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Let's Talk about Sexual Harassment in Middle School

KIMBERLY SHEARER PALMER

LIKE EVERY NEW EMPLOYEE at the *Washington Post*, I was given a “Codes of Conduct” packet—the company’s policies on everything from smoking to taking medical leave.¹ It was the section on sexual harassment that startled me most. Perhaps it shouldn’t have. But the prohibition against vulgar jokes and “brushing up against another’s body” brought home to me the stark contrast between the informal codes of conduct my friends and I had learned to live by in middle school and what’s permissible in the working world today.

The situations are very different, of course: There aren’t the same sort of power relationships in school that make harassment such a complex problem in the working world. But, looking back, I’m still left wondering why so many teenagers I knew put up with unwelcome sexual behavior. And why adults consistently turned a blind eye.

Twelve years ago, when I was in middle school, overt sexual advances were everyday events and usually overlooked by teachers. Boys grabbed girls’ breasts in the stairwells and cafeteria as casually as they would say “hello,” and our daily routines were punctuated by unwelcome slaps on the behind.

As it turns out, my experience wasn’t unusual. According to the American Association of University Women, 65 percent of girls in public school, grades eight to eleven, say they experience “touching, grabbing, and/or pinching in a sexual way.”² My friends and I used to let boys touch, grab, and pinch us, and I don’t think things have gotten all that much better. Sure, there’s greater awareness: today, the districts have a sexual harassment policy that schools rely on and teachers can refer to. But the issue doesn’t always reach administrators, much less the students. My recent conversations with today’s teenagers suggest that it wasn’t just my grade; it wasn’t just my school; and it wasn’t just back then. Many kids think—as my friends and I did—that the unwanted touching is just flirtation.

I have since learned to fight back when men harass me. In Paris a few years ago, when a guy grabbed my breasts, I shoved him away from me and yelled at him. After that, he left me alone. Now, when I think back to all the times in middle school when I *didn’t* make guys leave me alone, I feel angry. So I decided to go back and find boys from my class and ask them why. I got out my old phone directory and called the same boys who would have been too cool for me to call in middle school. Most had moved, and the listed numbers were no longer valid. The ones I found shared my memories of unwanted touching in the hallways. They are, as far as I can tell, good boyfriend material. They are by all accounts sensitive and perceptive; my younger sister knows one well, and my

close friend at college dated another. I found out they were just as confused as we girls were in those adolescent years.

One old classmate remembers the casual touching. “Even good guys did that,” he said. “It wasn’t sexual ... I don’t know what it was. I can’t think it’s a good thing.” He also recalled walking girls to class because they felt threatened. We didn’t speak in terms of apologies, but wonderment. It seemed so very strange that touching someone’s breasts or bottom in the hallways was considered friendly behavior.

Another one of my classmates told me that he remembered the same sorts of things. “Not until tenth grade would guys ... realize it was not the best way to get a girl to like you,” he said. Grabbing girls was *normal* behavior, we both agreed. It happened in public, in front of teachers. No one told us it was wrong. No one even seemed worried about the possibility of lawsuits, despite the 1992 Supreme Court decision that warned schools they could be held responsible for harassment.³ Maybe the teachers looked at our sometimes giggly and embarrassed reactions and thought there wouldn’t be a problem.

One male graduate told me that boys bothered girls back then because they didn’t know what else to do. “No one knows how to act [at that age].... You’re self-conscious, no one has self-esteem.” Boys, I realized, were just as insecure as I remember feeling. We were blindly following what we assumed was routine social conduct—grabbing, pinching, being pinched. Who knew there was another way to flirt?

in this issue

- 2 Lookout Point: Let’s Talk about Sexual Harassment in Middle School
KIMBERLY S. PALMER
- 4 Service Learning and Social Studies: A Natural Fit
ELIZABETH A. BLOOM
- 8 A Zen Garden at Tecumseh: From Mocking to Honoring
LEILA MEYERRATKEN
- 12 A Model Rivers Project: Relating Geography and Culture
ANDREA PORT JACOBS
- 14 Book Review: *We Were There Too!* by Phillip Hoose
MELINDA KARNES
- 15 Book Review: *Learning on Their Feet* by Carol Glynn
RONALD V. MORRIS
- 16 Musical Shares

Boys, he told me, were just trying to bridge the gap between girls and guys. “It wasn’t meant to hurt,” he said. Looking back now, he knows that what some boys did probably bothered some girls. But the girls didn’t show it. “They probably didn’t want to seem snobby or stuck up,” he remembered. As I spoke to these men, I realized how different they were from the guy who bothered me in Paris. The rules were so blurry to both girls and boys in middle school that neither gender really knew when lines were crossed. For example, when my crotch was grabbed on a school bus one afternoon, it wasn’t okay with me, but I didn’t even tell my parents because at some level it seemed so similar to what happened every day in school. I still feel mad, but I could hardly blame my former classmates when they were just acting out of friendship or flirtation—however misguided that was. And the more I talked with my female friends, the more I realized how often we gave the wrong signals. Some girls remembered enjoying the attention, sometimes laughing along. One recalled two boys dragging her into the boys’ bathroom, as she tried to kick her way free. But she didn’t remember being angry. “It was the only way to express ourselves,” she now says. But something else gave her further pause. She said she thought that “teachers let it slide” like the other dumb behavior that happens among adolescents.

They shouldn’t have. I remember only one teacher who stood in the front of her class and yelled at the boys for grabbing girls. Finally a teacher noticed, I remember thinking. Why was she the only one? And if the teacher noticed, why didn’t she inform the principal, and start a school-wide discussion? My annoyance with my former classmates redirected itself as I realized that adults who could have explained and enforced the differences between right and wrong behavior—our teachers—often did not.

The fact is, no one taught us the right way to act. But as Peggy Orenstein, author of *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap*, says, “It still must stop.”⁴ For me, it stopped as soon as I emerged from the achingly self-conscious early teenage years. Assertiveness came from the natural confidence that comes with getting rid of braces and glasses.

Shouldn’t we have been helped to learn those lessons earlier? An insecure seventh-

grade girl shouldn’t have to deal with aggressive boys grabbing her. But I keep asking myself: What would I have wanted my parents to tell me? What could they have possibly told me? “Don’t let boys touch you”? “Tell me if anyone’s bothering you”? I’m sure they told me those things. I’m sure I dismissed them, way too embarrassed to talk to them about anything dealing with boy-girl relationships. How can you help a shy seventh-grade girl who doesn’t even know whether to feel grateful for the attention or angry at the violation?

There are no easy solutions. Zero-tolerance policies make no sense, considering the level of confusion surrounding social behavior. Parents can try to teach their daughters to be tough; teachers can integrate into class discussions of what distinguishes flirtation from harassment. There’s plenty of inspiration, in anything from the writings of Shakespeare to Maya Angelou, as Wellesley College sexual harassment scholar Nan Stein suggests in *Flirting or Hurting? A Teacher’s Guide on Student-to-Student Sexual Harassment in Schools*.⁵ And adults can talk to boys about limits.

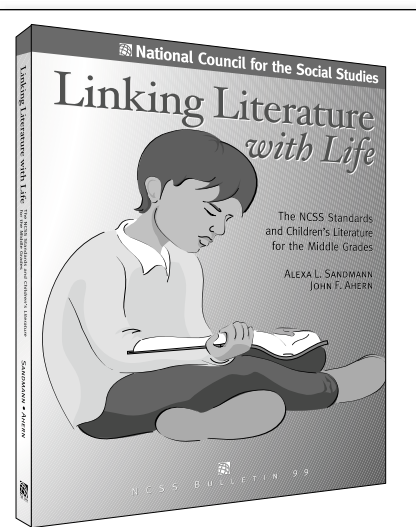
The fact is, my former classmates did not turn into bad men. They don’t bother women at work or college. And the women I knew in school have also learned where to draw the line. But we should all have learned the rules earlier, well before it comes time to sign those company policies. 📖

Notes

1. This essay first appeared in the *Washington Post* on August 20, 2000. Reprinted by permission.
2. American Association of University Women, *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment in School* (Washington, DC: AAUW, 2001).
3. Office of Civil Rights, “Revised Sexual Harassment Guidance” (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), www.ed.gov/offices/OCR/shguide/index.html.
4. Peggy Orenstein, *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* (Landover Hills, MD: Anchor, 1995).
5. Nan Stein, *Flirting or Hurting? A Teacher’s Guide on Student-to-Student Sexual Harassment in Schools* (Washington, DC: National Education Association, 1994).

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Lookout Point is an open forum. For consideration, send a response or an original essay to: Middle Level Learning, National Council for the Social Studies, 8555 Sixteenth Street, Suite 500, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910, or e-mail ml1@ncss.org.



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This book was written by two experienced educators for teachers in search of children’s literature that conforms to the social studies standards—and that students in grades 5-8 really like. After initial chapters that offer guidelines for using children’s literature in the social studies classroom, the authors present ten chapters that recommend suitable books for teaching each of the ten themes of the standards. The authors’ descriptions of all books include teaching suggestions that show how teachers can make the most of the books in the social studies classroom. All kinds of books are represented—picture books, factual works, fiction and poetry.

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Corporation for National and Community Service

Service Learning and Social Studies: A Natural Fit

ELIZABETH A. BLOOM

I am prepared for the question. “Does everyone have to do community service, Ms. Bloom?” My answer is an unequivocal, “Yes, we’re all going to do it.” I’ve seen it each time I introduce a year-long service learning project to my eighth grade social studies students. The reasons students are reluctant to volunteer are varied. The egocentrism of adolescents, and their fear of taking a risk that might expose them to peer ridicule, make them especially guarded. Over several years, I have observed a consistent pattern: Initial reluctance and even hostility toward service learning develops into a powerful, sometimes life-changing experience for young adolescents as the school year progresses.

I never pictured myself doing community service, and now I can. I did extra days at the soup kitchen because I had fun the first time, and I liked the feeling I got from helping people. —Kayla M.

Service learning became an integral part of my classroom several years ago. I had always been an advocate of problem-based cooperative projects as a way to reach all students, especially those who may not be aiming for college. Being an adherent of Multiple Intelligences Theory,

I wanted to go beyond the predictable logic of photocopied worksheets, textbooks, and lecture.¹ Projects gave me the opportunity to tap into the Multiple Intelligences of my diverse student population, to cultivate the spatial, interpersonal, and even musical interests and gifts of my students, in the service of social studies.

Getting Started

In my first years as a teacher, the students often bemoaned the fact that the historical events we studied seemed so far from the reality of their everyday lives. “Why do we always have to learn about the past, Ms. Bloom?” I began to wonder whether there was a way to bring current issues into the classroom in such a way as to make students feel that school was relevant and also lead them to understand that we study the past to illuminate the present. A recitation of current events articles just didn’t cut it.

Another dilemma for me was the always-looming New York State Social Studies assessment. The pressure mounted to move quickly through the required curriculum. Would it be foolhardy to add something to my

curriculum when I was unable to get through the entire required curriculum that I had already? Would it make sense to insist that students work in teams despite the fact that high stakes testing emphasizes individual achievement? Three years ago, I began to drop long-term projects, like the Civil War Museum that my students had created every year, because they simply took too much time. The challenge became to figure out how to combine contemporary issues with a hands-on instructional strategy, without detracting too much from the historical breadth that needed to be covered. I felt compelled to at least try.

My initial effort was to get students involved in hands-on social action.² I had my four classes research current problems and issues.³ In each class students presented their findings.

Each group tried to convince their classmates that their issue was the most compelling and had the most potential for students to effect significant change. The classes chose widely divergent topics. One class decided to investigate how to get local grocery stores to stock affordable hormone- and antibiotic-free milk. Another class chose the ongoing problem of slavery in the Sudan.

When the school year ended, the students evaluated their work through reflective thinking exercises. I found that the projects that elicited the most enthusiasm were the ones that dealt with issues of local and international hunger. The students in these groups had chosen, respectively, to volunteer at one of two local soup kitchens and to raise money for a sustainable food program (see sidebar). This satisfaction was directly tied to the sense that they had done something concrete to alleviate someone else's suffering. I noted in my observations and in their written and spoken comments that the experience increased their feelings of self-efficacy, pride, empathy and compassion.

Now I have had the experience of helping others and it made me feel so good about myself. Sometimes it's hard to see people who are not as lucky as you

End Hunger Now

SOURCES OF LESSONS AND SERVICE LEARNING PROJECTS

CROP is the name given to community, interfaith hunger education and fundraising events sponsored by Church World Service and organized by twenty-two CWS/CROP regional offices across the United States. (In some CWS/CROP regions, CROP has come to mean "Communities Reaching Out to People.") Some 2,000 fundraising events occur each year. Their free online educational materials include a handout, "Build a Better World;" a study/action guide, "Facts Have Faces;" a handbook on activities, "We Can Do That Too!;" and a simulation game, "Hungry Decisions." Call 888-CWS-CROP or visit www.cropwalk.org.



Break time at Saturday's Bread, a soup kitchen in Oneonta, New York. Photo by E. Bloom

The **Gerda and Kurt Klein Foundation** sponsors the Hunger Service Learning Program, a national community service program to give children the opportunity to take responsibility through the concrete action of working to end hunger. The community service program aims to let students play a role in feeding hungry children; to enable students to discover the needs in their own communities; to help students learn about hunger and its effects on people and societies; and to give students the ability to help end hunger by promoting particular remedies. Also check out the **kNOw Hunger Curriculum**. Call 610-668-2314 or visit www.kleinfoundation.org.

Heifer Project International is a non-profit organization that works to alleviate hunger, poverty, and environmental degradation around the world. Heifer helps impoverished families become self-reliant by providing food, and income-producing animals, and training in husbandry, economics, and land management. Heifer works with grassroots community groups, who determine their own needs, and train and prepare for their animals. **Read to Feed** is a creative program that allows children to change the world by reading books to help end hunger. Call 800-422-0474 or visit www.heifer.org and www.readtofeed.org.

Oxfam is an economic development, advocacy, and relief organization working to put an end to poverty worldwide. Oxfam works in partnership with local organizations in each country to help poor people help themselves. Oxfam America offers a wide range of opportunities for young people to learn more about poverty, globalization, and issues related to social and economic injustice. These include the **Fast for World Harvest** activity handbook, the **Hunger Banquet**, and the **Fair Trade Coffee Campaign**. Call 800-77-OXFAM and ask for National Outreach, or visit www.oxfamamerica.org and click on Get Involved.

Second Harvest (www.seconddharvest.org, 800-771-2303) can help get you in touch with hunger services in your area. Through a network of over 200 food banks and food-rescue programs, America's Second Harvest provides emergency food assistance to more than 23 million hungry Americans each year, eight million of whom are children. See educational programs (scroll down) at www.seconddharvest.org/childhunger/childhunger_foodbanks.html

World Hunger Year (www.worldhungeryear.org, 212-629-8850) and **Bread for the World** (www.bread.org, 800-82-BREAD) are also useful centers of information on the problem of hunger and efforts at solving it. **National Hunger Awareness Day** is June 5, 2003. Visit www.hungerday.org.

Looking into Service Learning

- Review the curriculum for the year and relate upcoming academic topics to service learning opportunities. Links can often be found in the areas of history, immigration, or civics.
- Find out what volunteer opportunities are available in your community. Don't overlook environmental projects, mural projects, and established volunteer programs. Start by calling feeding programs, churches, hospitals, nursing homes, and animal shelters. Often the students themselves will have ideas for you.
- Get your principal on board from the beginning. He or she will be an invaluable source of support, particularly if you are making participation a requirement.
- Talk up your program wherever you go. People will surprise you with the assistance and ideas they'll offer.
- Incorporate participation into your grading system. I count participation as a project grade. Many teachers who use community service projects require a written paper and/or presentation to the class at the conclusion of the project (or a journal or log that documents the project).
- Pass out a written explanation at the beginning of the project explaining what it is and how it will be assessed.
- Involve parents from the beginning. Have a sign-up sheet at parent's night, send a letter home, call parents you know and ask if they know other parents who might also like to participate. As often as possible include parents in the volunteer effort itself. Parents love it and some of them will be able to provide you with free help.
- Be very enthusiastic and don't allow yourself to appear defeated or discouraged by students' initial negativism. It will pass!

are, and sometimes you just feel like crying. It's not fair! If everyone did something good once a day it would not only change the lives of the people you are helping but you would benefit from it a lot as well." —Alix F.

Values and Civility

Young Americans are subjected to a barrage of conflicting messages about values and morals today. One study reports that children are exposed to 200,000 images of violence on TV alone by the time they are 18 years old.⁴ Advertisers compete for "young consumers," trying to win their loyalty at any cost. According to Gary Ruskin of Commercial Alert, the average child is assaulted by more than 20,000 advertisements per year.⁵ My older colleagues will sometimes lament what they see as the decline in civility in the hallways of our school. When these teachers began their careers, it seemed that nearly everyone understood the "unspoken rules" of the school culture.⁶ Now many children come to the school setting without a basic understanding of what constitutes appropriate language and such common niceties as helping a fellow student pick up a pile of dropped books. Such lack of civility serves as a backdrop for acts of violence in schools that have made national and international headlines. It's telling that a prominent national teacher's union now offers \$150,000 in life insurance to teachers murdered on the job.⁷

Educators are trying to address these problems. State education departments are placing increasing emphasis on the importance of character education. The New York State legislature, for one, has responded by passing the Safe Schools against Violence in Education Act ("Project SAVE"), which requires that all of school districts implement substantive character education programs.

The Board of Regents shall ensure that the course of instruction in grades kindergarten through twelve includes a component on civility, citizenship, and character education. Such component shall instruct students on "the principals of honesty, tolerance, personal responsibility, respect for others, observance of laws and rules, courtesy, dignity, and other traits which will enhance the quality of their experience in, and contribution to, the community."⁸

This directive was based on the premises that (1) destructive behaviors have a common core: the absence of good character and (2) people do not automatically develop good character in the same way that toddlers, for example, learn to speak even in a social environment where they are ignored. Intentional and focused efforts must be made to foster the character development of the young.⁹ Social studies programs of excellence include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic. This goal can, in part, be achieved by supporting the common good in our classrooms. The best educators recognize that the purpose of education in a democratic republic is to promote the intellectual and ethical development of its "student-citizens."¹⁰

Community Service and Values

Clearly, the combination of our own observations as educators and more broad-scale studies indicate that character education should be part of the curriculum. The middle level social studies classroom, the traditional place where civic education happens, is the obvious venue for this to occur.

Young people should take part in community service because it could make them grow up into a good person, plus it helps out the community. —John R.

In his book, *Emotional Intelligence*, psychologist Daniel Goleman argues that the lessons of moral education are more potent when taught to children through concrete experience rather than as abstract lessons.¹¹

It is not enough to lecture children about values: they need to practice them, which happens as children build the essential emotional and social skills. In this sense, emotional literacy goes hand in hand with education for character, for moral development, and for citizenship.

The evidence is building that service learning projects promote social/emotional learning, notes Shelly Billig, Director of RMC Research Corporation, in the May 2000 issue of *Phi Delta Kappan*:

- Middle and high school students who engaged in high quality service learning programs showed increased measures of personal and social responsibility, communication, and sense of educational competence.
- Students who engaged in service learning were more likely to treat each other kindly, help one another, and care about doing their best.
- Boys in middle school reported increased self-esteem and fewer behavioral problems after engaging in service learning.¹²

Not only does service learning help inculcate positive character traits and civic responsibility, it has also been shown to improve student achievement, engagement in school and academic confidence.

In my classroom, service learning has developed into a highly satisfying activity, a useful teaching tool, and a bridge to the wider community. In 2002 we added an important event to our service calendar. Following a grisly violent incident in our downtown-parking garage, a group of local people got together to create an event called Keep The Peace Candlelight Vigil and March. The group included representatives from our two local colleges, and the churches. My students represented our school. They painted banners, wrote and performed public service announcements on the radio to encourage participation, made *PowerPoint* presentations to educate students in other classes about the event, drew and distributed flyers, raised funds for commemorative pins and wrist bands, and sat on the event planning task force with adults. All eighty-seven of my students participated in some meaningful way in the preparation and planning as well as in the event itself. Our mayor declared a Keep The Peace Day at which students' musical and theatrical creations were performed.

It would be dishonest to say that preparing and supervising a service learning project has not added to my work. But the benefits outweigh the costs. It provides an avenue for teaching with hands-on activities despite the crunch of assessments. I get new ideas and fresh energy as the formerly unseen needs of our neighbors come to light. Students get excited about academic content that relates to their work. And suddenly they find they have the power to change things in their own community. They are needed.

Our city is currently building a greenway along the river that runs through our town. A call has gone out for volunteers to help build it. I know a group of energetic fourteen-year-olds who just might be perfect for the job. 🌱

Notes

1. Stephanie Weiss. "Meet Howard Gardner," *NEA Today* (March, 2000) (www.nea.org). In 1983, Gardner identified seven multiple intelligences - linguistic, logical/mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily/kinesthetic, intra-personal, and interpersonal. In 1996, he added the naturalist as the eighth intelligence.
2. Rahima C. Wade, ed., *Building Bridges: Connecting Classroom and Community through Service-Learning in Social Studies* (Washington, DC: National Council for the Social Studies, 2000).
3. Barbara Lewis, *The Kid's Guide to Social Action* (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 1998) This book contains many ideas and practical strategies for developing hands-on activism in children.
4. Jean Tepperman, "TV: The Violence Teacher," *Children's Advocate News Magazine* 25, no. 1 (January-February 1997): 3-4.
5. Gary Ruskin, "Group Praises Bush's Statement about TV" (Portland, OR: Commercial Alert, 1999), www.commercialalert.org.
6. Ruby Payne, "Working With Students From Poverty: Discipline," *Instructional Leader* (July, 1996): 2-5. While Payne's work focuses on children in poverty, I believe that many of her ideas can be applied to a wider student population. Teachers know intuitively that the effects of poverty, negative media, and the chaotic, dysfunctional home lives that many children experience impair children's ability to function successfully in a formal school setting.
7. The National Education Association currently offers all members automatic life insurance benefit of up to \$150,000.00 for unlawful homicide while on the job.
8. New York State Education Law Sections 801 and 801-a, Chapter 181 of the Laws of 2000 Civility, Citizenship, and Character Education/Interpersonal Violence Prevention Education Albany, New York.
9. *Ibid.*
10. National Council for the Social Studies, *National Standards for Social Studies Teachers* (Washington, DC: NCSS, 1994), www.socialstudies.org.
11. Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 286
12. Shelley H. Billig, "Research on K-12 School-Based Service Learning: The Evidence Builds," *Phi Delta Kappan* 81 (2000): 658-664; See also "Service Learning Affects Student Achievement," www.dpi.state.wi.us/dpi/dltd/bbfcsp/slaffect.html

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A Zen Garden at Tecumseh: From Mocking to Honoring

LEILA MEYERRATKEN

One grain of rice

Can tip the scale

When I started teaching about Japan, several of my eighth graders pulled at the edges of their eyes or pushed down their noses. I continued with the lesson, ignoring the behavior, until one student shouted. “Yeah, we nuked ‘em.” Three students stood up and slapped their hands in a high five. I froze to the floor.

My mind wandered back in time to my trip the year before, in 1998, to Japan. An elderly man stepped up to me, “Here, Omyagi you take to America for students,” and he held out a colorful plastic bag. He told me that he had walked a long distance in this town today so that he could meet me, the visiting American teacher. He wanted to share with many others that day the honor of giving me presents (*Omyagi* means a souvenir gift) to deliver to my students and their school. What had I done to deserve these gifts? With a fragile smile and trembling hands, the man opened the sack so that I could peer inside. It was filled with candy, origami paper, and rice seeds.

Back in the present, in the classroom, I recollected myself, and realized that for the first time in my teaching experience I had felt an insult personally. I had always been careful to avoid showing strong emotions in class, but this seemed to be an exception. If I failed to reach my students now, it would feel like a personal defeat. So I reminded them that civilian deaths in any war are not an occasion for gloating.

The moment had passed, but I did not let the matter drop. Instead, I thought about enhancing my lesson plans.¹ But from where should I start? I needed to find a common bank of information that we, students and teacher, could use to explore cultural differences and intolerance. Within a week, I distributed a copy of *The Bracelet* by Yoshiko Uchida to every student.² It is a book about the imprisonment, in the Western United States, of U.S. citizens of Japanese descent in 1942-45. The story is told from the point of view of seven-year-old Emi and her family. Seeing that the book was about a child younger than herself, one student rolled her eyes, commented, “How elementary.” I devoted some class time to reading the book aloud to get every student hooked before I assigned chapters as homework. Suddenly, the topic did not seem so “elementary.”

Even before they had finished reading the book, students began asking questions. “Was this a work of historical fiction? How many of the events described in the book were true, and how many did the author make up to create a ‘good story?’” I was glad to see that students were beginning to broaden their vision, to leave behind their prejudicial remarks



and engage in the real matters of history, culture, and justice. I provided some background information about the imprisonment of Americans during World War II, but I left some of their questions unanswered, while challenging them to seek answers for themselves.³

After students had finished reading *The Bracelet*, I showed the documentary film *Honor Bound* by Wendy Hanamura.⁴ The 55-minute film tells the story, through remembrances and archival footage, of young American men, the sons of Japanese immigrants, who fought as U.S. soldiers in Europe during World War II, even while their families were held in U.S. prison camps. The veterans interviewed for this film, members of the 442nd Battalion, recalled how they rescued 211 U.S. soldiers from Texas, the “Lost Battalion,” on the brink of annihilation by German troops in the Vosges Mountains in France. The veterans also remembered the friendly rivalry in the barracks between the more easy-going Japanese-American soldiers from Hawaii, whose families were not imprisoned during the war, and the more reserved soldiers from the west coast of the United States, whose families were imprisoned and

lands and property seized.⁵

At one point in the film, when a veteran talked about his experience and cried, several students held their breath, which indicated to me that students’ attitudes were changing. At our next meeting, students were eager to talk. “This is part of our history, and we’ve never heard it before. Why not?” asked one student. “Could this happen again?” asked another. A vigorous discussion ensued about the legality and meaning of Executive Order 9066, signed by president Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1942. International law (the Geneva Conventions) describe how nations can intern enemy aliens during a war, but the imprisonment of Japanese American citizens of Japanese descent had no legal precedent. It singled out people based on race, not nationality. At the end of our study of the internment, I read aloud *Heroes*, a short story in which a Japanese American boy must act the part of “the enemy” when playing “war” with his friends because he looks like “them.”⁶



As the days progressed and students learned more about Japanese culture, the Japanese language, and the histories of both Japan and the United States, they felt the need to do something with their new knowledge. They created artwork, composed poems, and wrote reports, but something still seemed to be missing. Students then began working on a twelve-foot-high poster, "An Injustice to Remember." They contacted U.S. World War II veterans of Japanese ancestry and requested interviews. They received mementos for the poster, including photographs. On Law Day, the poster hung in the courthouse, where students were given a tour. Local news covered the event.⁷

Students were inspired by these events. One student suggested turning the bland school courtyard into a Zen garden, a memorial to the Japanese American veterans, especially those of the 442nd Battalion. This idea energized the class, and the students' visions for the project had no limits. They imagined a large, deep pond with a waterfall, a fountain, *Koi* (decorative Japanese fish), water lilies, and authentic *Ishidoro* (Japanese stone lanterns). Noting my skeptical silence, one student said, "You told us we could do anything." I was no gardener, but I agreed to support their efforts.

The students outlined their rough idea and presented it to the principal. They contacted a landscaping firm, which volunteered to help them design the garden and estimate the costs, in money, material, and work hours, of making some of their vision come true. Then, every morning for about one year, any extra space in my classroom was filled with wheel barrows and garden tools. After school, some students would stay until six or seven o'clock to work in the courtyard. Some fathers and grandfathers pitched in after school hours, shoveling, measuring, and talking with students. Shovels of dirt gradually filled the crevasses and leveled the ground. Students walking past the windows could see, day by day, a new landscape beginning to take shape.

One sticking point was a six-foot hole that the students dug for a miniature pond. The insurance company for the school disapproved of this idea for safety reasons, and demanded that the hole be refilled to a depth of only twelve inches, "a puddle," as one student put it. The twenty-four tons of dirt needed for the task, however, had already been hauled away. Faced with a dilemma, my students decided to conduct some research. They met with the insurance agent, contacted attorneys, and searched the web for building codes and relevant information. In a final meeting with the insurance agent, the students pointed out that the pond design called for steps along the sloping sides, so if anyone fell in by accident, they could walk right out. Also, the courtyard in our school is an enclosed, decorative area in the middle of the building, so it is not usually open to people at all. The insurance agent's concerns were allayed, and the students got their deep pond.

Students raised funds by asking directly for donations of funds, materials, and advice from local businesses. Students printed up a "business card" for the project, attended business and service organization meetings, and met with store managers. They gave presentations, scheduled work, and kept track of incoming donations.⁸

Three months later, the final garden was a beautiful thing.⁹ Students had researched Japanese gardens, planned the project, raised funds, obtained materials, secured professional advice, and contributed manual labor to make their dream become a reality. They even purchased the *Ishidoro* that they had initially envisioned when first dreaming about their Zen garden.

My lessons on American history and Japanese culture, together with the students' self-motivated service project, created enduring memories for the students. They learned about the excitement of real history and how fragile our Bill of Rights is. They learned about their own ability to understand and solve real problems. They learned that a dream can become a reality. The experience was also a lesson for me. I saw how the lessons of the classroom were reinforced by the service project.¹⁰ Not every service project is going to be as grand or complex as was the building of a garden at Tecumseh Middle School and producing a poster for public display, but I have seen how even a small commitment to community service can plant a seed of citizenship.¹¹ At Tecumseh, I observed how the very same people making careless jokes had the capacity to learn, to change their thoughts and feelings, and to produce impressive work in the end. My students all had sharp minds. It was up to me to engage them. 🗺

Notes

1. I teach an Exploratory Foreign Language course in which students are exposed to several foreign languages to help them make an informed decision about which language to pursue in high school. Students also learn about the cultures and histories of the relevant foreign countries. Tecumseh Middle School is a public school in West Lafayette, Indiana. About 40 percent of students receive free or reduced lunch and the same fraction are considered "at risk" in some category.
2. Yoshiko Uchida, *The Bracelet* (New York: Paper Star/Penguin Putnam, 1996); Another book on the topic of the imprisonment that I have used is *Baseball Saved Us* by Ken Mochizuki (New York: Lee & Low Books, 1995).
3. Yoon Pak, "Dear Teacher: Letters on the Eve of Japanese American Imprisonment," *Middle Level Learning* (September 2001): 10-15, www.socialstudies.org/resources/moments/pearlharbor.shtml.
4. Wendy Hanamura, *Honor Bound*, (55 minute video. Sale \$195. Rental \$75. Phone 212-808-4980. www.filmakers.com).
5. Frank Abe, *Conscience and the Constitution* (56 minute video. Sale \$265.00, rental \$85.00, add \$15.00 S&H. Phone 800-343-5540. Fax 845-774-2945). Online at www.resisters.com/orders.htm; An middle-level study guide about the imprisonment is available at www.pbs.org/conscience under the Resources link.
6. Ken Mochizuki, *Heroes* (New York: Lee & Low, 1995).
7. To read more about the poster and related history, visit the site of the Japanese Veterans of America, at www.javadc.org.
8. The total value of the garden, materials and labor, came to about \$18,000.
9. Haruzo Ohasi, *Japanese Gardens of the Modern Era* (Toyko: Japan Publications, 2000).
10. Rahima C. Wade, ed., *Building Bridges: Connecting Classroom and Community through Service-Learning in Social Studies* (Washington, DC: National Council for the Social Studies, 2000).
11. I would like to thank the principal of Tecumseh Middle School, Mr. Chris Himsel, and our superintendent, Dr. Edward Eiler, for their support, as well as parents, staff, businesses, and community members who donated time, labor, and funds to help students complete their Zen garden project.

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A Model Rivers Project: Relating Geography and Culture

ANDREA PORT JACOBS

As she looked at a picture in a science magazine, Janet, one of my sixth grade students exclaimed, “That’s all? That little puddle is the source of the huge Mississippi River? How does the river get so big?” Answering these questions provided the opportunity to examine in depth the social studies standards theme **PEOPLE, PLACES AND ENVIRONMENTS**.¹ Since my goal in teaching geography is to open a larger world for my sixth graders, Janet’s questions prompted me to find a way to help my students discover the variety of ways rivers might affect the environment, culture, and history of the people along their courses. In this article, I describe two versions of a successful project that I use with my students when they study geography.²

The model river project combines geographic knowledge and research skills. Each year, I select the type of project we will do in light of the amount of class time available. I believe that a longer, one-month project (described below), which requires students to examine and report on life along the entire length of a river, is superior. It provides students with an opportunity to test their ideas about the relationship between people and the river in several settings. (The relationship often changes as the landscape changes.) A shorter, two-week project does provide opportunities to teach and practice geographic research and presentation skills, but it may not provide as much depth of understanding of social geography. The longer project also provides greater opportunity for students to solve problems creatively as they work on their model of a river valley.

The Project Begins

When studying the regions of Asia, I used the model river project as a culminating activity and an authentic assessment of student learning. Five rivers—the Ganges, Indus, Mekong, Huang He (Yellow) and Chang (Yangtze)—originate in the Himalaya Mountains. This region possesses a wide range of cultures and relationships among people along each river system and illustrates the many benefits that rivers provide to human society over time. Each student creates a three-dimensional (contour) model of a river system and a fact book about that river. If they choose, students can work with a partner, but each is required to make a plan (and have it approved by the teacher) that spells out what the division of labor will be for creating the model and the report.

To begin, I give each student a detailed, written description of the rivers project, which includes requirements, directions, suggestions, and a summary of how the project will be assessed (Handout, p. M13). I instruct students on how to use a card filing system to collect data for the fact book. (Although some students may have access to a computer, I have found that using cards is the best way for them to learn research

skills.) I show students an example of a well-researched book, with data organized in charts and lists. I do not require students to write everything in complete sentences in this activity. The models of river valleys, made on a base of foam board or plywood, are described in the handout, as is the rubric for assessment.

Resources for Research

A preliminary check of resources in the library and on the Internet indicated that there was adequate information close at hand for students to complete the project (See References). For the students, however, conducting research was sometimes complicated by their inability to gain access to the information they needed in a timely manner. Thus, I made sure that a variety of useful resources were present in the classroom. Photographs and diagrams are important in helping students identify the various parts of the river systems, and several travel websites proved a useful source of pictures. Companies that plan adventure tours provided online photographs of remote and isolated regions. General references such as encyclopedias, atlases, travel books and magazines, and *National Geographic* and *Smithsonian* magazines provided sufficient information for my first two classes to successfully complete the project. Basic descriptive statistics such as the length, volume of water, hydroelectric power generated, etc. was readily available from almanacs and encyclopedias. We learned that there was not always agreement on the exact location within a region of the source of some rivers.

Outcomes

After my first use of the river model project, a seventh grade teacher commented on the great understanding my students had about the geography of rivers. The project was successful in several ways. Students were very proud of their works and felt that they had accomplished much in the month allowed to complete the model river and its data book. Students defined the geographic concepts associated with river systems, described the cultural choices of the people concerning the rivers, and listed some of the the benefits and the dangers of rivers. Students answered questions from classmates, and older students, and adult visitors. Students showed respect and ease during the exhibit at the social studies fair we conducted at the school to share our knowledge. The principal asked particularly challenging questions, but the students always replied with good answers. The more savvy students have addressed such sophisticated issues as the politics of the Three Gorges Dam, but all were able to accurately respond about the concepts.

Partnerships worked well particularly when the pair had uniquely



different strengths. Some of the best projects were those where one partner was talented as a researcher and writer while the other was better as a designer and builder. Because of the difficulty sixth graders have in following the changes in names along an international river such as the Mekong, I have found that narrowing the number of choices for rivers provided less confusion and resulted in similar learning outcomes.

During the 2001-2002 year, I ran out of time to complete the project. I modified the procedures so that the project could be completed entirely in class over two weeks. The shortened format used only the example of the Amazon River, and it required small groups to construct a model of one portion of the river's course. Each portion was then joined to complete a single model. The model was 12' to 14' long and required three tables for support. Posters about each segment were hung on the wall above the model. We used clay and paint from the school supplies, and I gathered most of the construction materials with help from the art and primary grade teachers and a few contributions from parents. Because each student did not face as many problems to solve, I felt that the level of learning was not as great using the shorter format; nevertheless, students



were provided with valuable opportunities to learn and research and did gain an understanding of the Amazon River system and its impact on human organization.

Conclusion

The model river project addressed the conundrum commonly faced by teachers: how can students be provided the opportunity to learn specific skills while also enjoying some latitude in how they acquire those skills? The requirements of the longer project using the rivers of Asia had positive effect on students' skills and knowledge. The students honed their research skills and asked new questions as they built their river models. The 3-D models of river valleys enabled students to visualize what they were reading. Students took two-dimensional data (maps, charts, pictures, statistics, and narrative descriptions) and represented them in three dimensions to demonstrate the intricacy of a vast river system. Sixth graders organized a long-term, multi-step project. They carried it out using information in creative ways to demonstrate their understanding of



important concepts and relationships between the physical attributes of a river system and the cultural choices of the people living in the region. Students with artistic and academic bents made equally important contributions to the project, displaying their unique talents. 🌐

Notes

1. National Council for the Social Studies, *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies* (Washington, DC: NCSS, 1994).
2. This article was provided to *Middle Level Learning* by Mary E. Haas, Elementary Education Department Editor of *Social Education*.

References

- Pringle, Lawrence. *Rivers and Lakes*. Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1985. Although this book is almost twenty years old, its book's beautiful photographs and chart "The Endless Journey of a Water Molecule" are very useful.
- Living Geography*, Princeton, NJ: Two-Can, 2001. This book is a great resource, with photos of river models can help students conceptualize their own projects.
- What is a River System?* Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2003. This animated tutorial with sound is online at www.nationalgeographic.com/geographyaction/rivers/ga01.html.

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A River Runs Here

Description of the Project

Writing a River Fact Book

Using the information you collect on 3x5" research cards, make a separate booklet which includes the most important information about your river. Make your book neat and attractive. You may list the information in an outline by subject. (In other words, you do NOT need to write in complete sentences and paragraphs.) On the last page of your fact book, list your references, providing a full citation for each source. Save index cards from your research, as I will ask to see these. The information you gather for this book will provide you with facts and ideas for making your model.

Constructing a 3-D Model

- Describe the project to your parents this evening. Ask them nicely if they could purchase a piece of 1/4" foam poster board at an office supply store or discount-type department store.
- Use your imagination and ingenuity and all the information you've collected to make a three-dimensional (3-D) model of the physical and social geography of your river.
- Find inexpensive stuff to make the model. For example, you might use egg cartons for mountains, and find various kinds of blue, brown, or yellowish (depending on the river) materials for water, such as a deflated balloon, colored plastic wrap, etc. Packing peanuts or plastic bubble sheets are good for ice. Combine yogurt containers, different types of paper, packaging peanuts, wood scraps, clay, and plastic to illustrate the natural features of mountains, hills, plateaus, and valleys. Lego blocks can be used for man-made features such as bridges, dams, boats, and buildings.
- Sketch a plan before you start construction, to be sure that you can get everything in the proper place. Show me the plan before you start construction.
- As best you can, keep the scale accurate. Mark the elevation of the river's source, then mark several changes in elevation along the way to the river's mouth at sea level.
- Show how people live and work along the river. Make models of boats, houses, livestock, paddies and other crops. You may include model people if you like.
- Label important landforms such as mountains and major human landmarks such as dams, bridges, power plants, factories, and cities.
- Put it all together and bring everything to school: your model, fact book, and all your note cards. Be prepared to give a two-minute presentation about your river to the class, with the use of your model river.

Assessment

The model and the fact book will have separate grades.

FOR THE MODEL: 100 POINTS TOTAL

Accuracy:	25 points
Detail:	25 points
Creativity:	25 points
Appearance and presentation:	25 points

FOR THE FACTS BOOKLET: 50 POINTS TOTAL

Three (or more) references:	15 points
Thorough research:	25 points
Neatness, organization, spelling:	10 points

We Were There Too! Young People in U. S. History

by Phillip Hoose. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001. 264 pp. \$26.00 hardback.

REVIEWED BY MELINDA KARNES

Today in United States history classes, students want to learn about more than the activities of a few “famous men.” They want to understand the roles that both men and women played and how different cultures contributed to our history. They want to know about the experiences of young people at a given time and place. Taking this step in a history curriculum is easier with some topics, such as the Industrial Revolution (which led to child labor being an issue of social reform) or the Civil War (for which there are books that describe the accomplishments and heroics of young people),¹ than with others such as the early explorers.

In *We Were There Too! Young People in U. S. History*, award-winning author Phillip Hoose built upon the idea of inclusion and developed a valuable resource for middle school teachers. The stories begin with young Diego de Bermúdez, who was on Columbus’ 1492 voyage, and end with Kory Johnson, a young environmentalist at work in the 1990s. Over seventy short biographies highlight historical turning points, such as the American Revolution, the Lewis and Clark expedition, and the Civil Rights movement. Some of the “famous” individuals such as John Quincy Adams, Sacajawea, or Frederick Douglass, would be easy to research in a typical school library. Other names will not be so familiar to the students,

and finding out more about these people will call for careful research with the help of a librarian.

Hoose used multiple sources to research each individual and to illustrate the chapters, including prints; maps; stamps; portraits; photographs; local state and federal records; and diaries and other primary-source documents of all types. This reader wishes, however, that Hoose had cited sources more often. For example, it would be useful to know the source for the statement: “Nearly a quarter of the crew members [of Columbus’s ships] were teenagers and younger boys.”

Not only is the biographical material riveting in this book, but the presentation of each story is very well done. The layout of the book is tremendous. Each story is organized like a computer screen, with multiple windows containing pertinent information about the era. Take for example the story of Betty Parris and Abigail Williams, the two young girls who started what is now known as the Salem Witch Hunt. “Windows” of information include an entry about “wolf money” (rewards paid to boys for trapping and killing wolves), an explanation of the “jungle of rules” that Puritan children obeyed, and a minister’s view of the events of the day.

The possible uses of this book in the classroom are many. Almost any units of American history would intersect at least one of the biographical entries in this valuable resource. Learning experiences such as individual and/or group research, simulations, dramas, extensive writing exercises, learning centers, art projects, music, and dancing could all be created on the basis of the biographical and historical data presented in this book.

Exercises that employ skills such as comparing and contrasting, timeline construction, cultural empathy, and “then and now” analysis could easily be fashioned from these chapters.

Many times, I have heard college students say, after reading Howard Zinn’s classic *A People’s History of the United States*, “I wish I had learned about these people when I was in school!”² Now there is no excuse not to present some of this great history to middle school students. Read chapters from *We Were There, Too!* to your students, or let them read it for themselves. Either way, this book needs to be used in social studies classes of all sorts. Hooray for Phillip Hoose, and hooray to the teachers who use this book as a resource in their classrooms. 🌐

Notes

1. Jim Murphy, *Boy’s War: Confederate and Union Soldiers Talk about the Civil War* (New York: Clarion Books, 1993); Ina Chang, *A Separate Battle: Women and the Civil War* (New York: Puffin, 1996).
2. Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States: 1492 to the Present*. (New York: Harper Perennial Library, 1995).

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Learning on Their Feet: A Sourcebook for Kinesthetic Learning Across the Curriculum K-8

by Carol Glynn. Shoreham, VT: Discover Writing Press, 2001, 516 pp. \$25 paperback.

REVIEWED BY RONALD V. MORRIS

In art class, students enter the room with the phrase, "What are we going to do today?" Students should walk into social studies class with a similar sense of expectation. It can be a place where they will do something important and interesting each day. Teachers can use the book *Learning on Their Feet: A Sourcebook for Kinesthetic Learning Across the Curriculum K-8* by Carol Glynn to help create such expectation within students.¹

Learning on Their Feet contains three chapters (15-17) that specifically target social studies. These three chapters (for grades k-2, 3-4, and 5-8) pursue the noble goal of getting students out from behind their desks to do something so that at the end of the day, when students are asked what they did in school, they will have an interesting story to tell.

To understand the social studies chapters, it is imperative that teachers read the first eight chapters, which provide the rationale for the kinesthetic lessons. Most new social studies teachers do not have a strong background in drama or theater that would help them use this book with ease. Some new teachers will also need more background to be able to explain these activities and their importance to students. A new teacher might have difficulty finding enough details in the descriptions to make some of the activities work. On the other hand, there are several examples of plays (such as the "Three Branches of Government" or "Thomas Jefferson Sleeps") and songs (listed under "Musical History" such as "Nathan Hale," "Benedict Arnold," and "We are Always Working") that a new teacher could immediately use. Seasoned teachers could use some of the more complex activities to hook the attention of their students prior to a more traditional lesson plan.

For example, listed under the heading of "Middle Ages" is an exercise, "Vows of Silence" (pp. 245-246). Glynn first tells a personal story about how the exercise made her daughter realize how much parent and child had to say to each other every day and how much they needed to say it. Next, she lists the suggested ages for this activity. The six steps that follow include selecting an easy independent work task, introducing the vow, setting a time limit, setting "harsh" consequences for breaking the vow, determining if music will play in the background during the exercise, and deciding how many days the exercise will continue.

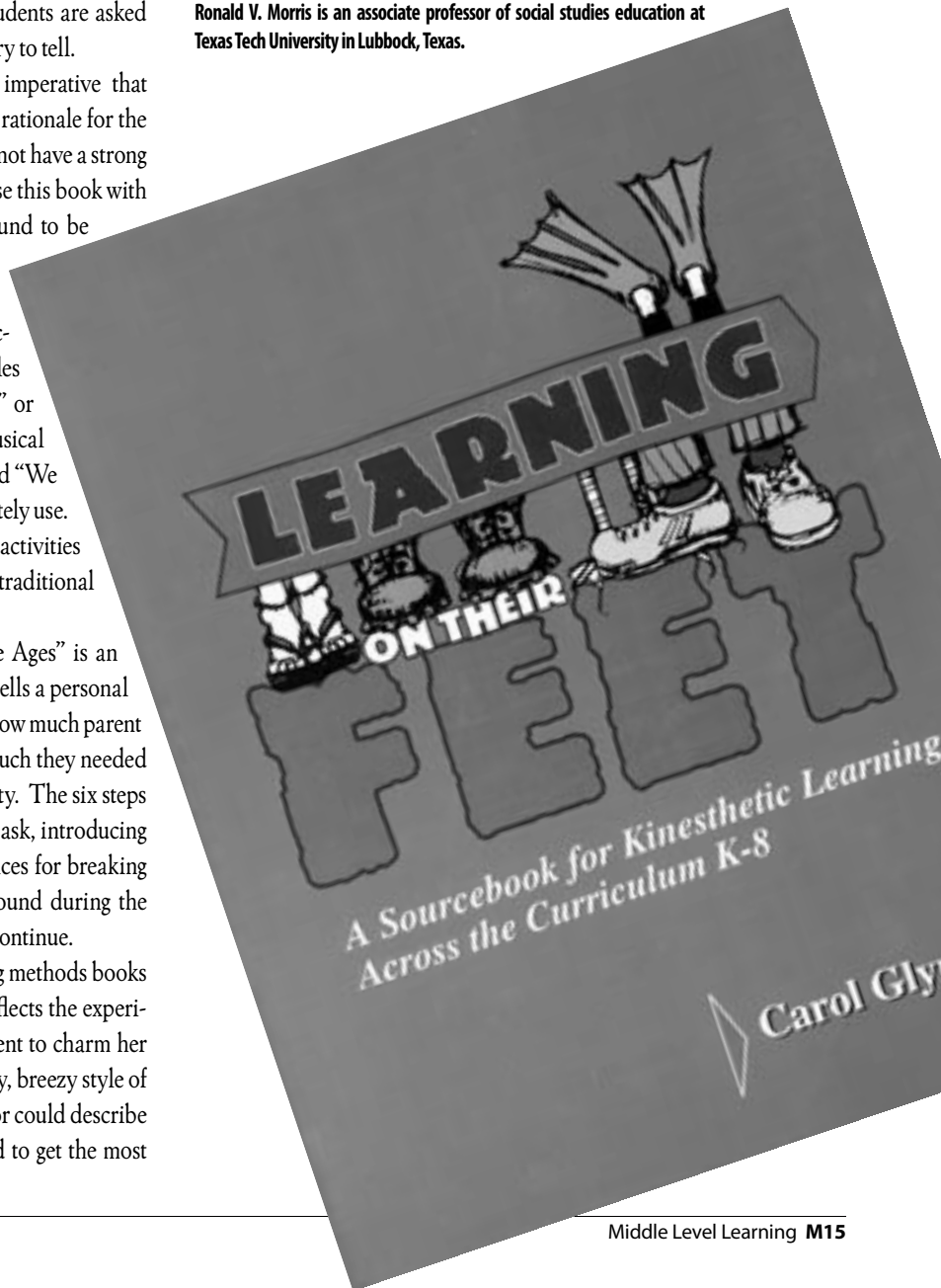
This collection certainly goes beyond most teaching methods books about kinesthetic learning and dramatic practices. It reflects the experience of a gifted actor and entertainer who uses movement to charm her audience as well as to teach academic content. The chatty, breezy style of writing is non-threatening. In a second edition the author could describe how students might obtain the depth of content needed to get the most

out of role playing and how historical empathy can result from these experiences. Furthermore, a second edition could include additional activities incorporating controversial issues and involving students in decision-making. More suggestions for evaluation and assessment would also be helpful. ❏

Note

1. Carol Glynn, *Learning On Their Feet: A Sourcebook for Kinesthetic Learning Across the Curriculum K-8* (Shoreham, VT: Discover Writing Press, 2001).

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Musical Shares

This game is a variation on musical chairs. It can lead into an interesting conversation about various service learning opportunities in the community or to open a lesson on the topic of hunger.¹

Preparation: Chairs, boom box, music, descriptions of service learning opportunities in your neighborhood that address the problem of hunger or homelessness

Time: 5 to 10 minutes

- 1 Ask for ten student volunteers to play the game. Tell the class, “This group of students represents the human population of Earth.” Ask these students to place their ten chairs in a circle (facing out). Tell the class, “The chairs represent the Earth’s resources.”
- 2 Invite each student volunteer to sit in a chair. Tell the class, “If resources are divided equally, there’s more than enough for all.” Play a round of musical chairs: Play the music for half-a-minute while students walk around the circle of chairs; stop the music; each student must find a seat. Say, “See? Everyone has a seat.”
- 3 Tell the class, “The resources of the world are not distributed equally.” Ask two students from the group to stand against the wall. Tell them, “You represent the poorest fifth of the human family, about 1.3 billion people, yet you collectively earn just 2 percent of the world’s income, about a dollar a day. You may stand against the wall while the music plays.”
- 4 Mark a line down the middle of one chair seat with masking tape. Ask six students to stand in front of three-and-a-half chairs. Tell them, “You represent the world’s middle class, about 3.5 billion people, with just enough to get by. You earn 33 percent of the world’s income. You can take turns sitting down in these three-and-a-half chairs. Some of you can walk, and some can rest your feet, as the music plays.”
- 5 Ask the remaining two students to spread out comfortably over six-and-a-half chairs. Tell them, “You represent the richest fifth of the human family, 1.2 billion people, earning 65 percent of the world’s income. You have more than enough, enjoying many personal conveniences. You may walk, or sit, or recline as the music plays.”
- 6 Play the music for half-a-minute. Then ask the ten volunteers to freeze in place.
- 7 Ask the whole class, “What did you just observe?” The results can vary. Sometimes, students in the “middle class” will quibble over who gets to sit down. One “rich” student may get up and walk about while the other pretends to sleep. The “poor” usually just observe the game.
- 8 Ask the class, “Where would this young woman be seated? She works nine to ten hours a day, seven days a week, earning as little as twelve cents an hour in a factory in Vietnam. She works on an assembly line, making giveaway promotional toys, cartoon characters, for fast food restaurants. She left her family farm when she was seventeen years old because she can make more money working at this factory.” (There may be some disagreement over whether she is part of the middle class, being a wage earner, or poor, having little chance of further education or promotion.)²
- 9 Ask the class, “Where would most families in our community be seated in this game?”
- 10 Ask the class, “Do you know of any organizations in our own community that works to end the problems of hunger or homelessness, here or overseas?”³

Notes

1. Adapted from a CROPWALK game at www.churchworldservice.org/wecantoo/sim1.html.
2. In 1999, the average income in urban areas in Vietnam was \$60.00 per month, and in rural areas it was only \$16.00 per month. About one quarter of the population lived in urban areas in that year. Nguyen Quang Thai, “Eliminating the Inequality Income Distribution Situation in Vietnam” (Singapore, National University of Singapore, 2000), sunsite.nus.edu.sg; National Labor Committee, *Toys of Misery: A Report on the Toy*

- Industry in China* (New York: NLC, 2002), www.nlcnet.org; Steven Greenhouse, “Nike Shoe Plant in Vietnam is Called Unsafe for Workers,” *New York Times* (November 8, 1997), archived at www.saigon.com/~nike/news/ny110897.htm.
3. Call 888-CWS-CROP or Second Harvest at 800-771-2323 to find out about hunger and service learning opportunities in your area.