



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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## **Discovering Community, Discovering Ourselves**

Curriculum Unit 14.02.06  
by Susan Hansen

### **Introduction**

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Strolling along one spring morning on the Yale University campus one of my third graders blurted out, "Miss, I don't see anyone here that looks like me." This very profound statement opened my eyes and made me wonder how I could instill the importance and promise that a college education would have on the lives of my predominately Latino inner-city students. Many of the students from my school, which serves neighborhood families, have limited experiences outside of the direct community in which they live. Our yearly visit to the Yale University campus is implemented in order to support the goals of The New Haven Promise Scholarship Program. The New Haven Promise Scholarship Program covers full tuition at public colleges or universities in Connecticut for New Haven Public School students who meet academic and behavior requirements. It was obvious to me that in order for my students to fully understand the purpose of our yearly visit to a college campus that they would have to visualize themselves as future members of a community of higher learners. In order for that to take place my students will need to understand the concept of community and how it feels to be a part of a community in which they feel valued and can make vital contributions.

The goal of my unit is to use children's literature as a springboard to engage my students in the exploration and analysis of the many communities we encounter and participate within our classroom, our city, and our world. In our exploration of the concept of community students will discover how their own unique qualities enrich and meld them as a member of a community. They will also learn how the awareness of belonging to a variety of communities can create a sense of self-worth and open many opportunities for themselves. Students will also learn how our differences can be used to enhance communities as opposed to isolate us. By the end of the unit students should understand that community is not just a fixed place or location but more of a set of human interactions, beliefs, values, or needs which bring them together with others with a common goal or understanding in mind. As our society becomes more advanced technologically and expands globally, the ability to successfully navigate within a wide variety of communities both locally and internationally will be detrimental for our 21<sup>st</sup> Century learners.

I am a dual language English component elementary teacher at Christopher Columbus Family Academy in New Haven Connecticut. The goal of my school is for students to become bilingual in English and Spanish with meeting academic standards. I have designed this unit for my predominately English Language Learner Latino students in order to bring about active engagement in the discovery of the many communities they are

currently a part of now and to widen the scope of their future as life-long learners and citizens in a global world. While this unit is designed for second grade students in an urban environment it is also appropriate and easily adaptable for students from suburban or rural environments at any other primary or intermediate level.

## Rationale

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The impetus for this unit came from an observation I made of one of my students and his sibling. One afternoon I observed a conversation between two students from my school and an adult who was manning The Dream Booth at an arts festival outside of our school. The adult was trying to persuade the two students to create a picture about their dreams. One of the students responded as she looked up at the sky and stated that she had nothing to draw because she had no dreams. Her brother quickly added on that he also did not have any dreams. At that moment I realized the impact that isolation can have on our inner city minority students and their futures. I questioned how I could help my students make connections to the world around them in order to create dreams which would eventually turn to reachable goals. My goal for this unit is to expose my students to the many communities they belong to now and the communities they can belong to in the future as they attend college. When they look up at the sky I want my students to see the limitless possibilities that lie ahead.

Many children who attend my school live very isolated lives due to poverty. Our school offers consistency and safety in their daily lives. Our students have limited resources and opportunities to interact outside of their neighborhood communities. This unit was designed in order to teach my students the wide variety of communities they already belong. They will also learn how to contribute to a community in order to promote a sense of self-worth and develop confidence as they become aware of their unique qualities. For example, our students have the unique quality of being bilingual. They belong to both an English speaking and a Spanish speaking community which can open many doors for them both socially and academically. As students progress through the unit, they will expand their understanding of the wide variety of communities they are involved with and see themselves as viable citizens and community members.

This unit was also designed to support the English language Learner develop content area vocabulary appropriate for the communities they belong. As students have practice speaking, reading, listening and writing in many settings for a variety of purposes as community members they will develop confidence in taking risks in their learning and in new experiences.

## Content Objectives

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The students will be able to develop a sense of identity of their unique roles and how they fit in as a learner, friend, and citizen.

The students will be able to understand how both their unique qualities and commonalities can contribute to communities in which they take part.

The students will be able to grasp the concept of community as being an abstract concept of ideas which bring people together for a common cause or purpose.

The students will be able to identify evidence of community in their classroom, city, and the world.

The students will be able to interact with community members in order to meet and address common goals.

The students will be able to view themselves as vital individuals who can impact their school, community, and world.

## Teaching Strategies

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Use of children's literature in order to spur interest and as a springboard for rich discussions.

Use of experiential learning in order to make learning more meaningful and relevant.

Use of graphic organizers to support needs of English Language Learners.

Use of heterogeneous small group interactions in order to support dominate and non-dominate language learners.

Use of problem-based learning in order to promote active engagement and collaborative interactions between peers.

Use of opportunities for structured student talk experiences in order for students to focus on productive verbal exchanges.

Use of content vocabulary in order to develop speaking and writing skills.

## Description of each unit section and a sample lesson for each section

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### Section 1: The Classroom Community

As children grow, the school community is a vital arena for them to develop a sense of identity and a sense of how they fit in the world around them. Aside from their home and their families, school is the first community they belong to as individuals. As learners, children have more success when they feel a part of the classroom community. At the beginning of the year instead of students arriving to a bright and shiny classroom I purposely leave unpacked boxes and bare walls. I do this with the intention of having my new students help me set up the classroom and to help share in the decision making of where things should be set up and placed. This is our first step in creating our classroom community in our room. In order for students to truly feel valued and willing to take risks in a new environment amid many new faces and changes, they must have a sense of ownership. The sense of ownership will make students feel valued in their individual roles as they contribute to the whole group as a community of learners.

Oftentimes when young children are asked to explain what a community means to them, they will respond by naming a locality such as a firehouse or the library. For the first section of this unit the objective is for students to grasp the concept of community as a group of individuals who come together by means of a common interest, cause, belief, etc. In order to establish this concept discussions need to begin with questions such as, "What is a community?" and "How does it feel to be a part of a community?" Students should come to an understanding of the role and or roles they play as a part of a community within the classroom not only as learners but as a friend as well. Through discussions, surveys, and projects students will learn that not everyone is alike, however, there are times that we create community based on our interests, beliefs, culture, etc. which can bring us together with people from different backgrounds and experiences. This section of my unit uses two picture books, *The Sandwich Swap* by Queen Rania Al Abdullah and *Chester's Way* by Jim Henkes read as a shared reading experience. The goal is to use the two books in order to identify and analyze evidence of community and how it brings the characters together.

## Classroom Community Lesson Sample

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This lesson is the culminating activity after the shared reading and analysis of community from *The Sandwich Swap* and *Chester's Way*.

### Story Synopsis

**The Sandwich Swap:** This story is about two best friends named Lily and Salma who are from two different cultures. Each day both Lily and Salma joyously do everything together until one day they let the differences in their daily sandwiches come between them. Each day Lily eats a peanut butter and Jelly sandwich while Salma eats a humus and pita sandwich. Both girls feel sorry for one another for having to eat such yucky sandwiches and finally Lily tells Salma how she feels. This creates a division in their friendship and soon their classmates join in and take sides. The story ends with both girls coming together and realizing what a big mess they created over a difference. In the end they approach the school principal and work out a plan to bring their school community together for a cultural food party.

**Chester's Way:** Chester and Wilson are best friends and very much alike. Day in and day out they enjoy doing the very same things. A new and very unique girl named Lily moves into their neighborhood and tries many times to become their friend to no avail until she becomes useful to them by saving both Chester and Wilson from a group of bullies with her unique qualities as a weapon. The two boys finally accept Lily into their group and they all enjoy doing things together and soon discover that despite their differences they have much more in common.

### Objectives

The students will be able to identify character traits displayed by each character in both *The Sandwich Swap* and *Chester's Way* in order to accept differences and to create community.

The students will identify their own personal traits which depict belonging to a variety of communities in order to create a classroom community gallery.

1. Review the previously read storyline of *The Sandwich Swap* and *Chester's Way* and discuss each character's

personality traits and interests. Children may need support identifying specific traits. Model with a think aloud of character traits you noticed in the books. For example, since both Salma and Lily like to create art and would want to be described as artistic or as artists. You would then explain how they could belong to an art community. Each character will have many character traits which will put them in a variety of communities based on their actions in each book. Allow students to think-pair-share their ideas for several minutes in order to generate ideas. Guide the discussion and record information on the chart. Use the charts below to display the traits and the community for each trait.

Character Traits and Community Membership The Sandwich Swap			
Salma		Lily	
Trait	Community Membership	Trait	Community Membership

Character Traits and Community Membership Chester's Way					
Chester		Wilson		Lily	
Trait	Community Membership	Trait	Community Membership	Trait	Community Membership

2. Discuss findings on the chart and lead the students to the understanding that we all belong to many communities. Point out how being a part of many communities opens us up for more friends and more opportunities for support from others. Have students discuss which characters they connect with based on the character traits and explain which communities they would belong to based on the chart created.

3. For a culminating activity of the lesson, give each student a blank paper doll image to decorate a unique image which represents themselves by using a wide variety of art materials and supplies as such as buttons, yarn, fabric, markers, etc. Once students have completed their image have them glue their paper doll image in the center of large construction paper and label with at least 6 character traits that represent their interests, heritage, and talents. Tell students to leave room because they may want to add to it throughout the year.

4. Post all images on a large bulletin board which will serve as a visual display to compare themselves to their classmates. This display will serve students in order to develop relationships based on common interests, experiences, and backgrounds. This bulletin board can be referred to and added to throughout the year.

### **Extensions**

Allow time for students to meet in common groups of their choice periodically to share and discuss ideas based on the specific community group. Students could create projects or provide support to one another. These scheduled interactions will support the development of content based vocabulary in an authentic environment. Students should be encouraged to alternate their groups in order to increase exposure to many communities. This would be a great activity for recess during inclement of weather or at the end of the day.

In order to celebrate diversity and bring the classroom community together, plan a cultural food festival for students and their families. Since I have students representing many Latino cultures who share one language, I would have a rice and beans party in order to expose students to the many recipes and varieties of two common ingredients which bring us together as a community.

At the end of the year have students create new paper doll images of themselves in order to compare how they have change over the year. Students can use their comparisons to write about the communities they belonged to throughout the year.

## **Section 2: The City of New Haven Community (or any community)**

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The objective of this section is for students to find evidence of different communities in two different sections of our city. This section begins with the read aloud of the picture book *Around Town* by Chris Soenpiet. Students will take two separate walking tours. One of the walking tours will take place in our immediate neighborhood and the other walking tour will take place in the Yale/New Haven neighborhood in order to conduct two ethnographic studies. Both areas chosen for the walking tours are very different from one another with respect to it purposes and the population it serves. In order to create relevance, these walking tours should be taken within the same week. Students will use their observations from both tours to compare and contrast using a class generated checklist. Once students have completed both tours they will have a deeper sense of community as a concept.

### **City Section Lesson Sample**

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This lesson should be done prior to walking tours. *Around Town* is a book about a child's first visit to New York City. It describes and illustrates the many sites, diverse cultures, found not only in New York City but in any large city across the country.

#### **Objective**

Students will identify and note evidence of community and its purpose observed in the book *Around Town* in

order to create a check list for our walking tour.

1. Pre-reading: Tell students that you will read aloud the book *Around Town* which is about a place very similar to New Haven. Ask volunteers to share what we might read and see in the book. Tell students that they are going to be looking for evidence of community in the illustrations and the text.

2. Read Aloud: While reading stop periodically and "think aloud" for the students in order to model evidence of community that you noticed. Explain its purpose and the type of people who might engage within that community. Be sure to focus on the people and purpose of the spaces and places observed. For example, you might want to point out the tall office buildings and suggest that business people such as bankers and office workers might use this place to conduct business. Point out that the people who work in this building would be considered as part of the professional community. While you are thinking aloud refer to the sentence stems that you have written on the board:

I notice evidence of a \_\_\_\_\_ community.

The purpose of this community is \_\_\_\_\_.

People who are part of this community might be \_\_\_\_\_.

Continue giving 2 or more examples.

3. Complete the rest of the book and stop periodically to have the student's think-pair-share using the sentence stems. The sentence stems serve as a scaffold and will help the English Language Learners form their ideas. Allow students to take turns sharing their thoughts and ideas to the whole group. While students share their ideas jot down their comments using their key words on chart paper.

4. Have students break into small groups to complete a matrix based on evidence of community observed in the book, *Around Town*. It would be helpful to have several copies of *Around Town* for each group to refer to as they complete their work. Each group should be formed into heterogeneously based on ability and language levels.

<u><b>Around Town</b></u>		
<b>Evidence of Community</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>People</b>

5. Discuss the up-coming walking tours and explain that a checklist will need to be made to help us observe evidence of community. Have students brainstorm a list of questions to note evidence of community which will be listed on a chart. Once students have listed questions and share them with the class, break down the list to 10-12 questions to be included in the checklist.

## Extensions

Bring along disposable cameras for students to take photos of evidence of community and write descriptive sentences of the community they discovered. Display photos on a bulletin board for students to compare and contrast.

Invite community members such as mayors, alderpersons or civic leaders, business owners to come and be interviewed by students. Students would use the information gathered from their questions to create a book called Our City.

Create a Venn diagram comparing the two communities toured. Use the diagram for students to discuss and/or write about similarities and differences.

## Section 3: The Global Community

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The objective of this section is for students to use their interests and talents in order to effect change in a global community. This part of the unit begins with the read aloud of Something Beautiful by Sharon Dennis Wyeth. Students will work in small cooperative problem-based learning groups in order to research a global project of their choice using the site <http://collaborate.ilearn.org>. Students will use their research to contribute to their chosen project and interact with other children from around the world using the internet. This section of the unit uses a problem-based collaborative unit format. Projects range from topics about environmental causes, human rights, bullying, animal preservation, and beyond. Students will first need to research their chosen topic to find possible solutions for the project. Students may need to create a song, skit, poetry, poster, etc. Over the course of this section the role of the teacher shifts toward facilitator as projects will vary from technological needs, student interests, and talents. In order for this section to run smoothly the use of a computer lab is highly recommended.

## Global Community Lesson Sample

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This lesson begins with the read aloud of Something Beautiful by Sharon Wyeth which is a very touching and relevant story for inner-city learners. This story is about a young girl who looks beyond the ugliness of her inner-city neighborhood in order to find beauty in her life. She spends all day walking around and asking people that she knows if they have something beautiful until she realizes the beauty she is looking for is in her heart and in her control. In the end she goes home and cleans up her front yard and experiences the feeling of empowerment.

### Objectives

Students will learn how they can have an impact on others globally through an act of volunteerism.

Students will learn to work collaboratively with project community members to reach a common goal.



1. Pre-reading: Bring in a vase of beautiful flowers or a bright painting and display them on top of a cluttered mess on a table. Ask the students to name what they see? Most students will respond to the beautiful vase of flowers or the bright painting. Ask the students who said the flowers or painting why they saw the flower or painting first. Tell the students that the girl in our book is having a hard time looking for something beautiful. Show the cover of the book and ask students to think-pair-share why they think she is having trouble. Allow students to share their thoughts and ideas and have them draw connections to their own lives.

2. Read Aloud: Read aloud the book and stop periodically to ask questions to check for understanding. Possible questions might be:

Why do you think the young girl is so determined on her quest to find something beautiful?

How would you describe the girl's feelings in the beginning of the story?

Do her feelings change throughout the story? How so?

Who did the girl make her yard beautiful for?

How do you think the girl feels after she cleaned up her yard?

What do you think the author is trying to tell us through the story?

How can we use this story to make things better in our world?

3. At the end of the story write the word philanthropy on the board. Define it for the students in kid friendly terms. Such as "a voluntary effort one takes to use their time, talent, or resources to benefit others." Explain to the class that just as a girl in the story, they also have power to impact change not just locally but around the world.

4. Using the computer overhead, display the website, <http://collaborate.ilearn.org>. Show the students several possible global projects they can join and become philanthropists. Explain that they will be interacting with others across the globe to have impact on a common cause or issue. Depending on skill level and computer access, allow students to research possible projects on their own.

5. Target about 10 projects that seem to peak the students interests. Allow students to form groups of 3 to 5 students to choose a project. In forming groups try to allow students to choose their top two projects. This will help in creating heterogeneous groups.

6. Students will then complete a plan of action form to identify their project, who and where will it have impact, resources needed, and roles of each member will perform.

Global Community Project Action Plan	
Identify the project	
Purpose/mission	
Who will the project impact	
Roles and responsibilities of each member	
Resources needed	

Closure: Each group will share the project they will take part of to the whole class. As student groups share projects record on chart paper to display in the classroom for future reference. Collect each action plan so you can help facilitate and provide resources.

### Extensions

Students could write a short summary of their project and how they made an impact on the global world. Display the summaries of their projects around a world map and indicate the location with a colorful tack. Students will have a visual display in order to understand the power they have as citizens in our school, city, and in the global world.

Students could research a concern or need for our city and enlist support from the global community and upload the project on <http://collaborate.ilearn.org>. Students could interact with contributors of their project from around the world over the duration of the project.

## Resources

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### Teacher

Canfield, Jack & Wells, Harold. 100 Ways to Enhance Self Concept in the Classroom: a handbook for teachers and parents. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc, 1976. Great book for ideas and hands-on activities to develop community in the classroom.

Dalton, Joan. Among Friends: Classrooms Where Caring and Learning Prevail California: Developmental Studies Center, 1997. This book has excellent examples for building community in the classroom.

Echevarria, Jane & Graves, Anne. Sheltered Content Instruction: Teaching English\_Language Learners with Diverse Abilities. Massachusetts: Pearson Education, 2003. This book focuses on strategies for successful implementation of Sheltered Content Instruction for English Language Learners.

Halaby, Mona. Belonging: Creating Community in the Classroom. Massachusetts: Brookline Books, 2000. This book supports the importance of building community in the classroom with case studies and practical ways to promote community.

Igoa, Cristina. The Inner World of the Immigrant Child New Jersey: Routledge, 1995. Great book for showing the perspective of

English Language Learners which includes tips on how to support emotional and academic growth.

Paloma McCaleb, Sudia. *Building a Community of Learners: Collaboration among Teachers, Students, Families and Community* New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994. This book supports ways educators can forge partnerships with their students and their families with respect of home cultures and diverse families in order to enhance learning.

## **Student**

Amsel, Sheri. *The Everything Kids Environment Book: Learn how you can help the environment by getting involved at school, at home, and at play.* Massachusetts: Adams Media, 2007. This book offers a variety of everyday activities and projects children can implement in order to positively impact our environment.

Bunting, Eve. *Our Library.* New York: Clarion Books, 2008. This book shows how library patrons come together as a community to save their beloved library from closure.

Carle, Eric. *The Very Lonely Firefly.* New York: Philomel Books, 1995. Great book for classroom community.

Cooney, Barbara. *Miss Rumphius.* New York: Viking Press, 1982. This story is about a woman who longs to make the world beautiful and spreads Lupine seeds which bloom year after year. Great book for global community.

Earth Works Group. *The New 50 Simple Things Kids Can Do to Save the Earth.* Missouri: Andrew McMeel Publishing, 2009. This book discusses environmental challenges our Earth faces and offers ideas on how kids can help out on projects ranging from preservation of natural resources to helping endangered animals.

Fleischman, Paul. *Westlandia.* Massachusetts: Candlewick Press, 1999. Interesting fantasy about a boy who uses his misfit qualities to create his own civilization.

Henkes, Jim. *Chester's Way.* New York: Mulberry Books, 1988. Great story to teach appreciation of diversity.

Pfister, Marc. *The Rainbow Fish.* New York: North-South Books, 1992. Teaches how sharing our unique gifts can build community and avoid isolation.

Polacco, Patricia. *The Junkyard Wonders.* New York: Philomel Books, 2010. Excellent book to read in order to celebrate diversity and to build classroom community. This story is very emotionally touching. Don't read without tissues!

Polacco, Patricia. *The Lemonade Club.* New York: Philomel Books, 2007. Depicts students coming together as a community to support a sick friend who feels isolated.

Rabe. Tish. *How to help the Earth-by the Lorax.* New York: Random House Children's Books, 2012. This catchy rhymed reader narrates suggestions for children on how to live green and save the environment.

Rainia, Al Abdullah. *The Sandwich Club.* New York: Disney-Hyperion Books, 2010. Great story! Demonstrates how we can overcome differences by celebrating our diversity.

Scarry, Richard. *Richard Scarry's Busy, Busy Town.* New York: Golden Book Publishing Company, 1994. This book is a great book for students to look for community in a variety of settings in a city or town.

Soentpiet, Christopher. *Around Town.* New York: Lothrop, Lee, & Shepard Books, 1994. Good book with detailed illustrations to introduce the events and attributes of a city.

Wyeth, Sharon. *Something Beautiful*. New York: Dragonfly Books, 1998. Promotes local and global community interactions.

## Appendix

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Common Core Standards for Grade Two

CC.2.R.L.3: Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges.

CC.2.R.I.9: Compare and contrast the most important points presented by two texts on the same topic.

CC.2.L.1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CC.2.R.L.1: Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.

CC.2.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.

CC.2.W.6: With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.

CC.2.W.7 Participate in shared research and writing project

CC.2.SL.1 Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about grade 2 topics and texts with peers and adults in small and larger groups.

CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

## Websites

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<http://www.50simplekids.com/>

<http://collaborate.ilearn.org>.

<http://www.kidsplanet.org/>

<http://kidworldcitizen.org/2013/02/20/35-service-projects-for-kids/>

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<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

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