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Literacy on the move: a journal for the journey

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LITERACY ON THE MOVE: A JOURNAL FOR THE JOURNEY

A note is just given to Mrs. Clark, Adam's first grade teacher, stating that his parents will be attending a meeting next week in Florida and are planning to take him out of school so he can travel with them- how might Mrs. Clark react? Teachers have differing attitudes towards students missing class due to family travel opportunities. Some teachers may feel that parents should not allow students to miss any time in the classroom and bemoan the fact that they will be faced with getting together all the "make-up" work for the child and trying to catch the child up upon returning. However, some of us have a different view of a child's chance to travel with family. Teaching in a small, rural district for many years I feel that when students have the opportunity to travel, they are afforded strong learning experiences I can't provide in my classroom. When you live in the land-locked Midwest, it is one thing to read a book about the ocean and see a video clip...it is another to wade in the Atlantic and feel the salt on your skin after swimming.

It is easy to see how traveling, by any means- trains, planes, or automobiles can help solidify a child's understanding of geography or other social studies content. However, how can we, as teachers, use this experience to enhance the literacy curriculum of our classrooms and document the type of learning that is occurring? Using journal or diary writing and providing students with the materials to organize their reflections on their journey can provide multiple learning opportunities to keep them reading and writing while absent from our classrooms.

A Journal for the Journey

This project provides a writing experience that will document a student's experience when traveling with the goal of increasing their interest and ability in writing detailed accounts of their experiences to share with their classmates when they return. A three-hole pocket folder, which

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can be purchased for less than 50 cents, is provided for the student with colored pencils in the front pocket, a US or world map, paper (plain, lined, or illustrating paper- depending on the age of student) as well as a letter setting the expectation for this project. (Figure/Document 1). The child is encouraged to locate print resources that are relevant to what they experience (brochures, menus, maps, etc.) to help re-tell the account of their time away from school and are encouraged to select their own photographs and/or postcards they feel will help share their experience when they return. Each day they are gone the student chooses what they would like to write about with the expectation that upon returning they are expected to share their journey and serve in the role of teacher in order to impart to their classmates what they learned while gone.

An Authentic Experience

Literacy learning occurs best when experienced in a way that emulates real-life experiences (Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, Tower, 2006). While literacy learning is undoubtedly complex, there is empirical evidence that students more effectively learn language and demonstrate increased growth in understanding and producing texts when they experience learning in an authentic context (Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007).

Routman (2000) states that when we allow for the sharing of personal pieces of writing, such as postcards or letters, teachers help students recognize that writing is connected to the world we live in, it is not just an activity we do in school. Students then begin to see the relevance of writing, not as an assignment, but as a way to communicate thoughts and idea for personal benefit. This concept is supported by the theory of situated learning that espouses learning as a social and collaborative process that can occur outside of school as well as inside the classroom (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989).

Multiple Opportunities for Print Exploration

Encouraging children to gather maps, brochures, menus, etc. along the way turns their attention to looking for print in the world around them. Taking a trip to Grandma's where there may not be many brochures of events- a church bulletin or note from Grandma might be gathered. Children may draw pictures of Grandma's neighborhood or draw pictures of the family they visited. Using real-world materials such as brochures, menus, maps helps children see the broad contexts that literacy embodies and draws their attention to the way print informs us and engages us in very real and important ways on a daily basis.

The writing provided in this folder may take on various styles of personal narrative. With a very young child there may be illustrations and labeling with support of dictation from a family member. Older children may choose to write the text as a diary, a very popular writing style seen within their own school library in classic literature such as the *Diary of Ann Frank*. Perhaps they may choose to support their diary writing with graphics, as modeled by Jeff Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* book series. As in Kinney's books, the use of graphic illustrations to support the text leads readers to greater comprehension and proves to be an enjoyable way for student writers to share their ideas as well (Fingon, 2012). Norton (2007) states that when a child writes in a diary format they provide a "window to the world" for others to live through the experiences of another. Some students may choose to write a personal narrative related to one specific event from the day or re-tell the entire days activities. (Figure 2a,b & 3). [figure 2a text[sic] "Today I larnd to kneebord. I was at table rock lake. In missiri. Linesey got in the water to hilp to start me. granpua pulled me. I got up my first time. I went on big waves and I dint fall off. I want to do it agen.".(7yrs)] Choice is a key element in this experience. This participatory opportunity through choice leads to greater ownership in the task and is highly motivating for the student. When

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students are able to relate what they write to their own lives and interests, they realize how new learning arises from everyday experiences (Immordino-Yang & Faeth, 2010).

Prior to sharing their writing upon returning, the student and teacher should review the writing to clarify anything that may be confusing and provide opportunities for corrections or revisions that may be necessary for the student to be able to present their information to the class. It is in this re-reading that the teacher can assess the student's ability to self-monitor and self-correct errors and note any additional instruction that may be warranted. Authentic writing activities have a clear audience and for this project, the student's class is that audience. While sharing, the class can make connections to the writer's work and ask questions for clarification, which builds discussion skills and strengthens oral language skills.

Do our busy days allow for this type of sharing- as we seek to teach the standards set before us? What might be some standards-based outcomes that could be seen from this work? Determining importance, organization of thoughts and ideas, providing details to support main ideas, providing opportunities for our students to ask and answer questions on a specific topic? Yes, assessment opportunities for all of those and more. For example the following Common Core State Standards are just a few of those that would clearly be addressed through this project.

ELA Common Core State Standards:

Kindergarten Writing (W.K.3)

Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events, tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened.

Grade 1 (Foundation) F.1.1

Demonstrate understanding of the organization and basic features of print

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Grade 2 Speaking/ Listening (SL.2.4)

Re-telling an account accurately

Grade 3 (W.3.4)

With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.

Grade 5 Writing (W.5.8)

Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a list of sources.

As technology is becoming more mobile with hand-held devices, Internet connectivity when traveling and data plans, students, especially older students, may wish to write their notes online using technology resources as available. If the student is able to complete the writing independently using the technology, the learning focus of this project would still remain rigorous. However, adults/parents should be cautioned that if they take over the task of the actual writing for their student, the learning opportunities of the student would be diminished.

Traveling with students can provide optimal learning experiences and documenting those experiences can lead to deeper literacy learning. Time spent “on the road” can be productive learning time as students reflect on what they are seeing and how they might like to share that with their peers back the classroom. Writing down their ideas about what they have done during the day provides them with a time for reflection and the chance to record memories to enjoy for years to come.

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Dear Parent/Guardian,

Thank you for informing me of your upcoming trip. It is my belief that travel can afford your child amazing opportunities for learning that can not otherwise occur here in our classroom. Those new experiences can be captured through our writing! I will not be sending any typical “make-up” work for your child to complete during his/her absence. Instead, I will be sending you with an assignment that when completed should provide your child with optimal learning and provide you with a journal or log of your travels written through your child’s eyes! When your child returns they will be asked to share their experiences with our class so we will all learn from your child’s experiences.

- The pocket at the front of this folder can be used to collect artifacts that show experiences your family has during this journey. Include additional road maps, menus, or brochures of what you have actually experienced.
- Using the map that is included please help your child keep track of their journey. They can draw the route or make notations of airplane terminals, landforms, etc. to show us where they went on their adventure. Please have them find our town to begin their travels.
- I have included paper. Each day of your journey please ask your child to reflect on what they did, learned, or enjoyed. Please ask them to date it at the top. You will find a box of colored pencils and two regular mechanical pencils included in the folder for this activity. Encourage them to write about the day’s events and draw or illustrate their work. Ask them to read it to you or a family member once completed. Your child should write this independently and it is fine that they use invented spelling during their writing. You may certainly help and guide them in this process, as needed, but this work should be your child’s work! If you find they are having difficulty reading it back to you, you may wish to write their ideas on a post-it note and attach that to the paper.
- Post cards or pictures of your trip can be placed in the back pocket for sharing upon your return. Any additional artifacts or notes are welcomed! If your pictures were taken digitally, feel free to e-mail a few for me and I can show them to our class Please limit your pictures to 10.

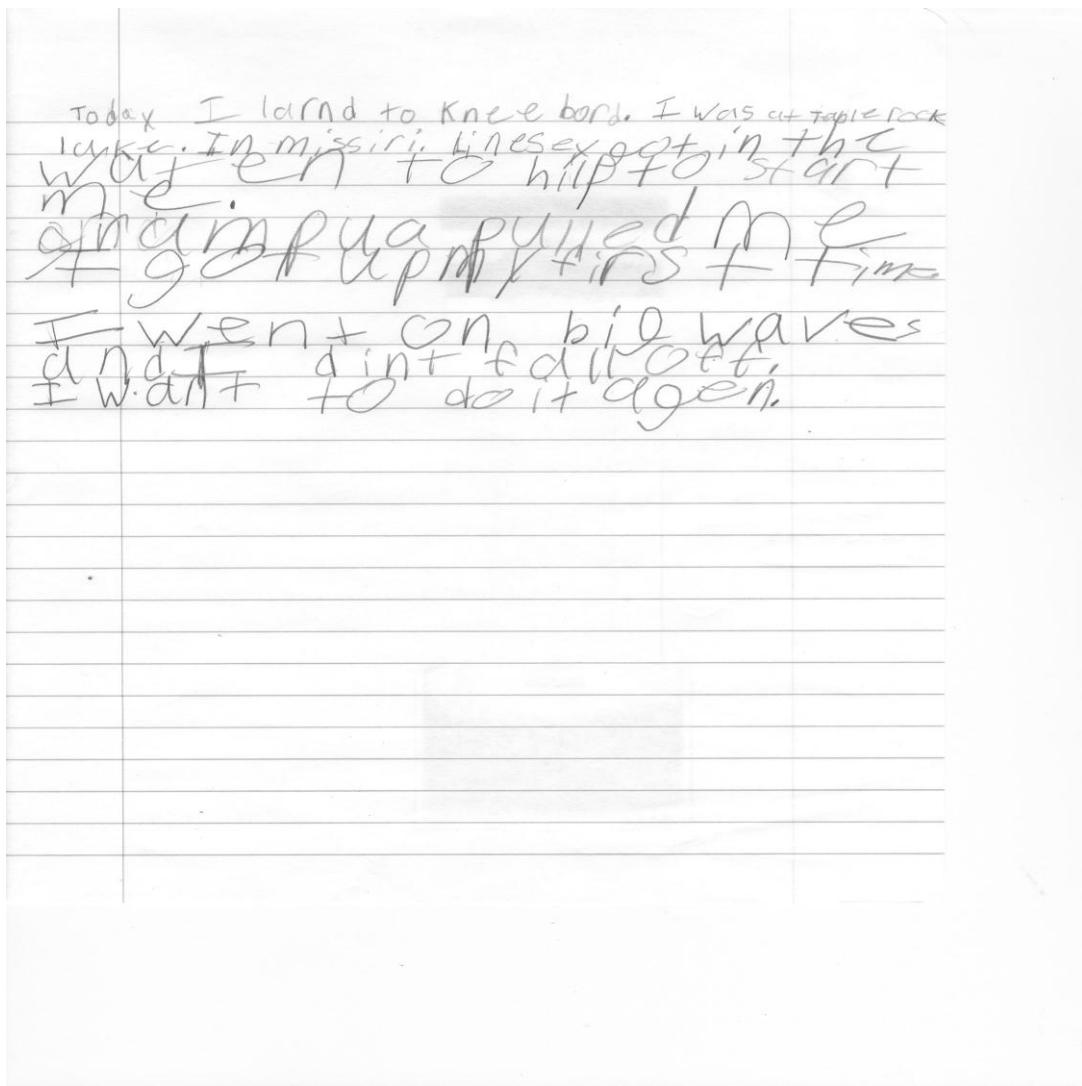
Upon your return from your travels, please make sure that your child returns this folder to school to share their learning with us their first day back. We will miss your child- but look forward to hearing about your journey!

Yours in education,

Mrs. Clark



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Student Sample (7yr)

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Student Illustration (7yr)

Today we did a lot of stuff. We got up this morning and had pancakes for breakfast and then went on the boat. We were on the boat looking for a spot to swim. We eventually found a cove to swim in. We did that for a while. Then I went kneeboarding with the new kneeboard that had the hook on it to make kneeboarding easier. Tanner decided to kneeboard with Lindsey and got up on his first try! I think the kneeboard with the hook made it easier. After that we went tubing with 4 people, 2 on each tube. We are going to go to the pirate putt-putt course and the landing. I had a lot of fun in Branson.



Tanner

Student Sample (12 yr)