



My Family: Gender Differences and Similarities

Curriculum Unit 99.01.04
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Introduction

Women's voices in fiction is not a topic of discussion in the primary grades, especially in Kindergarten. Exposure to literature is the truest goal for a great number of classroom teachers in New Haven. The overall lack of experience with reading is a hurdle in Kindergarten. The concept of fiction versus nonfiction also does not play a strong role in the Language Arts curriculum for the early years of education. Most Kindergarten students are steered toward simply reading stories without defining the voice of the author, especially as it pertains to the author's gender. This tendency could be due to the lack of appropriate resources or curriculum available to Kindergarten students. However, this tendency could also be due to the lack of personal understanding and comprehension of women's voices in fiction as experienced by the classroom teacher. My goal is not to "reinvent the wheel" but to make obvious the opportunities within the Language Arts curriculum that offer a gender perspective.

Kindergarten and the primary grades encourage the use of hands-on activities in the classroom curriculum. The alternative activities defined by rote-style learning further conflict with the goals of this unit. The memorization of concepts, words, letters and sounds stifles any author's voice. The only purpose of reading is for reinforcement of the concept most recently memorized. Under these circumstances, students do not have the opportunity to read for pleasure and appreciate an author's voice.

The closest parallel to hands-on activities regarding the family is the involvement of family members in the teaching of this unit. The family best known by my kindergartners is their own, that is, their parents, grandparents, siblings and other close relatives. The focus for this unit is gender differences and similarities. The gender similarities and differences are defined through the discussion of family members, their interests and habits. Planning and structuring a full-bodied, hands-on curriculum unit for the study of gender differences and similarities assists with the understanding of women's voices in fiction beyond Kindergarten. By building upon what a five- or six-year-old best understands, the complexities of voice have greater meaning in the future. I have planned and will implement many hands-on projects and discussions of gender through my unit topic, "My Family: Gender Differences and Similarities."

Curriculum

All About Me

Beginning with the current classroom curriculum "All About Me," I will complete a mini-unit on growth, development and gender differences as they can be relayed to five- and six-year olds. This mini-unit includes physical and emotional differences between boys and girls. The songs "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes" and "Did you Ever See a Lassie?" begin the discussion of physical differences, while the song "Mary Wore her Red Dress" opens the discussion of likes and dislikes. The physical differences to be covered are obvious, yet the likes and dislikes, or psychological differences are not as apparent. For Kindergartners, the psychological differences are manifested through the stereotypical differences taught to them by their family members, peers, etc.: Girls play with dolls, boys play basketball, girls don't climb the jungle gym, boys climb anything and everything! These differences, to be recorded on a chart entitled, "People say girls should.../People say boys should..." are displayed in the classroom for future use.

Once the physical and psychological differences are clarified, we will discuss our personal likes and dislikes and list them on chart paper. The students are encouraged to talk about their favorite activity, and the lyrics to "Mary Wore Her Red Dress" are altered to accommodate the activities most enjoyed by each student (See Box 1). These likes and dislikes are compared to the information collected on the chart "People say girls/boys should..." A new chart, "We say girls and boys can...." will be drafted to display our overall findings from the comparison. The actions listed on the new chart will be illustrated and bound in a booklet of the same title and placed in the Reading Center. The Reading Center is an area in the classroom used to reinforce Language Arts lessons, themes and units. The Reading Center contains fiction and nonfiction trade books, class-made books, flash cards, audio cassettes, an audio cassette player, headphones, paper, markers and bean bag chairs. An audio recording of the class-authored "Mary Wore her Red Dress" is made in the Reading Center and included in the series of songs sung during Morning Meeting each day. The Morning Meeting is the time of day when events of the day, week and month are discussed, songs are sung to reinforce the current classroom curriculum and events from the students' home-lives are shared. Other songs and Reading Center-created items are also shared during Morning Meeting.

Box 1: All About Me

Mary Wore her Red Dress

Mary wore her red dress,
Red dress, red dress.
Mary wore her red dress
All day long.

Roberto wore his orange hat,
Orange hat, orange hat.
Roberto wore his orange hat

All day long.

Mary Wore her Red Dress (revised)

Tanijah likes to swing on a swing,
Swing on a swing, swing on a swing.
Tanijah likes to swing on a swing
All day long.
Davonte likes to jump rope,
Jump rope, jump rope.
Davonte likes to jump rope
All day long.

Family Time

The mini-unit that follows "All About Me" is "Family Time." "Family Time" is a unit that extends the theme of "All About Me" to the immediate relatives who affect the lives of the children in the class. The children learn the song, "My Family's Just Right for Me" and compare the different families mentioned in the lyrics. The children are then asked to list the members of their family that live with them. A sheet of drawing paper is distributed to each child for each member of their family. A booklet is then 'published' in the classroom for each child illustrating the members of their family: Me, Mommy, Daddy, Auntie, Uncle, Grandma, Grandpa, Cousin, Brother, Sister, etc. (See Lesson Plans)

A math lesson follows with the song "The People in a Family" which sings about family size. A graphing project records the various family sizes. Each family size is represented by a number and a color. The family books, above, are covered in construction paper to match the number of people in the booklet (ie.: Family size of 2=red, 3=blue, 4=green, 5=yellow). Holes are punched in the booklet's cover and pages to coincide with the number of family members in the booklet and yarn is used to bind the family book. (See Lesson Plans binding instructions)

"The Three Bears" is read and gender differences are discussed as they relate to the various Papa Bear, Mama Bear, and Baby Bear possessions that are encountered in the story: porridge, chairs, beds. The math integration of measurement is illustrated through the creation of stick puppets for each character in "The

Three Bears." The height of each bear is compared to his/her gender/age. The children use the puppets to re-tell the story in their own words. The puppet show is videotaped and re-viewed at a later date for concept reinforcement.

"Just Grandma and Me" is read as an introduction to our discussion of grandparents. The children draw pictures of their grandparent(s) and describe the activities they enjoy experiencing with them. To review the story of "Just Grandma and Me" a Living Book is made available in the Computer Center. A Living Book is an interactive CD-Rom that is viewed using a computer having a CD-Rom drive. Living Books allow a non-reader to hear the story and see the words without the need for computer experience. Those children who do have experience with computers may read and 'play' in the story by clicking on the various characters, objects, and words on the screen. In my classroom story paper is then placed at the Computer Center and the children are encouraged to illustrate and speak/write about the activity they most enjoy sharing with their grandparent(s) or other older relative. Students who have difficulty writing independently are assisted by the teacher, assistant or a classroom volunteer who writes what the child expresses orally.

"Who's That Tapping on my Window?" continues our discussion of grandparents. The children list the similarities and differences between their parents and their grandparents. Grandparents are invited to the school for a social with snacks and beverages prepared by the students. A photograph will be taken of each child with their grandparent(s). These photographs are made into slides for use in the culminating performance in which the YNHTI Team members participate. Grandparents are surveyed for information regarding their occupations and favorite activities/hobbies. The children each their grandparent(s) the revised version of "Mary Wore her Red Dress," encouraging their grandparent(s) to sing about what they enjoy doing.

"Who's That Tapping on my Window?" also leads to the discussion of siblings. Pictures of siblings are solicited from parents and scanned into HyperStudio™ cards. HyperStudio™ cards are windows created via the HyperStudio™ program that contain graphics, text, audio and or animation. The cards are programmed by a student, teacher or any person familiar with the HyperStudio™ software. In this case each child tells a story about their sibling(s) and an audio recording of the story is included in the card. The HyperStudio™ card stack will be printed to paper and to video for parents to view. A comment and signature page is included with the video and booklet copy and each child will take turns bringing the two items home. The comment and signature page will provide a place for parents to respond to the project in writing. The song "The Sister Song" will be learned and the use of the words sister or brother in the lyrics will be dependent upon the student's sibling(s). A child having no siblings may participate in the project by telling about a cousin.

Culminating Project

The culminating project completed by both the students and their respective family members is a literary magazine containing poetry and prose. The writing will reflect the style of the female author through the compositions of the students' Mothers, Grandmothers, Aunts and Sisters. The male's voice will also be included for comparison through the writings of Fathers, Grandfathers, Uncles and Brothers. The literary magazine is then 'published' and dispersed throughout the student body, with a copy being placed in the Library Media Center for visitors to enjoy.

Conclusion

One month or more is devoted to the study of the curriculum unit. In this case, the curriculum unit is the study of family as it relates to gender. All classroom subjects (i.e.: Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Development) are integrated into the "My Family" subject matter. The literature read in the Language Arts lessons reflects the aspect of family life covered by the unit. The Mathematics lessons build on sequencing of time, counting, ordinal numbers and other concepts that are reflected in family life. Social Development lessons are enhanced through the participation of parents, grandparents, siblings, and the like in the implementation of the overall unit. Full days are spent discussing and actively participating in the reading and analysis of fiction depicting the family. Classroom events are planned to coincide with the "My Family" readings at hand. Concept awareness will be shared with the entire student body through a team culminating project and encouraged future study will begin. The discussion of voice and gender in fiction occurs as other students notice the new-found knowledge displayed by Kindergarten students in their own school. Other teachers will become more interested in studying the author's voice in fiction with their own classes simply due to the enthusiasm shown by my Kindergarten students.

All in all, the appropriate resources and curriculum will then be available and easily located. Primary (and possibly even secondary) teachers will no longer opt to avoid the complexities of presenting "the voice" of an author; they will encourage the comparison of voices by sex, ethnicity and the like. The void of women's voices in fiction curriculum will be filled, the neglect will disappear and all interested teachers will feel at ease teaching the topic in their classroom.

Bibliography

Audio/Visual Resources

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Lesson Plans

All About Me

Lesson 1: My Body (Resource Sheet)

Objective: To label familiar human body parts.

Materials: scissors glue/paste crayons Worksheet 1

Following a discussion regarding various body parts, distribute Worksheet 1.

Lesson 2: All About Me (Baby to Now Sheet)

Objective: To draw pictures that depict 'me'.

Materials: Worksheet
crayons 2 paper-cutter

Following a discussion regarding "me" and the actions or objects that define "me," distribute Worksheet 2. Collect the completed worksheet and cut each sheet on the center horizontal line. Collate and keep the cut worksheets for future use in the Family book that will be compiled and bound during the Family Time unit.

Lesson 3: Family Time (Family Book pages)

Objective: To draw pictures of various family members.

Materials: crayons Worksheets 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, 3e and 3f paper-cutter

Following the song "My Family's Just Right for Me" and a discussion about the members of a family, cut Worksheets 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, 3e and 3f on the center horizontal line and distribute appropriate half-sheets as requested by the students. Please note: Worksheet 3f is blank to accommodate any family member not listed in the other four sheets. Encourage the students to illustrate the family member listed at the top of the half-sheet. Collect all sheets and collate according to student.

Lesson 4: Family Time (Publishing the Family Book)

Objective: To bind family book sheets. To make a family book.

Materials: crayons Worksheets 2, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d, 3e and 3f scissors 3-hole punch yarn (pre-cut to 12" lengths) craft-needles colored construction paper (cut 1" wider and 1" taller than the worksheets)

The collected, cut and collated "family" worksheets (3a-f) as well as the saved "me" worksheets (2) are 3-hole-punched on the left margin by the teacher. Construction paper is cut by the teacher to a measurement that is approximately 1" wider and 1" taller than the worksheet measurements and 3-hole-punched on the left margin by the teacher. Pre-cut lengths of yarn, craft-needles and the hole-punched worksheets are distributed to the students. Following the teacher's example, the students will bind their family books according to the directions below:

Encourage the students to write the title of the book on the cover.

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