

MULTICULTURAL RESOURCE CENTER

A collaborative project of Saint Paul Public Schools Office of Educational Equity and the East Metro Integration District

"The Problem Solver"
Nail Fetish from Congo



Summer 2006, Volume 2, Number 3

Teaching With Objects

This issue of the Multicultural Resource Center (MRC) newsletter focuses on "Teaching With Objects." The MRC houses an extensive collection of objects available for checkout that reflect material culture from around the world. These objects are not solely intended to be used as display pieces, but are teaching tools for hands-on use with students.

Using objects in classroom instruction is a means to help develop critical thinking and inquiry skills. Objects are stimulations for conversations and explorations and are a great way to begin a unit of study. They can be used to broaden the use of multiple intelligence experiences and a way to look at topics and issues from multiple perspectives.

The significance of the object lays not in its physical being but in the symbolic representation or narrative that the object represents. This meaning changes based on the experiences of the user. Using objects as a springboard for investigating a variety of narratives or points of view allows for the ability for all students experiences to be brought to the table and valued. Creative use of objects in the curriculum can help students better connect what they are learning to their own experiences.

While using objects may be a natural fit for art and social studies teachers as a way of adding authentic experiences to their curriculum, there are many creative ways to incorporate objects into other subject areas as well. Geometric designs and patterns are used across cultures and integrate well into mathematics. Science teachers may be interested in using our collection of musical instruments to investigate the properties of sound or how the materials available in a specific environment shape a culture and vice versa. Language arts teachers may use the objects for something as basic as descriptive writing or for creating monologues about the individuals who would have used the object. The possibility for integrating objects into an area of study is limitless.

Explore our collection of objects online—photographs of objects that are available are regularly added to our website—or stop by to get a better feel for what is available. Page two of this newsletter has some suggested activities for using objects in the classroom, while page three has a list of print resources available through the MRC to support your use of objects in the classroom.

Learn More Online...

<http://www.historylab.org/curriculum/teaching-with-objects.pdf> "Teaching With Objects: An Object Inquiry Unit," Washington State Historical Society.

http://www.indiana.edu/~mathers/edu/top_index.html "Teaching With Objects and Photographs," Mathers Museum of World Cultures.

http://www.museumsandpublicschools.org/learning/learning_from.html MAPS: Museums and Public Schools, Chicago Public Schools

<http://carlos.emory.edu/ODYSSEY/Teachers/woa/woa.htm> Collection of worksheets for looking at objects.

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"The materials are great for developing inquiring minds and connections between students of different cultures and races."

"The workshops have provided me with the tools needed to share my culture and therefore help my students."

"By being able to bring in artifacts and materials that reflect cultures from around the world the kids were able to more readily find themselves and/or their heritage present in the curriculum. It also provides an opportunity to talk about and honor differences."

"I have only had a chance to attend one evening session and borrowed some related materials. The MRC is an excellent resource. Now that I know about it I will be participating in other offerings and using materials more."

Exciting Events Coming Up @ the MRC

This summer the MRC will be offering two exciting staff development opportunities. Look for our 2006-07 calendar of events in the fall newsletter this September.

On June 20th and 21st from 9 am to 3 pm we will explore various frameworks for examining and critiquing multicultural lesson plans and learn about the resources available through the Center. Specific attention will focus on strategies for incorporating objects from the MRC collection. Participants have the option of paying for one graduate credit through Hamline University (\$150). The registration deadline for the workshop is June 9th. You can download the registration form for this class from our website.

The second opportunity is on Wednesday, July 12th from 8:30-4:30 when the workshop "This is My Home: Integrating Human Rights Education & Cultural Competency Skills into Your Classroom" will be offered. In this workshop, participants will learn about the basic principles behind Human Rights Education, as well as how to use the tools provided by This is My Home in their curriculum and school. This workshop is free. Learn more or register online at <http://www.thisismyhome.org/trainings>.

Ideas for Using Objects in the Classroom

The following are just a few suggestions for how to use objects in a classroom setting:

1. One hundred questions...as a group, try to brainstorm 100 questions you can ask when looking at an object. Distribute "mystery objects" and use your power of deduction to see if you can figure out what the object is.
2. Explore the meaning of an object from two (or more) individuals perspectives. These individuals could be contemporaries or have lived in different time periods. How does the difference in their experiences shape how they view the object? Write a poem for two voices to express this.
3. Give groups of students a collection of about six different objects and ask them to imagine they are museum curators and have to arrange them in one case. What are some of the different ways they could organize them? By themes, chronologically, by material, methods of manufacture, aesthetics? What different messages are conveyed to the viewer in each display configuration?
4. Give each child an object or have groups share. After examining the object, have the student write a monologue of what the object would say if it talked. Follow up with pairing up two students with different objects and invite them to write and perform a dialogue between the two objects.

The MRC staff is available to help you come up with other creative ways to integrate the objects in our collection into your lesson plans.

From the Inter-district Partnership Coach...

Thanks to all the teachers, principals, and EA's that participated in partnerships, staff development, and workshops this year!

Saint Paul teachers...if you are interested in participating in a new or existing inter-district partnership next year don't forget to have your requests to my office by June 9th.

If you don't have an idea or missed the deadline, don't worry. Look for a list of available partnerships for the 2006-07 school year sometime this summer. I will also be advertising partnership matches throughout the fall of next year as well.

Please contact me at stephen.severance@spps.org for further information and/or forms.

Check It Out...Just a Sampling of MRC Resources on Teaching With Objects

***Inquiry-Based Learning Using Everyday Objects* by Amy Edmonds Alvarado and Patricia R. Herr.** Describes object-based inquiry as a tested method that enhances the skill of the student, as well as the instructor, by engaging students in hands-on studies of everyday objects, raising their curiosity and enthusiasm for the learning process. Includes theory, how to collect objects, sample lesson plans and more.

***The Art of the Personal Object* by Philip Ravenhill.** Exhibit guide for the exhibit of the same title at the Smithsonian Museum of African Art. Blends photographs of museum objects from Africa with the socio-cultural history of the objects. Includes such personal objects as cups, stools, eating utensils, and combs.

***Artifact and Analysis: A Teacher's Guide to Interpreting and Writing History* by Smithsonian Institution.** This resource guide is a collection of activities for looking at objects and documents in a historical context and writing about them. The packet includes a set of six color transparencies of objects from the Smithsonian collection to support each of the activities in the book.

***Bridges of Understanding: Ceremonies and Festivals* by the Mizel Museum in Denver.** This curriculum guide was designed to support the exhibit of the same name. It focuses on the relationship between objects and ceremonies and festivals in various culture groups. Student activities are included.

***Bridges of Understanding: Rites of Passage* by the Mizel Museum in Denver.** This curriculum guide was designed to support a museum exhibit of the same name. It focuses on the relationship between objects and rites of passage in various culture groups. Student activities are included.

***The Story Vine* by Anne Pellowski.** A collection of engaging stories from around the world that utilize objects such as worry dolls, thumb pianos, and even sand to tell them.

***Geometry from Africa: Mathematical and Educational Explorations* by Paulus Gerdes.** The author analyzes the connection between art and artifacts from Sub-Saharan Africa and their connection to mathematics. He includes suggested classroom applications. Most appropriate for secondary classrooms.

***Hidden Messages: Instructional Materials for Investigating Culture* by Barbara Finkelstein and Elizabeth Eder.** This book explores the theory behind and a collection of activities for using objects, film, and primary source documents with students. Geared towards working with students at the secondary level.

***Many Smokes, Many Moons: A Chronology of American Indian History Through Indian Art* by Jamake Highwater.** With emphasis on the tribes of North America, this publication uses art and artifacts of various Indian cultures to illustrate events affecting their history from earliest times through 1973.

***Material World: A Global Family Portrait* by Peter Menzel.** This book offers a fascinating look at the material possessions of families throughout the world. The subjects have been determined "average" for their countries and have agreed to have photographers move the contents of their houses outside in order to create visible representations of their relative standards of living. Each chapter includes the original spread of possessions, statistics about each family and country, as well as further pictures of daily life and some observations by the photographer.

***Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture, and Popular Imagination in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* by Annie E. Coombes.** Between 1890 and 1918, British colonial expansion in Africa led to the removal of many valuable African artifacts that were subsequently brought to Britain and displayed. This fascinating book analyzes the different and sometimes conflicting representations of African peoples and their material culture in Britain at this time, the justifications for imperial expansion implicit in the displays, and the effects that this had on racial stereotyping and prejudice.

***A Teacher's Guide to Learning from Objects* by Gail Durbin, Susan Morris, and Sue Wilkinson.** This book is about how to use objects in a classroom without specialist knowledge and how to prepare pupils to get the maximum from them during a site visit to a museum or historical site. Many hands-on activities are described in this book.

Browse our on-line catalog to discover more great resources for your classroom!

<http://mrc.spps.org/Catalog.html>

Multicultural Resource Center

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About the Multicultural Resource Center...

Multicultural education is a progressive approach for transforming education that holistically critiques and addresses current shortcomings, failings, and discriminatory practices in education. It is grounded in ideals of social justice, education equity, and a dedication to facilitating educational experiences in which all students reach their full potential as learners and as socially aware and active beings, locally, nationally, and globally. Multicultural education acknowledges that schools are essential to laying the foundation for the transformation of society and the elimination of oppression and injustice. ~Paul Gorski (<http://www.edchange.org>)

The Multicultural Resource Center (MRC) facilitates access, for teachers, to the necessary tools to infuse learning experiences with Multicultural Education. The MRC is part library, part museum, mostly a place where educators can come to build their capacity in working with diverse students and find resources to support this new capacity.

The goal of the MRC is to promote the creation of equitable learning environments infused with multiple, authentic viewpoints that confront the norming of whiteness. Through curricular support, lending out materials to support such an environment, and providing modeling through class visits and staff development opportunities, social change will occur. Please explore our website to gain a better understanding of the MRC's various roles.

Summer Hours

Summer is a great time to make use of the resources available at the MRC. Consider using the space for curriculum planning, with the added benefit of having tons resources for creative ideas at your fingertips. The lending library is also available for checking out resources for use in summer school programs.

If you are interested in using the space for other meetings, please check out our website for policies and procedures for reserving the MRC.

The MRC will close for the school year on Wednesday, June 21st and reopen for the 2006-07 school year on Monday, August 21st. We will be open on the following Wednesdays during the summer from 8:30 am to 4 pm: **July 5th, July 12th, July 19th, August 2nd, and August 9th.**

Additional hours may be added. Please check our website or voice mail message for any adjustments that may be made to this schedule.

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