Section 1: Description of school library program

Our program was called "History Hits the Road to Woodsdale." We were trying to make history come alive for our students in a meaningful way. There is an old Chinese proverb that states: "Tell me, I'll forget; show me I'll remember, involve me, I'll understand." The staff believed that the hands-on approach of History Hits the Road would help the children and their parents truly understand what daily life was like in the 1800's. Students experienced the daily chores of corn grinding, spinning and weaving, candle dipping, and the decorative art of paper marbling. The students also gained insight into what travel was like as they explored a genuine 1880's covered wagon. The program served as an introduction to the time period for our younger students and brought the words of the text book alive for the older students. The hands-on activities were complimented by the students listening to and reading books on the 19th Century as well as spending time researching the era.

Each year Woodsdale plans an activity that involves the children and their families. After discussions with the teaching staff, the Local School Improvement Council and the PTA, it was decided to try and feature a history program. The next step was to locate scholars who could help us with the content of our program and the hands-on activities. We were fortunate to find the staff of West Virginia University's Jackson's Mill Historic area. They have been traveling the state for 4 years and have presented high quality programs at schools, fairs, and festivals in West Virginia, Pennsylvania and Maryland. Dean Hardman, our project director serves as the program coordinator of Jackson's Mill Historic Area Heritage Programs. Historians Susan Church and Jeffrey Wyne also participated.

After the scholars were secured, we needed to find funds to pay the expenses needed to run the program. An application was made to the West Virginia Humanities Council. We were awarded $700.00. The PTA and the school divided the rest of the expenses.

Prior to the visit by the scholars, the librarian and the teaching staff provided some creative history lessons to help students better understand the pioneer way of life. The children listened to several books about pioneer life and learned about historical quilt patterns, how the wool from the sheep was turned into fabric. The fourth graders planned and participated in a computer simulated wagon trip on the Oregon Trail. They made journals and recorded an account of their trip. The fifth graders analyzed the lyrics to "Sweet Betsy from Pike" to see if the described events and problems were encountered by the real pioneers. Some students participated in a study of the historical fiction book, The Courage of Sarah Noble. They researched the real Sarah's life and compared it to the fictionalized account. Third grade created Conestoga wagons out of shoe boxes.
The art classes created clay pots, a wagon wheel color wheel, three dimensional pioneer figures and the children learned how to make beads out of paper.

On October 11, 2006, the presenters from Jackson's Mill set up 3 stations in the school gymnasium. A vintage wagon was parked on the playground. All of the presenters wore period costumes. Parent volunteers acted as guides and assisted the historians.

Mr. Hardman discussed transportation and the chores the children would have had to do in the 1800's. All of the students had a chance to grind corn into meal. The school got to keep the corn meal that was ground. It was made into corn bread for the children to taste later in the week. He also showed students a thirty-five star flag and discussed West Virginia's early history. Mr. Wyne demonstrated paper marbling and how it was used. He showed students a law book with marbled edges and end papers. He also shared a marbled band box and explained what it was used for. The children had a chance to swirl the oil paint in wheat paste. Each classroom received three marbling samples to keep. Susan Church discussed textiles. She explained the process of starting with sheep and ending up with clothing. Each of the children received a small piece of wool and learned how to roll the wool into yarn without any tools. She also discussed weaving and knitting. Two spinning wheels were available for the students to look at.

From 6:00-7:30, the students were invited to return to school with their families. The paper marbling and spinning stations were repeated. In this session the children were allowed to make their own marbled paper and they could try using the spinning wheels. They were also able to dip candles and learn about hunting and tracking in the 1800's. The evening session was so popular we had to turn people away from the paper marbling and candle making stations. We even added an additional half an hour to try and accommodate more families. Both the parents and the teaching staff commented on how much they had learned. It was evident that the children enjoyed their time at each of the stations, since so many of them returned with their parents in the evening.

Our students and their parents experienced a small taste of what life was like in the 1800's. Mr. Hardman and his staff have many years of experience in their chosen fields of study so each of the activities as well as the information given to the children were historically accurate. The hands-on approach allowed the students to actively participate in their learning. They began to have some idea how long it would take to produce one piece of clothing and why people didn't have many different outfits. Spending time looking at the vintage wagon made the difficulties of travel very clear. The 35 star flag was a revelation to many students. They found it hard to believe that there haven't always been 50 states. Through activities in the library and in the classroom the children also experienced the past through reading, research, and role playing games.
Section 2: Impact of program or program series in the humanities

The original plan for this program was to bring in a speaker that could discuss pioneer life. The program would have been held in the evening and the parents would be invited to attend. After discussions with the school's principal and the faculty senate, it was decided to try to expand the program and make it more interactive. The librarian decided to contact the West Virginia University State 4-H Leader, Deborah McDonald to ask for names of scholars who might be available to present a program of this type. She put us in touch with Dean Hardman, who serves as the program coordinator of Jackson's Mill Historic Area Heritage Programs. Mr. Hardman described the type of programs he and his staff could provide. After further discussion with the principal, faculty senate, and the Local School Improvement Council (in West Virginia the council is mandated by state law and must consist of 2 teachers, 2 service personnel, the principal, and 2 at large members from the community), the components of the program were selected. Mr. Hardman worked up a cost analysis. The librarian contacted the West Virginia Humanities Council for support. Pam LeRose, the grant coordinator suggested the school submit a mini grant. The librarian gathered the necessary information and submitted the application. The librarian also met with the PTA and the principal and both agreed to provide funds for the program. We were awarded the grant and all the funding was secured. The contract was signed with Dean Hardman and his History Hits the Road team. The Faculty Senate met and each grade level decided how they were going to extend the program in their own classrooms. The librarian also planned activities for the students in the library. Notices were sent home to parents several times to remind them of the program and information about the program was included in the school and PTA newsletters. 366 children and 30 staff members visited the stations during the day. We estimated the crowd in the evening to be between 150 to 175 people. The students were actively engaged and really developed a sense of what the life of a family in the 1800's might have been like. As part of our agreement with the the West Virginia Humanities Council, we had to conduct a formal written evaluation with the adults who attended the evening session. They were 100% positive. The students talked about the event for a long time afterwards. The library's collection of historical fiction and nonfiction about the 1800's were popular for the rest the school year. Our students also scored very well on the social studies portion of the West Virginia state test.

This went beyond the usual library program for several reasons. First a great deal of advance planning was needed and many organizations were involved. The faculty senate and local school improvement council helped with the planning. The WVU Extension Service helped us to locate the scholars that were needed. The grant had to be written and administered. Additional funding had to be found from the school and PTA. The whole school was involved. Every grade level conducted special lessons with library support. The weekly library classes were also focused on the humanities content. The scholars were at the school for a full day and the various classroom activities lasted for several weeks.

Woodsdale Elementary
Section 3: Relationship of the program to the curriculum

Woodsdale's mission statement is: "To provide educational opportunities that will enable each child to acquire basic skills to build a strong foundation for success. "History Hits the Road to Woodsdale was one of these opportunities. The combination of reading, research, and the hands-on activities brought history alive. The words they had been listening to and reading had more meaning.

Standard 5 of the West Virginia content standards states through history, students understand the identity and origins of their families, communities, state and nation. When children read about the past they tend to think of it as unrelated to them and they typically focus on the lives of famous people. They tend not realize that history is made up of common people who are their ancestors. The reading, research, role playing, and interaction with the scholars made the past seem more real. They gained an understanding of how a family would have traveled and spent their day in the 1800's. The family event started many conversations. Parents were able to share stories about their ancestors with their children.

All of the classrooms at Woodsdale conducted special projects related to this project. Fifth grade used classroom and library resources to research famous West Virginians of the time period. They shared what they learned in oral reports. The fourth graders played a computer role playing game called the "Oregon Trail." The students kept journals about the events of the trip and wrote letters to the folks back home about their adventures. Student even used primary resources from the Library of Congress to select land to file a claim on and learned the procedure for mapping your claim. Third grade had a visit from a local bee keeper and the children tasted honey fresh from the comb. Later in the year the PTA funded a field trip for third grade to Meadowcroft Village. It is a rebuilt community that was founded in the early 1800's. Third grade also did a study of the Newbery Honor book Sarah Nobel by Alice Dalgliesh. Students learned research basics by researching the life of the real Sarah Nobel. The second graders made butter and were amazed at how much time and effort was involved. They also listened to many stories about the time period. The first graders learned about quilt patterns and their unique names. A book called The Quilt-Block History of Pioneer Days with Projects Kids Can Make by Mary Cobb explained the name origins. The children created paper quilts and named their original designs. They also listened to a series of historical picture books that talked about the process of turning wool into clothing. Warm as Wool by Scott Russell Sanders and Helen Cogancherry was of special interest. It tells the story of a woman in Ohio who struggled to keep her children warm. Kindergarten especially enjoyed the book Covered Wagons, Bumpy Trails. They discussed what they would take on a covered wagon journey and colored pictures of a covered wagon, people in period dress, and a log cabin. The resources of the library were actively used in all of these projects. Rather than simply disseminating information, the school library media program was centered on the process of learning.
Section 4: Replicability

What made this project so special was the involvement of the whole school community. The principal, faculty senate, Local School Improvement Council, and the PTA worked together to make it happen. Everyone was focused on what was best for the children and how to make the most learning happen. Then the parents were able to experience the program with their children. It would be important for anyone planning a project like this to get all of the key players on board at the beginning. If people feel they are part of the planning process, they are more committed to making the project successful. Hopefully our project will help others find new ways to work together to get children actively involved in their learning.

The scholars of the History Hits the Road team were vital to making this project work. They were able to conduct the type of program we wanted. The content was historically accurate and the activities were hands-on. Schools in West Virginia, Maryland, and Pennsylvania would have the opportunity bring them in. Other places could find scholars who do this type of programming in several ways. They could contact local colleges and universities. Local museums might have staff or lists of people who could be available. Talking to demonstrators at local fairs and festivals might lead to finding the right people for the job. We spoke to the cooperative extension service which is established by the federal government in every state. They might be able to provide the names of people to contact.

Once the topic of the program is selected, the librarian needs to check the school’s library resources to make sure there is enough accurate material available to support the classroom projects and extend student learning. Our school has a very limited budget so some of the holes were filled with internet resources.

Our next step was to secure funding for the project. We were fortunate to be able to apply to the West Virginia Humanities Council for the biggest part of the funds needed. With a quick search of the internet, I was able to determine that all 50 states have a Humanities Council. Project leaders would need to check the requirements for their state’s council. Woodsdale’s project also received funds from the PTA and the school’s general fund. Before asking for money it is important to have a clear idea of what the money is needed for. The objectives of your project need to be clearly spelled out. I find it is better to speak to groups like the PTA in person when you are asking for money. It shows that you are committed to the project and you are there to address any questions or concerns.

The third component that made our project successful was the support and involvement of the teaching staff. They were involved with the project from the beginning. They had a chance to discuss what they thought was important. To make this work the teachers needed time to plan together. Project directors would need to look at their schedules and school calendars to find time to meet.

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