Hunt, B., Hunt, T.J. (2005). “Learning by Teaching Multicultural Literature”. *English Journal*, 94:3, 76-80.

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Abstract

Hunt shares her ideas and experiences about the challenges and successes of teaching multi-cultural literature to high schools students. She acknowledges that presenting literature from a multi-cultural perspective is extremely beneficial to students, but she did not know how to proceed. This was due to her limited exposure to the genre. Once she began teaching it, problems soon surfaced, including presenting the text out of sync. She shares that she did not take the time to make sure the texts connected effectively with each other. Furthermore, when teaching a specific culture, i.e., The Native Americans, she did not make distinctions among various cultures therein. These are some of the pitfalls the article points out. Hunt encourages teachers to make sure they fully understand the text in order to respond directly to questions posed by students and parents. She admonishes the reader to have a solid rationale for why you are teaching a certain text. Teachers need to be passionate about what they are teaching and this will be conveyed to the student. Extensive research is necessary, but it is also important to take the time to digest the material to be presented. She points out the need to write engaging and creative lesson plans, not just fact based lesson plans. Teachers also need to be prepared to explain to parents and administrators the importance of teaching multi-cultural literature and to be fully aware of the difference between multi-cultural literature and international literature. Finally, one must realize that you don’t have to be an expert in this area, just a willing educator that will make mistakes, learn from them, and move forward.

Application

Teaching a multi-cultural unit is something I have not done to date. I am fully open to doing this and look forward to the experience. I have taught, and am just beginning, a multi-genre unit under the theme, “Perseverance”, and realize it would not be that difficult to put a multi-cultural spin on it. We already are requiring students to write a persuasive, narrative, descriptive, expository, and poetic piece, but we could require them to approach it from a multi-cultural perspective. Students could be asked to incorporate at least three different ethnicities within their research to support their writing, or the expository piece could involve several individuals with similar backgrounds, but from varying cultures. This article has given me several ideas to take back to my Team to discuss how we can pursue this. I’m sure we will stumble along the way, but it should increase engagement for the students and the teachers.

Question

How can we design a multi-cultural unit within the theme based unit, “Perseverance” that can expand the knowledge of our students and help them come away with something positive? How can we then translate this into a project that is community based?