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Ella and Henry: A Standards Based Unit and Accompanying Novel

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Ella and Henry: A Standards Based Unit and Accompanying Novel

by

Virginia Harris Prather

Senior Honors Thesis

A Capstone Experience/Thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of

University Honors College at

Western Kentucky University

2008

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Abstract

My CE/T consists of a young adult novel appropriate for elementary students and an accompanying Standards Based Unit of Study (SBUS). An SBUS is an instructional plan for teaching and learning that addresses content areas in a meaningful way. As part of the SBUS, I am including lesson plans, essential questions, a calendar for teaching this four-week unit, all worksheets, writing prompts, and other activities to be used, and an annotated bibliography of related works. The nature of this project is creative, as I have designed a unit for use in the elementary classroom. It will cover material from various content areas, such as reading, writing, and history. My approach is unique in that I will be writing an original work to use with this project, rather than a book written by someone else. My students will gain much from having an author as their teacher, because I will be able to motivate and challenge them in unique ways.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to Dr. John Hagaman whose constant guidance and encouragement helped make this project possible. I am also grateful to Dr. John Moore for reading my final drafts and being a part of my defense committee. I would like to thank Dr. Craig T. Cobane for his guidance during my Honors College experience and for being a part of my defense committee. I am grateful that Professor Marla Capper and Dr. Clay Motley could be a part of my defense committee as well. I am also thankful to my fiancé, Joshua Peerce, for his emotional support and encouragement every step of the way. I would like to express my thanks to my editor, Donna Peerce, who took time from her busy schedule to revise my novel. Last, I would like to thank my mother, Julie Mulcahy, who always said that someday I would write The Great American Novel. This is my attempt.

Forward

What you will find on the following pages is a two-part project that has taken almost two years to complete. However, the idea for the first component of my Capstone Experience/Thesis Project actually stemmed from Dr. John Hagaman's Expository Writing class at VAMPY in 2003. I write for recreation, and began a small novel as a way to release my creative energies. I worked on the novel sporadically, with no intentions of doing anything substantial with it, until I joined the Honors College and was introduced to the idea of a CE/T. When I pondered what my choice of project was going to be, I was a sophomore in Elementary Education with a half-finished novel on my hands. I already had some experience writing units, and I could still vividly remember some of the units from my elementary school days, which often centered on a work of literature. Then a thought occurred to me: "What if I was to write a unit on a trade book, such as those that were used with me...and write the book as well?" The result is a 252 page young adult novel and a standards-based unit to be used by a team of 6th grade teachers. With the help of Dr. Hagaman, Dr. John Moore, and my editor Donna Peerce, I have developed it into something that I am quite proud to sign my name to. The following exposition is a general description of my unit and novel, which outlines the significance of my piece, my qualifications to write the unit, and the limitations I experienced during the project.

My unit is a standards-based unit of study (SBUS): that is, it begins with desired standards to be met, then progresses to an essential question, then guiding questions that help the students address the essential question. The standards are taken from the Combined Curriculum Document published by the Kentucky Department of Education. The essential question for my unit is "How does one's culture impact how they view themselves and

others?” A SBUS ends with a culminating event, which must include a task, role, purpose, and audience for the students. The culminating event for my unit is a project that the students will be working on in at least three of their classes (Reading, Writing, and Social Studies). The students must create a newspaper to answer the essential question, using information they have learned in all three of their classes. The newspapers will be showcased at a Parents Night at the school for friends and family to see. The prompt and scoring guide for this project are included within the appendix.

In addition to being a standards based unit, my piece is interdisciplinary. In many schools, 6th grade students travel through the building to attend separate Reading, Writing, Social Studies, Math, and Science classes. I believe that the connectedness of subjects is lost when information is compartmentalized, which is why integration is so important. Students need to learn that writing, science, and social studies are one and the same; therefore, my unit includes a unit design and materials for three sixth grade classes: Social Studies, Writing, and Reading. I wanted to blend several disciplines and draw on the knowledge and skills from each.

As aforementioned, my novel was a recreational work-in-progress for quite some time. I did not begin it with any definite purpose or aim—I was simply having fun. Any author will tell you that much of the time, the characters in a book are the ones who write the story. (I know this sounds silly, but it is true.) But as my story progressed, I realized that I did have some goals in writing *Ella and Henry*, and I have even more now. My first goal is for students to be introduced to a very different type of book than they might have been exposed to before. Although more books for young adults are coming out than ever before, few of these have a female as the protagonist. I loved fairy tales when I was younger, but

was always disappointed that the man was always the hero, and all the girl had to do was stand on the sidelines and look pretty. Then I wondered, what if the tables were turned and it was the damsel who rescued the prince? I think that my book is unique and will give readers of both genders (and all ages!) a new perspective on gender roles and stereotypes.

Second, I want students to be able to identify with and relate to the characters in my book. Although few have ever been faced with life-or-death choices as Ella is, almost everyone has had to cope with issues dealing with family problems, bullies, and discrimination because of gender or some other factor. Likewise, students will be able to identify with the love that Ella has for Henry and Tom, because most people have family or friends that they care deeply about. The themes of the book are universal and apply to everyone's daily battles, even though those battles may not involve swords or cannons.

Another goal is to give my students a reason to enjoy reading. It seems as though many students see reading as a chore, like doing math problems or copying definitions. I want students to know that reading is a gift that they can take with them their entire lives. I want to nurture a love of books in all my students and, even if they are not the most fluent readers out there, I want them to appreciate all the things that books can do for them. Books open the mind and can take a reader anywhere, from tropical islands in the Caribbean to faraway castles in medieval Europe. That is one reason why I am doing an activity on cultures as my cumulative assignment. I want my students to know that books are marvelous resources that can open doors to worlds that they never imagined.

Last, one of my goals for this book is to get my students thinking. Even fictional books like this one can pose important moral and ethical questions about the world in which we live. In the book, the lifestyle of the character Tom (and later, Ella and Henry) is not one

that most people would condone. Piracy had been given the most negative of connotations, entailing theft, murder, treachery, and greed. However, it is my hope that after reading the book, my students will be able to look past the labels that society gives people, to see the true worth of the person underneath. No one in his or her right mind would call Tom a thief or Henry a traitor. The characters in my book are not what they appear. They are dynamic, imperfect and ever changing, just like the people that students will encounter throughout their lives.

As the author of the novel I will be teaching, I can foresee myself giving a valuable contribution to my students. Think of what the students will gain from having an author as their teacher! Because I am so familiar with the messages and themes in the book, I can motivate and challenge my students in unique ways. I will help the students learn as they never would have if the author were not there for questioning. Throughout school, my teachers would often ask us to write down questions about a text that we would ask the author, if we could. For once, that will be possible. I will also share the processes of writing and forming goals with my students. In their reading class, they will be working on memoirs. The process of writing a memoir is similar to writing a book. I could share my own writing process with the students, and then let them discover what works best for them. Someday, one of my students may become a bestseller! Last, my contribution goes beyond my specific students: I am creating a unit that all elementary teachers can use and benefit from. Everything that is essential to a unit is included in this piece. It is my hope that my work will be both a model for a unit, and also a powerful unit in itself.

My standards-based unit is significant in many ways. As aforementioned, it is centered on strands taken from the Combined Curriculum Document (CCD). In my unit

designs, I have indicated the significant Core Content strand to be addressed. For instance, in the Reading section, I used the strand that states, “Students will identify or explain the use of literary elements (e.g., characterization, setting, plot, theme, point of view) in a passage.” Because the content is taken from the 6th grade CCD, I also know that it is developmentally appropriate for my students. In addition to the content strands used in my unit, I have indicated learning goals and objectives in my unit designs. These goals and objectives were taken from the Core Content, and indicate the skill or process students must master.

I have utilized many research-based strategies in my unit. A research-based strategy is one that has been proven effective in helping students understand and retain information. I use many strategies from *Thoughtful Education* (Marzano) such as graphic organizers, summarizing and note taking, identifying similarities and differences, and non-linguistic representation of information. I have also used many strategies from *The Strategic Teacher*, by Silver, Strong, and Perini (2007). These strategies cater to the four learning modalities (Understanding, Mastery, Self-Expressive, and Interpersonal). Examples of these research-based strategies in my unit include the Window Notes strategy, Inductive Learning, Community Circle, and Pattern Maker. These are just a few of the strategies I have utilized that will make teaching more effective.

In addition to the plethora of strategies, my unit caters to a variety of learning styles. As previously mentioned, I adapted my instruction so that it would hold the interest of students of all four learning modalities. I also have included activities for a variety of Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences. The Theory of Multiple Intelligences states that all children learn differently, and each child may be gifted in one or more of the nine “intelligences.” I have incorporated musical, artistic, kinesthetic, verbal, and logical tasks and

activities into my unit, to cater to the diverse learning styles of my students. Many hands-on activities are used in all three sections of the unit, because I am aware that a good portion of students learn by doing. I have also made an effort to teach to several different styles at once; for example, when presenting information on the Activboard, I will make sure that students can see and hear it at the same time. I am aware that some students are auditory and some are visual learners, so I wanted to cater to both of these preferences at the same time. In this manner, I hope to ensure success for all learners.

My piece is appropriate to their development and prior knowledge of sixth grade students. Although no two sixth grade classes are alike, there are certain characteristics that students demonstrate when they are between the ages of eleven and twelve. According to Chip Wood's *Yardsticks*, eleven-year-olds are starting to be able to see the world from varying perspectives. They are also able to understand abstract concepts and use deductive reasoning. These are all skills that students will use to work through the tasks of the unit. In addition, I have included numerous hands-on activities, because older students still benefit from manipulating materials. My novel *Ella and Henry* has main characters who are the same age or perhaps slightly older than sixth grade students. I used a vocabulary in the book that was extensive but not overwhelming for the sixth grade student, and my novel is not so long that they will lose interest before they are through. In these ways, I know my unit and book are developmentally appropriate for students.

My book and accompanying standards-based unit promote rigorous study. By the time they are in 6th grade, students are capable of conducting research and putting together presentations on their own or in a group setting. The tasks I have included in my unit are often multifaceted and time consuming. However, they are what make the unit rigorous.

Children cannot learn unless they are challenged. I believe that the activities and final project outlined in my unit designs are somewhat demanding, but they are appropriate for the abilities of my students. Nothing within the unit is too difficult for my students to complete, especially if the correct adaptations are made for those who need them. (Adaptations will be described in a later section). Students will have to read the book *Ella and Henry*, write a memoir that is polished enough to appear in their seventh grade portfolio, and conduct an in-depth study of the cultures of the Caribbean. In these ways, my unit is rigorous, yet manageable.

No book or unit is useful unless the students can relate it to their own lives. Although the characters in *Ella and Henry* are fictional and lived hundreds of years ago, they face many of the same challenges as today's adolescents. These include conflict with family and friends, a need for acceptance by peers, and the search for a place in the world. Students would quickly lose interest in a piece with which they could not connect. That is why one of my goals for writing *Ella and Henry* was to relate it to the lives of readers. The accompanying standards-based unit also relates to real life because students will perform real world writing tasks. These include journals, on-demand, open response questions, and portfolio pieces. These are all tasks that students will be required to do as they travel through school. My unit also relates to the real world because students will be studying cultures from Central America. Through gaining a greater understanding of those cultures, students will be better prepared to enter a global society.

An understanding of cultures leads to my next point: my unit reflects the personal, social, cultural, and global concerns of students. Most likely, every student in the class will have been bullied at some point in his or her life. A significant personal concern for 6th grade

students is finding the place in their school or community where they fit in. Acceptance by peers is of utmost concern for these students, so a portion of my book and unit is centered on teaching acceptance of those who are different. Bullying is a major social concern with many schools today, which is a topic that is touched on in the novel. A cultural or global concern of many is the influx of immigrants into communities. Students may be unsure of how to act around students who look or speak differently, but my unit will teach that everyone has something important to contribute. If students understand a person's culture, they are more likely to accept that person into their circle of friends.

This unit demands higher levels of thinking from students. Tasks from all levels of Depth of Knowledge (DOK) and Bloom's Taxonomy are used in all three sections of the unit. Depth of Knowledge indicates how deeply or thoroughly students are able to understand material. There are four levels of DOK, and all are covered within the unit. Bloom's Taxonomy is a system of classifying objectives and questions, and ranges from the Remembering or Knowledge level to the Creating or Synthesis level. I have taken questions and tasks from all levels, so that my unit is balanced in terms of what the students are required to do. An example of a high-level task is the culminating activity, where students will have to synthesize an answer to the essential question, based on what they have learned during the unit.

This unit is significant because it makes the learners ask questions. The culminating activity centers around answering a fundamental question about culture and perspective. Students will address other important questions throughout the unit. In almost every lesson, the students will be asked higher order questions. The purpose is not only to assess their knowledge, but to encourage students to formulate their own questions about the material.

In my unit designs, I have specified many modifications that can be made for students. One of the major modifications is allowing ESL students or those who have difficulty with sustained reading to receive an audiotope of the book. They will then be able to participate in discussions and complete all activities relating to the story. I have also elected to read some selections aloud to all the students, because even sixth graders enjoy being read to. I utilize group activities in many instances, while maintaining a balance of whole class, group work and independent work. Students who are reluctant to speak in a whole-class setting may open up in a smaller group, where they feel less pressure to perform. Group work is also a modification for level of support, because the students within a group can help each other with the assignments. I have created many accommodations for a variety of student needs, and these accommodations can be found within the unit designs.

Several factors have made me credible to write this unit. The first is that I am the author of the book the unit is based on. If the students have any questions, they have both their novel and me as resources. Even if I am not the one teaching this unit, I have designed it around the themes and ideas from the book that I believe are the most important. This is reflected in the discussion questions and journal prompts I have created. If students ask, I can talk about how the novel came about, and my reasons for writing it. My unit stemmed from my book because I knew that I wanted to share my work with someone someday, and a unit for students seemed like the best way to do this.

Another reason I am credible is that I am a senior in Elementary Education. At the time of my defense, I will be exactly a month away from my first day of student teaching. At this point, I have learned how to do lesson plans, units, assessments, and every other task an in-service teacher is required to do. I can do these things as well as anyone with my level of

schooling, and I believe improvement will come with time and experience. There is little else that my university professors can teach me. The rest will come when I have my own classroom. Because I know how to do the thing teachers are required to do, I believe I am more than capable of creating a unit for use in the classroom.

I was confronted with several limitations during my CE/T experience. There was the constant issue of time, which no one ever seems to have enough of. I was enrolled in extremely rigorous Elementary Education classes, which are not a cakewalk, contrary to popular belief. The past two years have been without a doubt the most stressful of my life. At any given time, I was balancing eighteen hours of classes, a CE/T, part-time employment, involvement in extracurricular activities such as the HonorsToppers, and planning my wedding in May. Time was a luxury that I have not had. However, I believe that I have produced a sound piece in spite of all this. I have put as much time and effort into it as possible, and the knowledge that I have done my best is a great feeling. My only regret is that I was unable to complete sections for Science, Math, and the Related Arts. The cause of this, of course, was the lack of time. Dr. Hagaman and I decided, after some thought, that those areas should be the contribution of the classroom teacher. I feel confident that, given the unit and novel I have created, teachers would be able to design instruction for the rest of the 6th grade subjects.

As my CE/T experience ends, I think back to the articles that were written about me in the Honors College Student Newsletter, the *Arête*. I was chosen as the student to be followed throughout her thesis experience. The earlier interviews showed extreme confidence that I and anyone else could complete this endeavor with ease. The later ones showed a student who was frazzled beyond her wits. However, now that the end has come, I

feel closer to that first description. Although there were times when I felt I should quit the whole thing, I had the support of an amazing team of people who were behind me every step of the way. These include my wonderful Advisor and Second Reader, my amazing fiancé Joshua, my supportive friends, and the rest of my Thesis Committee. I am grateful for their confidence and support. This experience has been long, grueling at times, but rewarding above all else. I hope that you enjoy reading my novel and my unit, and that someday, it will be used within many classrooms.

Ginny Prather



Extra! Extra! Read all about it!

You've traveled to Central America and back and learned about the people there. You've written a memoir about someone significant in your life. Now it's time to bring it all together!

As the culminating event for our unit, you are going to create a newspaper with your classmates. Working in groups of three, you will attempt to answer the question "How does one's perspective and culture impact how they view themselves and others?" You may use any media that is typically found in a newspaper (feature articles, headlines, photographs, drawings, editorials, cartoons, interviews) to answer this question. Your newspaper should be at least two FULL pages in length, and should clearly tell us your answer to the question. You must use information we have gone over in class, in addition to your own ideas. Here is a detailed rubric:

Scoring Rubric

SCORE	DESCRIPTION
4	The students work in groups of three to create a newspaper answering the question “How does one’s perspective and culture impact how they view themselves and others?” The students use at least six different types of media in their papers. They use at least ten facts or ideas discussed in class to support their answer. Three additional ideas not covered in class should also be used to support their answer. The newspaper is of sufficient length and demonstrates a thorough understanding of the concepts of perspective and culture. All parts are complete and correct.
3	The students work in groups of three to create a newspaper answering the question “How does one’s perspective and culture impact how they view themselves and others?” The students use at least five different types of media in their papers. They use at least eight facts or ideas discussed in class to support their answer. Two additional ideas not covered in class should also be used. The newspaper is of sufficient length and demonstrates an understanding of the concepts of perspective and culture. All parts are complete and correct.
2	The students work in groups of three to create a newspaper answering the question “How does one’s perspective and culture impact how they view themselves and others?” The students use at least four different types of media in their papers. They use at least six facts or ideas discussed in class to support their answer. One additional idea not covered in class should also be used. The newspaper is not of sufficient length. The student made a strong attempt, and showed some understanding of the concepts of perspective and culture.
1	Students provide little evidence of understanding of the content. They work in groups of three and attempt to answer the question “How does one’s perspective and culture impact how they view themselves and others?” Only some parts of the answer are correct. The students use three or fewer different types of media in their papers. They use four or fewer facts or ideas discussed in class to support their answer, but no additional ideas are used. Paper is of unacceptable length or quality. The students demonstrate that they do not understand the concepts of perspective and culture.
0	Students are incorrect or irrelevant
Blank	No Response

Student Rubric

4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - work in groups of three to create a newspaper answering the question "How does one's perspective and culture impact how they view themselves and others?" -use at least six different types of media. -use at least ten facts or ideas discussed in class to support your answer. -use three additional ideas not covered in class to support your answer. -the newspaper should be of sufficient length and show that you thoroughly understand the concepts of perspective and culture. -answer all parts correctly and completely.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - work in groups of three to create a newspaper answering the question "How does one's perspective and culture impact how they view themselves and others?" - use at least five different types of media. -use at least eight facts or ideas discussed in class to support your answer. -use two additional ideas not covered in class to support your answer. - the newspaper should be of sufficient length and show that you understand the concepts of perspective and culture. -answer all parts correctly and completely.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - work in groups of three to create a newspaper answering the question "How does one's perspective and culture impact how they view themselves and others?" - use at least four different types of media. - use at least six facts or ideas discussed in class to support your answer. -use one additional idea not covered in class to support your answer. - the newspaper should be of sufficient length. -show that you made a strong attempt, and demonstrate some understanding of the concepts of perspective and culture.
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -provide little evidence of understanding of the content. -work in groups of three and attempt to answer the question "How does one's perspective and culture impact how they view themselves and others?" -only some parts of the answer are correct. - use three or fewer different types of media. - use four or fewer facts or ideas discussed in class to support your answer, but no additional ideas are used. -Paper is of unacceptable length or quality. - demonstrate little understanding of the concepts of perspective and culture.
0	-answer is incorrect or irrelevant
Blank	-no answer is given

On-Demand Writing Task 1

Situation:

In society today, many people try very hard to "fit in" by conforming to the standards of others. For instance, young people may have to wear certain clothes, listen to certain music, or act a certain way in order to be accepted.

Writing task:

Write a feature article for *Teen People Magazine* about why you think it is important to be unique. In your article, identify a literary or film hero whom you admire for "not following the norm," and describe why you admire that character.

On-Demand Writing Task 2

Situation:

Bullying has become a problem at your school. Many students are afraid at recess because this is not being addressed. Think of a time when you witnessed or were part of a situation involving a bully.

Writing task:

Write a letter to your school based council narrating this event and explaining why bullying needs to be stopped.

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