

2014 Jaffarian Award application - Perry Meridian Middle School Library

Narrative

1. *Describe the program or program series, and how the school library and librarian were involved. If the program is ongoing, use the information on programming and activities from the previous school year (2012-2013) only.*

- *Include the title of the program or program series.*
- *Explain the humanities theme or topic emphasized in the program.*
- *Explain why you chose this program.*
- *Describe in detail the program or program series.*
- *Describe the planning process and collaborative relationships involved.*

Through a series of serendipitous events, conversations, and meetings, a unit named The R.O.A.D. I Travel (Research, Observe, Analyze, Discover) incorporated the 8th grade Language Arts Department with genealogy/family history, community resources, technology, and self-discovery. It required the involvement of the Indiana State Library, the Indiana Historical Society, and students' families. It took a village to fully realize this incredibly rewarding project.

While brainstorming and planning, we scrutinized the years' theme, the standards, and the experiences we wanted to incorporate. Family involvement was crucial, which could be challenging for our economically disadvantaged community. We agreed it was necessary for students to engage in learning opportunities different than previous experiences. While meeting their needs as 21st century learners and information-literate citizens, it was imperative that our students experienced tools available to them through their community and the Internet.

The Indiana State Library was a critical component to this project. Through phone calls, emails, and face-to-face meetings, we brainstormed what was feasible for both the educators and the state librarians. The excitement from the state librarians and the educators was palpable as we planned this project together.

We didn't want the only teaching voices students experienced to be those of the teachers they already knew. We wanted to familiarize students with the field experts throughout the community. Videos were created by the Indiana State Library for us to incorporate into the lessons and were the first contact students had with these experts.

Previous to this project, students had no knowledge of the "Ask-A-Librarian" feature available through many library websites. We incorporated the experience of consulting an expert so students could learn firsthand that an information expert was as easy with the Internet. Students used their school-provided email account and the Indiana State Library "Ask-A-Librarian" website form to request the meaning and origin of their surnames. Prior to this, we worked with the state librarians to prepare them for the nearly 500 inquiries they would receive in one week and the quick responses required for the unit to progress efficiently.

Our students also needed experiential knowledge of their community resources; therefore, we coordinated a field-trip to the Indiana State Library and the Indiana Historical Society. Most students were unfamiliar with both, which made this trip especially powerful. This one experience single-handedly expanded how students thought of information retrieval, learning, and their community. During the field-trip, students received formal training from genealogy experts on using ancestry.com and researched their birth date using historical newspapers on microfilm. During a companion visit with the Indiana Historical Society, students learned from historians and preservationists through hands-on activities how to preserve family documents and interpret historical photos.

Active family engagement in students' learning was key to the unit's success. Students made valuable memories by interviewing family members and caregivers. After receiving training and practice conducting interviews, students led simple personal history interviews of their mother and father. In a later phase of the unit, students conducted a higher-level Family History Interview using a personal interview format customized and adapted for the project with permission from the Purdue University 4-H Youth Development genealogy project manual. Students developed more in-depth learning through these activities: interview skills, making an interview appointment, interview etiquette, utilizing technology to conduct long-distance interviews, and developing interview questions.

The finale of the unit was a personal research goal and plan, which culminated in sharing an independently developed personal family research project at the community Project Fair. Students displayed and spoke about their research journal and exhibits; sharing what they learned about themselves and their family. In attendance were families, friends, administration, community members, and other stakeholders.

2. *Describe the involvement of others in the program. Letters of support (to be uploaded below) should emphasize the humanities program and the impact the program had on students and the school community, not the library program or the librarian.*

- *Identify the number of student participants.*
- *Describe how the program features higher-order thinking skills through student involvement.*
- *Describe the benefits that ensued, including how you measured success.*
- *Describe the involvement and awareness of parents, administrators and community leaders.*
- *Explain why you feel the program is exemplary or goes beyond normal school library media programming activities.*

The R.O.A.D. I Travel project involved five eighth-grade teachers' classes and affected nearly 500 eighth-grade students, the majority of the eighth grade class. Students of all academic levels and from many countries around the world participated in this project and created their own personal research goal.

From the beginning of this unit, students actively engaged in higher-order thinking tasks. Students were taught and then expected to analyze websites for validity, construct an email to the Indiana State librarians, conduct multiple interviews, reflect on their learning, write an original family narrative, and construct a unique project using nearly any resource available to them. Students maintained a comprehensive research journal and developed a personal, customized research objective and learning plan. Examples of in-depth final projects include videos, scrapbooks, student-created family cookbooks, foods and clothing from students' country of origin, demonstrations of unique family hobbies, songs, poems, and three-dimensional tri-fold poster boards decorated with original family treasures.

Methods to measure student success were incorporated into each lesson and all phases of the unit. From purposefully guided and monitored student conversations where teachers gauged comprehension and involvement to exit slips at the end of each instructional class period, students were held accountable for completing tasks and staying engaged in the lessons and activities. Using both informal and formal methods, educators evaluated students on a regular basis. Students who were at risk to falling behind or needed skills reinforced were provided one-on-one instructional time. The teachers' efforts to help students meet learning benchmarks throughout the project were more than successful, which was evident at the Project Fair where, uncharacteristically, nearly every student was present to display a unique project created entirely on their own.

Students' families and extended families were integral from beginning to end. Students' interviews kept families informed and involved, as did teachers' communication with parents. Parents were kept up-to-date on activities through teachers' blog updates, letters home, emails, and personal interactions. It was important to have family members present to chaperone our field trip and to help the Project Fair go off without a hitch. Additionally, teachers from other disciplines, administrators, our school PTSA, and experts from the Indiana State Library and the Indiana Historical Society were excited to be a part of helping this unit be a valuable learning experience for students.

Normal library experiences cannot touch the in-depth scope of the R.O.A.D. unit. The commitment of the librarians, educators, and historians ensured that each lesson and experience was much more than a typical trip to the library. Students were able to access materials and resources not normally available to middle school students. Their engagement in extensive research over the majority of a semester was unlike any project in the history of our school. The Project Fair was an invaluable finale to showcase students' hard work. The crowd in attendance was beyond our wildest dreams and student and family engagement through the process was unlike anything we had ever experienced.

3. Provide evidence of a curriculum component.

- *Describe the relationship of the program or program series to the school's curricular goals and to the state's learning standards.*
- *State how the [American Association of School Librarians Standards for the 21st Century Learner](#) were incorporated into the program.*

- *Provide evidence of a curriculum component for classroom treatment of the humanities theme or topic emphasized in the program.*
- *Explain how the program goes beyond the school's standard curriculum requirements and programs.*

Unit Learning Objective: Each student will research family history in order to construct a personal research goal.

Unit Common Core Standards:

- 8.W.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question), drawing on several sources and generating additional related, focused questions that allow for multiple avenues of exploration.
- 8.W.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.
- 8.SL.4 Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focus, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

American Association of School Librarians Standards for the 21st Century Learner:

- Standard 1 - Inquire, think critically, and gain knowledge.
- Standard 2 - Draw conclusion, make informed decisions, apply knowledge to new situations, and create new knowledge.
- Standard 3 - Share knowledge and participate ethically and productively as members of our democratic society.
- Standard 4 - Pursue personal and aesthetic growth.

Thinking includes learning from the expertise and experience of others. As the world gets more technical and complicated, students will need to recognize when they've hit a roadblock, need to consult an expert, or need help from those with more understanding and experiences for the task. Within the unit, there were guided, exploratory experiences to gain new skills (ask-a-librarian, interviews, ancestry.com, etc.) and to build back-ground knowledge and hands-on experience before working on an independent project of personal choosing. Prior to the doing, students gained understanding through learning from resources, which included videos, articles, websites, community resources, and mentors.

Every activity in this unit was about building experiences with new skills and learning to a level that each student could create a final, independent research plan and product customized to their interests and family history. As each student gained experiences with genealogy, they also gain enough confidence to work independently on more advanced tasks based upon their prior experiences and what they found to be of personal interest. As learning progressed, students took their thinking to a deeper level as they involve themselves in more independent decisions and develop their own research questions and action plan for their more complex, independent final projects. Students developed new knowledge, ideas, and concepts through guided activities which led to independent thinking and doing that was implemented for this project, but also applicable for the future.

Integral to the unit's philosophy was the sharing of knowledge, experience, and solutions. Consider the value of being engaged in a grade level of nearly 500 students going through the same experiences together. This allowed for students to work together to problem solve some situations. Everything was hands-on, real world learning. The project incorporated active participation, development of relationships with family, and working collaboratively to learn and grow. As skills developed, they were integral to developing their independent plan and sharing what they learned with the community, through presentations and displays.

Through the media specialists' lessons, we provided opportunities for young people to sample a variety of experiences that were foundational to opening their minds to the endless possibilities for personal growth and independent experiences. As students gained knowledge and experience with concepts, they gained confidence and investigated independently to expand their knowing and doing of personal interest particular to their family. Once a student had a basic understanding and some core skills developed, they concluded with personal and aesthetic grown through an independent learning plan. Students produce something tangible based on what they did and learned.

4. Describe how this program might be replicated.

- *Provide examples of how this program or program series might serve as a model or springboard for humanities programming in other schools.*
- *Identify key components of the program that were essential to the program's success.*
- *Identify any key components that might need to be modified for use in other settings.*

Because of the large amount of time and effort the project took to create, the media specialist and classroom teachers planned with the intention of replication. We wanted the project to replicated year after year so that we could continue this cumulative project experience as a tradition that students and families would look forward to as they moved through our school system. A majority of this project could be replicated in other states, as many resources for the unit are available at the state, national and international levels.

Collaboration could and should be replicated in the implementation, development and preparation of this project. Our team of educators wrote a grant for a membership for all our students to Ancestry.com Inc. Because the company provides the opportunity for this grant, other schools may choose to give their students access to the resource to find more information about their ancestors. Our media specialist even received access to their comedic television commercials that we used as hooks to our weekly lessons which suited copyright laws.

Because it was incredibly successful for the students and for the community resources, the field trip to the Indiana State Library and the Indiana Historical Society could be replicated so that more students can use the materials that are seldom accessed by the younger generations. Historical societies and state libraries nationwide have similar resources such as librarians, computers, microfiche machines, etc. While a majority of the project could have been completed without the field trip because of the helpful library staff, the experience of visiting these buildings was essential in developing the students' respect of research preservation, pride in their

backgrounds, and overall understanding of the depth to which they are learning how to find information. If unable to fund a site visit, some of the field-trip experience could be replicated through a Skype event.

At our request, the state librarians created short videos on how to access information or conduct research that we played for the students prior to learning a new research skill. They added these videos to their YouTube channel, so they could be accessed by other educators. Also, the state librarians participated in a grand-scale Ask-A-Librarian initiative. Close to five-hundred students were taught how to send a message to the state librarians about the origins of their names. State librarians conducted the research and provided each student with the meaning, origination, and cultural significance of their last names. This is a service provided for free by many libraries, but would require advance notification for such a large quantity of queries.

Project descriptions and rubrics that we created for our students could easily be replicated and modified for use in other school districts and educational settings. The delivery, chunking, or sequence of lessons could also be duplicated or modified. Most of the lessons created for this project were taught once a week so that each participating teacher took their students to our school library once a week. For other educational settings or time considerations, the frequency of the lessons or omitting certain parts could be determined on a case-by-case basis.

The Project Fair community event could be replicated to fit the expectations of the educational setting's needs. We chose to require attendance from all students by including busing for families that needed transportation. For some districts, that may not be in keeping with the attitudes and culture of the building. A gallery walk of the students' projects within the building during the school day, with families invited to attend, could replace the event that we held after school hours, if needed.

5. Describe the expectations and outcomes of this program

- *What would you change about the program?*
- *What were some unexpected benefits or reactions to the program?*
- *How did this program take the library to the next level in terms of school and community collaboration, programming and student impact?*

This project was initiated by individual dreams of a few classroom teachers willing to combine their visions and trust the media specialist to make a huge departure from their former research experiences. It required everyone to accept a vested interest in the planning, design, implementation, and skills reinforcement. We worked collaboratively from the very beginning. It was successful because of the dedication of each educator and the state librarians.

Taking our students to a higher level of thinking meant providing experiences with community resources, but the students weren't the only ones learning. Many educators involved had never attempted family history research, so working closely with state library genealogy division was crucial. Educators used the knowledge gained from the state librarians to conduct their own research. Our examples shared with our students created further interest and excitement.

Students were pushed out of their comfort zone and asked to think and do in ways like never before. The Ask-A-Librarian was for most their first experience writing professional emails. Students formally interviewed family and friends outside of school to gain information about their family history. Guided learning concluded with students capable of using their new information literacy skills to develop a personal project plan and share at a community Project Fair. Lessons were segmented in a unique way to allow students time to process information, organize inside and outside of the classroom, and reflect on experiences and skills gained. Classroom teachers' differentiated instruction by teaching intervening lessons in the classroom to supplement the media specialists' lessons.

In order for the project to run more smoothly in the future, a few minor changes are needed. Throughout the process, we didn't appropriately anticipate how little students knew about themselves or their families. Activities such as locating birthplace on a map or spelling family names took longer than projected. Our students unique living situations prevented them from, or limited their interest in, interviewing particular family members. We made it clear from the onset our compassion and flexibility, but a few situations slipped through. In the future we must be more vigilant and attune to body language in order to work with certain students privately to develop alternatives. As is sometimes the case, a student's personal goal was sometimes unfeasible. Creating the project he envisioned at the beginning of the planning process was sometimes a painful and devastating experience. Educators need to work to develop better coping mechanisms so that students can believe that failure is learning and something from which to work. Finally, educators were so focused on helping students that we missed many photo opportunities. There were so many wonderful moments so important to us educators. We wish we had more of those keepsake moments captured in photographs.

Student and family engagement through the process was unlike anything we had ever experienced. This unit was so robust and rewarding for staff, students and families and the real-world applications of community engagement were beyond anything we'd tried in the past. The Project Fair was an exciting evening for everyone. The crowd was beyond our wildest dreams. The success in learning and sharing was phenomenal. For many of our students, something clicked and the learning switch kicked on. With our students who historically weren't engaged in the classroom, they suddenly completed a school task for the first time. It was exciting to see these students find value and meaning in themselves, the project, and their family.

Moving the unit beyond the school walls, incorporating community resources, and involving families took our students, classroom teachers and media specialist to the higher level of digital and community citizenship.