

English IV
Poverty and Hunger in Hamilton County
An Inquiry
August 2013

Community is how we collectively create a story about our place. It is the narrative of who we are, how we get along together, how we make a living, and how we are connected...Community is how we live well together.—Toni Hass and Paul Nachtigal, *Place Value: An Educator's Guide to Good Literature on Rural Lifeways, Environments, and Purposes of Education*.

Introduction: This inquiry project examines the need of the poorest in our community, those in poverty and experiencing hunger. The project originated with a simple question: Where is there a need in our community that we can investigate? Summer 2012 brought a significant need to many Hamilton County residents due to an economic downturn. The Hamilton County Food Pantry experienced a shortage of funds and donations that summer. This discovery elicited an expanded inquiry into other agencies facing an even greater need than previously experienced.

Rationale: Over a decade of teaching in Aurora Public Schools I have practiced place-based pedagogy, presenting students with curriculum that allowed them to connect to people in our community. The first place-based inquiry, “Elderly Voices—Living Links to the Past,” connected students with residents in nursing homes. Students interviewed, photographed and drew sketches of residents and created web pages with the stories of their lives. Since 1997, students have also conducted work ethnographies centered on the dominant work of Hamilton County, farming, interviewing local farmers and creating digital stories about them. Students have also interviewed local business people and prominent women. This poverty and hunger inquiry project arose out of a new found and growing interest in social justice curriculum, as a means for students and teacher alike to give back to the community through public literacy, that is, a public voice.

Steps in the Activity:

1. Students respond to questions posed by instructor, including:
 - What is poverty? How is it defined?
 - What is hunger? How is it defined?
 - Why do we have these social problems?
 - How can we have poverty and hunger in Hamilton County when it is a “wealthy” county?
 - What is the average median income in Hamilton County?
 - What is the average median income in each community in Hamilton County?

- What jobs are available? What is the income for each of these jobs?
 - Can all people in Hamilton County make a living wage?
 - What services are provided in Hamilton County?
 - What can we, as a class, do about these societal issues?
 - Whom do we speak to about these issues?
2. Students consider agencies that might be able to assist those in need and construct questions to ask the people directing the agencies, including the food pantry, ministerial association, thrift store, elementary school back pack program, county commissioners, Habitat for Humanity, and a local charitable foundation.
 - Field trip to Food Pantry
 - Field trip to Thrift Store
 - Guest speakers in classroom: ministerial association, Habitat for Humanity, county commissioner, elementary school back pack program, and local charitable foundation spokesperson.
 3. Students gather data and construct the following final projects (utilizing their new technology, iPads):
 - Create a fact sheet document.
 - Create flyers to promote awareness and donations around the county.
 - Create a mini-documentary film to share with classmates and other school students, but also promoting the agencies.
 4. Invite administrators and other instructors to evaluate our final iMovie projects for a team “competition” resulting in an award (breakfast pizza and chocolate!).
 5. Complete final self evaluation and reflective letter.
 6. Write thank you notes to agency personnel who helped us with our inquiry.

Resources:

- Christensen, Linda. *Reading, Writing and Rising Up: Teaching about Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word*. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, 2000. Print.
- . *Teaching for Joy and Justice: Re-Imagining the Language Arts Classroom*. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, 2009. Print.
- Flower, Linda. *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 2008. Print.
- Hass, Toni and Paul Nachtigal. *Place Value: An Educator’s Guide to Good Literature on Rural Lifeways, Environments, and Purposes of Education*. Charleston: Clearing House on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1998. Print.
- Leslie, Claire Walker, John Talmadge, and Tom Wessels. *Into the Field: A Guide to Locally Focused Teaching*. Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 1999. Print.
- Linn, Allison. “Sprawling and Struggling: Poverty Hits America’s Suburbs.” *NBCNews*.

22 March 2013. Web. 4 April 2013.

Sobel, David. *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms & Communities*.

Barrington, MA: Orion Society, 2004. Print.

Welch, Nancy. *Living Room: Teaching Public Writing in a Privatized World*.

Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2008. Print.

Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2a

Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2b

Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2c

Use appropriate and varied transitions and syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2d

Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2e

Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2f

Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Hamilton County Poverty and Hunger Inquiry Artifacts:

- Project Description
- Common Core Standards
- Final Evaluation Rubric
- Student Self Evaluation/Reflective Letter
- Student Generated Interview Questions

- Guidelines for videos
- Final Video Evaluations (conducted by administrators and faculty)
- Final Letter to Participants and Agencies
- Consent to Publish Form
- Thank you notes to participants
- *Aurora News Register* article
- Example of flyers A and B
- Examples of Fact Sheet
- List of donated items
- Links to Poverty and Hunger videos