

Creating a Culture — The Story Begins

Length:	30 minutes
School:	FAIR School (Fine Arts Interdisciplinary Resource School)
Location:	Crystal, Minn.
Grade:	6
Teachers:	Rick Wright, 6th-Grade Teacher Lisa Kindall, Theatre Melissa Brunkan, Music Rachael Hoffman-Dachelet, Visual Art
Description:	Students develop their own island cultures.

About This Program

Early in the year, the sixth-graders at FAIR School study ancient civilizations, including Native American and Aztec peoples. Starting in February, students break into groups to create their own cultures, drawing on 10 “universals of culture” as their guide. The universals of culture include such things as food/clothing/shelter, political organization, economics, family/kin, communications, arts/aesthetics, recreation, and attitude toward the unknown. In this program, we hear in detail about one of the cultures created by a group in Rick Wright’s classroom. Throughout the program, he and other sixth-grade teachers meet as a group, often with the arts teachers, to plan instruction.

Students work with the arts teachers and the other sixth-grade teachers to create various artifacts of their cultures. These include flags, rituals, jewelry, clothing, pots, fabrics, yarn paintings, weapons, and anthems. All of the creations reflect the social fabric outlined by the students. We see groups of students working with the theatre teacher (on developing rituals), with the music teacher (on modal scales), and with the visual art teacher (on slab pots and other clay artifacts). With the sixth-grade teachers, we see students learning the arts of batik, weaving and embroidery.

As the students are working on an almanac entry to describe their culture, they get a shock: representatives of the King and Queen of Fairlandia (actually two of the school’s music teachers) attempt to conquer the cultures created by the students. This program is the first of two parts.

Arts and Non-Arts Standards Addressed in This Program

Standards listed refer to the McREL Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks, a synthesis of national standards in each of the disciplines, found at www.mcrel.org.

Visual Art

Standard 2: Knows how to use structures (e.g., sensory qualities, organizational principles, expressive features) and functions of art

Music

Standard 7: Understands the relationship between music and history and culture

Theatre

Standard 6: Understands the context in which theatre, film, television, and electronic media are performed today as well as in the past

Behavioral Studies

Standard 2: Understands various meanings of social group, general implications of group membership, and different ways that groups function

Language Arts

Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

Math

Standard 4: Understands and applies basic and advanced properties of the concepts of measurement

Viewing Suggestions

Who Should Watch This Program

Teachers—“Creating a Culture — The Story Begins” will be especially interesting to teachers looking for ways to deepen students’ study of culture and ancient civilizations.

Administrators and professional development providers—This program can be used to help teachers understand the importance of finding shared concepts for interdisciplinary units.

Before You Watch

Respond to the following questions.

- What is culture? How do you define culture?
- How do you make abstract cultural concepts more concrete for students?
- What role could the arts play in a unit about a past culture?
- How do the arts affect a culture? How does culture affect the arts?

Watch the Program

As you watch, note how the arts are used to help students understand an abstract concept like culture. Write down what you find interesting, surprising, or especially important about the teaching and learning you see in this unit.

Reflect on the Program

- How did each art form serve to deepen students’ understanding of culture?
- What kinds of preparation do you think preceded the lessons seen in the program to make these activities successful for students?
- How do the resources and climate of this particular school help support the type of instruction shown?
- Which components of the study—social studies, visual art, theatre, and music—would be most challenging for you and your colleagues to incorporate in an integrated unit?
- What evidence, if any, did you see of the ways students benefited from this unit of study?

Additional Resources

Consult some of these resources for more information.

Books

Day, Nancy. *Your Travel Guide to Ancient Mayan Civilization*. Minneapolis: Runestone Press, 2000. ISBN: 0822530775

Grady, Sharon. *Drama and Diversity: A Pluralistic Perspective for Educational Drama*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. ISBN: 0325002622

Gerwin, David, & Zevin, Jack. *Teaching U.S. History as Mystery*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003. ISBN: 032500398X

Lipetzky, Jerry *DIG Curriculum*. Fort Atkinson, WI: Interaction Publishers, Inc., DBA Interact, 1998. ISBN: 1-57336-037-6

Macaulay, David. *Motel of the Mysteries*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin/Walter Lorraine Books, 1979. ISBN: 0395284252

McIntosh, Jane R. *Eyewitness: Archeology*. New York: DK Publishing, 2000. ISBN: 0789458640

Selwyn, Douglas, & Maher, Jan. *History in the Present Tense: Engaging Students Through Inquiry and Action*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003. ISBN: 0325005702

Web Sites

FOSS Full Option Science System: Landforms: Investigations that introduce students to fundamental concepts in earth science

<http://lhsfoss.org/scope/folio/html/Landforms/1.html>

Resource Center of the Americas: Promoting human rights, democratic participation, economic justice, and cross-cultural understanding in the context of globalization in the Americas

<http://www.americas.org/>