

Building Empathy

Cindy Gibbs

Beachland Elementary

x3356

cynthia.gibbs@indianriverschools.org

This project based learning experience is inspired by the d. school model at Stanford University.

My intended end result was for students to use speaking and listening skills to facilitate their designs and builds of empathetically driven products, based upon conversations and then interviews amongst partnerships.

The beauty of this set is that you can modify it however you see fit for your students' needs.

The standards listed and the possible methods by which you can have students achieve them are flexible according to your needs and timeframe. Be creative and use this as a framework upon which to build your own work.

LAFS.4.RL.1.3

Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions).

- Students read the book and conduct a character study on the main character based upon her actions in the story.
- Students read the book and describe how the sequence of events in the story affect the design choices of the character and ultimately lead to her success. Could be storyboarded, acted out, rewritten as a recipe or a set of how to instructions
- Students read the book and write to explain how the setting of cityscape affects the story and the story's outcome. Students could write to explain how a different setting choice would affect the story's outcome.

LAFS.4.SL.1.1

(There are a lot of points to master here, but they are all components of the process.)

- **Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.** (For example, the whole group discussion is when the teacher reads aloud the book and pauses for discussion and poses think alouds with the students. Diverse partnerships are the ice breaking portion

of the experience, allowing students to share energy and space with different classmates.)

- **Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.** (prior to discussion, students could refer to the text to summarize the story verbally to their peers, then write to summarize. This would be a great time to use Chris Biffle's Crazy Reading Professor Technique, youtube it if you haven't seen it before.)
- **Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.** (Depending upon grade level and ability of students, this can be teacher or student designed)
- **Pose and respond to specific questions to clarify or follow up on information, and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others.**(This is the questioning portion of the project. Students who ask deep, probing questions will receive richer information on which to base the product.)
- **Review the key ideas expressed and explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.** (Teacher/student conferences to discuss and clarify the interview questions and responses and the product

Procedure (open to change!)

- Read the book aloud

Refer to the sequence of the design process, and direct class discussion about this.

Possible questions:

Did the girl create the most magnificent thing immediately? How does the author's choice of verbs affect the story while describing the girl's design process? Her choice of adjectives? When the girl and her assistant take a walk after the explosion, what does the girl notice as she views all of her products in a row? How does this relate to the design process?

Design Phase:

Research

Students make a list of questions they want to ask someone to get to know them better.

Using teacher judgement, either allow students to choose, or randomly choose partners for them. I use labeled popsicle sticks.

Students use the list of questions to conduct interviews with each other, then report information to the class upon regrouping. There is a decent chance that the information

gleaned from this experience is going to be fairly lightweight. Favorite colors, and sports and so forth. Don't spend too much time with this part.

Once back to whole group setting, direct students to re-partner themselves, but this time with a person they really don't know very well.

Ask students what they learned from their questioning. Did you find out deep, interesting things about your classmate? Do you know about the last time they cried? Or when they were surprised? Or which pet they wish they could have? Or about the last super scary dream they had? Make a new list of questions, but make sure they can't be answered with one word, and also that the questions will uncover parts of their personality that you weren't aware of before. Make it interesting and probing.

After this set of interviews, ask the students to reflect upon what they learned about their classmate, but not to share it out. Explain that they will have the opportunity to design something, an object, a machine, for their partner, in secret. Now, ask the students to think with construction in mind, but also empathy, what does this person NEED, that they might not even know they need. Direct students to think about what else they need to know about their partner to create the perfect, most magnificent thing for them, remember it's a secret!

Planning

Students sketch out ideas for their Most Magnificent Thing (MMT) on paper. Label components with possible materials ideas.

Students scout out materials from the supplies table, amend planning draft as needed, as many times as necessary, but then try to stick to a plan.

Building

Your room is likely going to be a mess. Go with it. Encourage a "clean as you go methodology."

Supplies can include pretty much anything and everything. I request that families empty out the junk drawer in the kitchen, the pile of stuff that you keep but will never actually use in the garage or the laundry room. You will receive a treasure trove of stuff and things. I've had phone cords, magnets, buttons, dryer ducting, ice cube trays, boxes of all shapes and sizes, cardboard tubes, a spice rack, cups, etc. You will want LOTS of tape--duct tape, scotch tape, masking tape, painter's tape. Lots. You will also find a hot glue gun helpful, but you will use it as directed by your students, not them.

Students will need quite a bit of time to construct. Encourage redesign. If it isn't coming together the way the student thought it would, remind them that redesign is how the girl in the story got to her MMT. MMT's hardly ever happen on the first try. Redesign is key.

Presentation

When students have completed the design phase and have a finished product, it is time for the written and presented explanation of the object. Students should write a report to be given to their partners, including what the object is and what it does, and why the person needs this item based upon the interview research.

Students will present the object and the explanation to their partners to the whole group. This can be an emotional time, as the kids invent thoughtful and sometimes poignant objects for their friends. The Things are indeed Most Magnificent.