



Family Matters—Using Children’s Literature to Explore How Families Function

Guide for Curriculum Unit 90.05.05
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My unit uses a book and poems to encourage children to use good communications techniques in their families. A second goal is to improve reading skills. “The Shimmershine Queens,” by Camille Yarbrough, is about contemporary fifth grade black youngsters in the inner city. It helps develop appreciation for black culture and pride in one’s accomplishments. Poems, stories, and songs are incorporated in the unit. Activities include sharing photographs, guided reading and class discussion, brainstorming, role-playing, and producing a puppet show.

Topics addressed are:

Effective Communication—use of words, attitude, body language, and writing.

Recognizing Problems—alcohol and drug abuse, physical abuse, health problems, family conflicts, divorce and blended families, step parents, etc.

Resources—trusted adults such as teachers, counselors, church or Scout leaders, and doctors; hotlines, support groups, and social service agencies.

Ethnic Group—what does my culture tell me? What can I learn from ethnic groups different from my own?

Although this unit is intended for socially and emotionally maladjusted students at about fifth grade age, I can picture it being adapted for use with older students, and with those with greater academic ability. For older students perhaps other readings could be used or the same ones in more depth. More gifted students would not need the simplification of presentation. The same stimulus would evoke different issues and more sophisticated insights. Middle class white children may be more successful academically, may have different problems, but may be just as needy emotionally as my Black and Hispanic, disturbed inner-city students. Parents of any social or economic class may have problems with substance abuse of other problems which impair their effectiveness. Some well-to-do parents are guilty of neglecting their children’s emotional needs.

Even members of functional families can benefit from awareness of their interactions and of ways of improving their communication.

(Recommended for Reading and English, grades 5-6)

Key Words

Literature Family Life

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