**Culturally Responsive Teaching**

*Examples*

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| **Teacher** | Linda Christensen (social justice educator and author of *Reading, Writing, Rising Up*) |
| **Grade/Content** | 10th Grade Language Arts and Social Studies |
| **Objective(s)** | * SWBAT identify the central argument and supporting details in a persuasive text * SWBAT evaluate the effectiveness of supporting details in a persuasive text * SWBAT identify key ideas and supporting details in explanatory (expository) text * SWBAT evaluate key ideas and supporting details in an explanatory (expository) text * SWBAT create a persuasive essay that uses supporting details and rhetorical devices to advance an idea or claim |
| **Assessment** | * Reading quizzes where students are asked to identify and critique main ideas and supporting details in nonfiction (persuasive and expository) texts * Persuasive essay * Action plan proposal |
| **Lesson/Unit Details** | *The Backstory:*  Ms. Christensen teaches 9th and 10th grade English at a Title I high school in Portland, OR. This unit came into being after Ms. Christensen’s students arrived back in class immediately after taking the PSAT. As far as they were concerned, there was no need to go to college because this test confirmed their stupidity. Students remarked “the words on that test had letters arranged in ways I had never seen before.” Students blamed both themselves and their teachers for their poor performance on the exam.  Ms. Christensen’s co-teacher suggested that the students write about their experience:  **Write about a test you’ve taken. It might have been the PSAT or a math or English test or the yearly state achievement exam. Choose either a good or a bad testing experience. Think back to the experience and try to re-create it. What was the test on? How were you prepared for it? What did you feel like before you took it? During the test? After the test?**  The next day the students (and teachers) took turns sharing their experiences. The students discovered that many of them had suffered public or private humiliation connected with testing. They spoke about how tests and schools foster competition, and how grades are used as rewards or punishments rather than measuring how much was learned.  *The Unit:*  The teachers decided to plan a unit where students would be able to explore where so-called aptitude and achievement tests originated, and whose interests they served. The unit would focus on persuasive and expository reading and writing objectives, and would culminate in a final project.  The students read an article entitled “The Cult of Mental Measurement” which detailed the beliefs of Carl Campbell Brigham, the founder of Education Testing Service. They learned about the disturbing connections between standardized testing and eugenics movements in the early-20th century, which sought to prevent the contamination of “pure” white bloodlines by “inferior” races and ethnicities. Through role plays, film, and source readings the class explored changes in mass education in the early 20th century and critically examined groups (colleges, universities, school systems) who used Brigham’s tests as a sorting mechanism to preserve the status quo.  **At each stage of this process, students would practice reading and writing skills connected to persuasive and expository text: identifying and critiquing main ideas and details, connecting to background knowledge, and “talking back” to the text in writing and speaking.**  The class followed up the historical study by analyzing the correlation between income levels and SAT scores. On average, the higher the parent’s income, the higher score a student “earned” on the SAT. Then they looked at some of the sample vocabulary used in typical analogy questions:  HEIRLOOM:INHERITANCE::   1. Payment:currency 2. Belongings:receipt 3. Land:construction 4. Legacy:bill 5. Booty:plunder   After they pulled some analogies apart and made some of their own from each other’s background and neighborhood experiences, it became clear to students that the SAT questions measured access to upper-class experience, not ability to make appropriate analogies. Through class discussion, it became evident that the test was biased toward the privileged and functioned to segregate students on the basis of social class. When the test became demystified, it was no longer a boogeyman; when kids saw it as an obstacle, ETS no longer held the same power over them.  *The Assignment:*  The students had identified a problem: their futures and post-secondary aspirations were affected by a series of tests (SAT, ACT, state exams) with undeniably racist historical origins, that in their present forms still operated with systematic cultural biases that put them at a disadvantage.  Throughout several angry class discussions, the class arrived at an essential question: **How could they “beat” these exams and attain scores that allowed for admission into colleges of their choosing while still preserving their cultural dignity and pride?** The culminating project of the unit was a response to this question.   * Students wrote an essay in which they presented an argument for how standardized tests should be used, or if they should be used at all. In supporting their arguments, they were allowed to use resources they had read in class and to draw on their own experiences, but also had to incorporate outside research on the subject. The students were allowed to choose their audience (the school board, the board of directors for ETS, and the presidents of various universities were some of the options chosen). * Students worked in teams to create an action plan for how to respond to the essential question. Ideas that students developed and presented to the principal included: * Creating on-campus study groups and after-school tutoring specifically for help with the SAT * Using school funds to hire professional tutors (from Kaplan etc) to run tutoring sessions on the school campus * Teaching standardized-test reading passages as a separate genre of writing * Creating a resource-sharing center where students could check out and share test-study resources * No longer announcing National Merit Award winners over announcements or in the newspaper, as it fostered feelings of competition and inferiority * Holding a panel discussion where students could share their experiences with testing, and dialogue with teachers about forms of assessment that accurately measured learning while affirming their identity and fostering community, rather than competition. |