain the order. These assumptions are based on my own past experiences and prior knowledge. This unit is meant to set students up for success and empower them to take a positive role in the communities that they are a part of.

In my research, I looked for ways to expose students to the landmarks and special traits about the Hill area, whether it be the pharmacy, post office or community park. I found activities that are Common Core aligned that would promote community building and maintaining the community that has been built already as well as brainstorming ideas and ways to contribute to the community now and later in life, including community

service, going green and even growing up to get community helper jobs and contributing that way. The title of this unit suggests that the community we live in stands for something and that it is our responsibility to give back to the community for all that has been given and built for us. Students will converse more than ever about similarities and differences among themselves. They will discuss community structures and the things necessary to build a community. They will also address ways to improve the community and hopes and dreams for the community in the future. My goal is to bring young people together to build unity while instilling in them the value of being kind and helpful to one another so that teachers can teach more effective lessons without unnecessary disruptions from students. Students will be proud of who they are and what they contribute to the community even if they haven't seen it manifested yet.

This interdisciplinary curriculum unit will incorporate reading, writing, math, art as well as science as students work together to strengthen the community that they are part of. Students research what we can find in our community and who/ what is important in our community. They will find what the standards and expectations are in different communities and we look closely and carefully at the landmarks and institutions that make our community what it is, including but not limited to institutions such as schools, grocery stores, hospitals and substations. This unit best serves students from kindergarten through fifth grade and it can be adapted to various types of community and classroom backgrounds.

My unit is divided into four sections:

Section I: My Family is a Community

Section II: My Neighborhood is a Community

Section III: My School is a Community

Section IV: My Contributions to my Community

## Content Objectives

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### Reading

To ask and answer questions about key details in a text.

Students will be able to compare and contrast the experiences they encounter in various community environments.

To be able to use informational text features to better understand content.

### Writing

To write expository texts about the community we live in.

To apply for a job to serve as a community helper in our community.

To be able to draw and label a map of the community that we live in and include all major landmarks.

## **Research**

To be able to participate in shared research and writing projects about community helpers.

To generate engaging research questions in order to conduct and complete interviews.

To distinguish between fact and fiction when conducting research.

To evaluate multiple sources of information in order to answer a question.

## **Teaching Strategies**

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To use numerous sources to conduct research about the Hill community.

To compare and contrast two different community helpers using a Venn Diagram.

To use and label a map to better visualize the structures that define and outline the Hill community.

To activate prior knowledge by engaging and discussing the term and idea of community.

To formulate a list of questions prior to and during a shared reading and writing period about the Hill community.

To foster self-reflection through active reading and listening while conducting interviews and research.

To think, pair and share ideas and information gathered regarding the community and families.

To become an advocate for the community by informing others at school about ways to create, maintain and strengthen the community we live in.

## **Community**

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### **Section I: My Family is a Community**

A community is a group of people that live in the same place or have a particular characteristic in common. Membership in a community often results in shared common attitudes, interests and goals. Based on this definition, it is possible to be a member of numerous communities and to contribute to or take away from them in various ways. Most people do not consider themselves to be a part of numerous communities and often there is only a verbal association with the community in which we live. My students need to understand that the possibility of community is everywhere. This unit will inform my third graders about the different communities that exist and the ways to be an active member of those communities. In a family, everyone plays roles that are necessary for the family to function. Different family roles warrant different behaviors and symbolize variety in the household that spills over into the community and schools and even the workplace in the future. There are standards and expectations that have been set for people who live together. Students should be encouraged to think about what values make families work and what it takes to be a part of the family community. For example, the adults go to work and pay the bills in a household. It is known that siblings protect each other and provide companionship for each other.

The different relationships and discussions that happen in households are the stepping stones for what happens outside of the home in the neighborhood, schools, and classroom. The interactions that students have with their parents and siblings reflect directly on the interactions they have everywhere else. The ways that children are treated in the household is usually how they will treat their peers and teachers in the school setting. When it comes to the family community, the way that children play with their siblings will result in the way that they play with their classmates. If there are opportunities to argue and bicker at home when the parents are not present or not engaged in their lives, the same behaviors transfer into the classroom. When teaching the first lesson of the unit, students will be conducting family member interviews to find examples of community and positive interactions that happen in households.

## **Section II: My Neighborhood is a Community**

When a person is asked about their community, the first thing that comes to mind is the place they live and the people that live nearby. More often than others, people can identify themselves as members of a neighborhood community where they live rather than where they spend time or work. The same goes for young children in school. They do not recognize outside institutions or groups as communities and unfortunately this deters them from being willing to work together with people from outside of their comfort level at home. The students that I teach are from the Hill area, which has the reputation of being the poorest and most dangerous in the city. Located between Ella Grasso Boulevard and the train tracks, there is an area that travelers are advised to avoid and has a history of poverty and dissent. Fights in my classroom, are caused by students when it comes to differences in street addresses. As a classroom teacher in a poverty stricken area, I am exposed to conversations revolving around anger, violence, death and disrespect. As early as third grade, my students already know about all of the darks things a community has to offer. In turn, they have little respect for the people and things around us that make life beautiful.

When discussing community, the first thing that comes up in my classroom is those people who are not welcome in the community and how "bad" the community is that they live in. I feel it is my duty to address these misconceptions and to build a unit that would allow higher order thinking skills and demand more self-control from the young people who are in my class. There are so many community structures that bring us together and hold us together that students take for granted or view as unimportant entities. These community structures include the New Haven Free Public Library, the Walgreens Pharmacy, The New Haven Boys and Girls Club, Yale New Haven Hospital and the neighborhood church.

### **Community Structures**

Community structures help make a community what it is. People that live in the same community utilize the same establishments and rely on the same businesses in order to survive in the community. From sharing church space to riding the same public transportation lines, our young children share so much in common that they do not realize. This is why I grapple with trying to understand why they fight with each other so much and feel so uncomfortable with sharing their ideas, thoughts, wishes and even resources with each other. Living in such a harsh environment has caused many of my students to have trust issues and dislike each other for nonsensical reasons and differences. The community structures that help keep communities together are viewed as buildings on the street and not as shared space that helps to build communities up.

For lesson number two in this unit, a walking tour of the community will allow the teacher and students to see these places and discuss in depth the contributions that they bring to the city. This conversation would include taking careful notice of location and spacing of structures placing an emphasis on the shared spaces and mapping out the community for all students to see together. The use of a graphic organizer would allow students to visualize and conceptualize the resources available to them in their community as a "shared" experience. Discussion could include statements like "Who can tell me what this building is? Who has visited this place? What are the uses of this space? What would happen if the place was not available to us in our community? Do you share this space with your peers? What is the relationship between being able to share this space together with others but not share space respectfully in school or on the bus?" Conversation and critical thinking about these essential questions would lead students to write expository texts about the community they live in and inform their families and friends about all the positive aspects of the community.

## Community Helpers

While walking and talking about the community structures, students will be able to connect these positive structures to the community helpers that work there. Community helpers serve a great purpose in young children's lives without them ever knowing it. When students are asked what they want to be when they grow up, a common theme is that most of them want to be community helpers and they do not realize it. "I want to be a doctor" or "I want to be a police officer" are often the responses when asked about the future. Although these jobs are appealing to them, they rarely consider the question, "how will you save each other's lives and help each other out in this community if you cannot get along in the place you are growing up together or the in the classroom?" While touring the neighborhood and interacting with the community helpers, students will be able to gain an appreciation for the efforts of the workers who keep the community safe and functioning.

### Section III: My School is a Community

Now that students know what it takes to be a member of a community, the discussion can shift to the ideal that we are a part of a separate community when at school than when we are at home or in the neighborhood. There are barriers and borders that keep communities isolated from each other as well as the encounters and interactions that fuse communities together. In the school, age differences yield different jobs and duties in the building and building leaders and principals keep order and enforce the rules the same way that police officers do in the community. Compared to the neighborhood community, there are many similarities in the school building. There are class jobs for those who earn them.

### Section V: My Contribution to my Community

Now that your students know what it means to be a part of a community and they have a better idea of what it takes to maintain a community status, there is an opportunity to present the concept of contributing to the communities that they identify with. Community service can come in various shapes and sizes. Each and every person can contribute to the community; they just have to find ways that are useful and beneficial to the greater good of the others in that community. There are many ways to make the community better than it was the day before and there are many ways to give back. From helping others when they are down to cleaning up when you see a mess in the park, some community services are free and others can cost time and or money. The students need to understand that when the community is comfortable with sharing and caring for one another, the possibilities are endless for what could come of the neighborhood.

## Class Activities

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### Lesson 1- Interview

#### *Objectives*

Students will be able to participate in shared research and writing projects about community helpers. Next, the students will generate engaging research questions in order to conduct and complete community interviews. In addition, students will evaluate multiple sources of information in order to answer a question and present their findings in a creative way.

The interview lesson will allow students to research and present their new information to the class and school



on display. To start the unit, students and teachers will discuss the community and share readings about the community helpers in their community. The specific community helpers will vary depending on the community where the lesson is taught. After reading about community helpers and the ways that they help a community run smoothly, students can help form a list of helpers in the community that include jobs like a pharmacist, police officer, fire fighter, librarian etc. Students will then work in small groups assigned to one of the listed jobs to come up with questions to ask that specific helper. To get creative, students can have a flip notebook or a clipboard and pen to gather information about the community helper they are researching.

Once the questions are formulated, students will conduct interviews with the workers around their neighborhood and take extensive notes to use for their reports. Once the information is gathered, students will decide how to present the materials and some ways can be a powerpoint, a video, a poster, or even a diorama. This final product can be a homework assignment or a week long assignment that is edited and revised and peer reviewed in the classroom.

To close out this lesson, students can fill out a Venn diagram for two different community helpers that they learned about through this lesson. The Venn diagram will help hold students accountable for what they learned from their peers. This is also a great opportunity to assess what students may need clarification or further explanation when it comes to the community and the people that help make it what it is.

## **Lesson 2- Mapping it all Out**

### *Objectives*

Students will increase familiarity with local street names as well as locate their own homes and street names through this lesson. Students will be able to draw and label a map of the community that we live in and include all major landmarks. Finally, students will write an expository piece to share their findings from the neighborhood tour with their classmates and the school.

The map lesson will allow students to walk their neighborhood with their teacher and show their expertise in the area that they live as well as bond with their peers and teachers outside of the classroom. Students will work together to read signage and labels around the neighborhood and then they will work together to draw and label a mural-sized map to display in the school. The walk will help build a sense of community among the students as they talk about the places and share where they like to play/hide out, the restaurants they like to frequent and even the library they share in the community. Students will share their wealth of knowledge gathered from the community helper interviews as the landmarks and buildings are observed and discussed.

The map will be colored and labeled by all the students and they will have to agree on where the different places are located prior to the official naming. There will be various ways to assess if students are able to identify the streets, landmarks and pillars of the community. Ways to assess students include however are not limited to: have students respond to a writing prompt about what makes up there outside of school community, have students fill in an empty map or have students complete a quick quiz related to the sights seen on the tour of the area.

## **Lesson 3- Job Applications**

### *Objectives*

Students will be able to identify the necessary skills for class jobs as they did for the community helpers.

Students will be able to apply for a job to serve as a community helper in our classroom community. Students will improve their speaking and listening skills while applying and interviewing for the class job of their choice. Students will practice respectfully disagreeing with one another without rude remarks or disruptive behavior. (Teachers should pay close attention to complaining or teasing and address it swiftly as this is a community building unit that promotes the differences of opinion as a learning agent to strengthen the classroom community.)

Once the students have a sense of what it takes to to be identified as a community and what landmarks and buildings make up a community, they will be able to come up with the jobs in the classroom and job descriptions for each of them. Students will then be able to apply for the jobs in the classroom. Students would have to explain what job they would do best and why they believe so. The other students in the classroom would either agree or disagree if the student would be a good fit for the position they are applying for. There could be a class vote or a "silent" selection of the class community workers. After "interviewing" and assigning the jobs, the new workers could be posted in the classroom. A closing conversation could be conducted about how the community runs best when we all live or work together in a positive manner. The discussion should also include what would happen if the community we live in did not have one or more of the workers and how we all play a role in the community that other people rely and depend on.

## **Classroom Materials**

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In order to teach the unit you will need to have various texts about community helpers, community structures and the impacts that the workforce may have on that specific community. The students would really benefit from having a social studies section in the library that they can use for reference in their research. In order to teach this unit, you will need to have poster paper and materials for students to use to present their research, especially if they do not have the means to purchase items for the homework assignment. Students may need a clipboard or notepad and pen to gather interview questions and play a role of a news reporter, gathering information about the community. It would also be useful to have copies of blank Venn diagram and map layout for the lessons that require an exit ticket.

## **Appendix: Implementing District Standards**

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Upon completion of this unit, students will be exposed to the following Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. In literacy/ reading this unit will encourage students to ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text and determine the main idea of a text while recounting the key details. Next they will explain how the details support the main idea of the texts we share. In literacy/ writing, students will write informative/ explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly. As the students conduct their short research projects that build on the knowledge they have about community, they will specifically write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences. Also, students will recall information from experiences or gather information from print and digital sources; take brief notes on sources and sort

evidence into provided categories. In literacy/ speaking and listening, students will engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher- led) with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. They will ask questions to check for understanding of information presented, stay on topic and link their comments to the remarks of others. Therefore, students will determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

## Student Bibliography

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Aylmore, Angela. *We Work at the Hospital*. Chicago, Ill.: Heinmann Library, 2006. An easy read with non-fiction text features and a wealth of information on the community helpers that work in the hospital. Chapters include information about the doctor, nurse, uniforms and even the special tools used by hospital workers.

Carr, Aaron. *The hospital*. New York: AV2 by Weigl, 2014. This book shares with readers why the hospital is an important part of the neighborhood we live in. This is an easy reader that provides vivid photographs and descriptions of the hospital.

Carr, Aaron. *The library*. New York: AV2 by Weigl, 2014. A story from the My Neighborhood series that provides the reader with non-fiction text features while describing the key functions and aspects of the library. An easy read for elementary learners.

Carr, Aaron. *The school*. New York: AV2 by Weigl, 2014.

Carr, Aaron. *The police station*. New York: AV2 by Weigl, 2014.

Flanagan, Alice K., and Christine Osinski. *Ms. Davison, Our Librarian*. New York: Children's Press, 1996.

Kallen, Stuart A.. *The police station*. Minneapolis, Minn.: ABDO & Daughters, 1997. This story is like taking a field trip to the police station. Young readers can find an index and glossary that can help them with all of the vocabulary related to the police station.

Liebman, Daniel. *I want to be a police officer*. Willowdale, Ont.: Firefly Books, 2000.

Ready, Dee, and Charles Sneiderman. *Doctors*. Mankato, MN: Bridgestone Books, 1997. A community helpers edition based on a day in the life of doctors. This story will give readers plenty of information about how the doctor contributes to the community and how the doctor is prepared to do his job and save lives.

Ready, Dee. *Nurses*. Mankato, Minn.: Bridgestone Books, 1997.

## Teacher Bibliography

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Adamson, Heather. *A Day in the Life of a Police Officer*. Mankato, Minn.: Capstone Press, 2004.

Book, Inc. *Community Helpers*. Chicago: World Book, 2011. A very colorful and interactive text about all of the community helpers in most cities. Children can learn about teachers, police officers, firefighters, and other people that work in their community. This book

includes checks for understanding questions, new vocabulary words and even puzzles to solve that keep the reader engaged in the text.

Garza, Carmen Lomas, Harriet Rohmer, and David Schechter. *In my family*. San Francisco, Calif.: Children's Book Press/Libros Para Niños, 1996. A beautifully illustrated story about a Mexican American family and their love for their community. This story was written in English and Spanish on every page. This is a great connection for my Spanish American students in my classroom that experience similar lifestyles.

Greene, Carol. *Firefighters fight fires*. Plymouth, Minn: Child's World, 1996. A book from a series of non-fiction texts about community helpers. This text hones in on the daily duties of firefighters and how they keep the community safe. There are excellent photographs that show firsthand what firefighters do and where they go.

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