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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1990 Volume II: Contemporary American Drama: Scripts and Performance

“Come-Alive” Social Studies: A Study of Culture Through Playwriting

Guide for Curriculum Unit 90.02.07

by Frances J. Sandahl

This unit is designed to use playwriting and drama to help teach 4th grade social studies. Using 4 and 5 hours a week for about 9 weeks it combines playwriting and the dramatic arts with the study of the river cultures of Ancient Egypt. The study of plays leads to improvisations based on Egyptian life and history, and progresses to writing down that improvised material. It uses the technique of the integrated day to draw in as many of the aspects of a teaching day as possible: spelling, math, reading, art, creative writing, and listening time, all are drawn into the social studies matrix during the life of the unit. Special attention is paid to the children’s projection and the growth of their knowledge of plays, playwriting, and theater arts. It also suggests ways to combine these with an intensive study of Egyptian myth, economic life, politics, history, and arts. It culminates in a performance for a school audience, and includes trips to Yale Art Gallery’s Egyptian collection, the gate at Grove Street Cemetery, and the Egyptian wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.

(Recommended for Elementary Social Studies, grade 4)

Key Words

Drama Playwriting Egypt Ancient History Egyptian

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