

Agriculture Inquiry

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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Inquiry in Action

Grade four students at Brevoort Park School in Saskatoon participated in an inquiry unit led by classroom teacher Merrill Bulin and teacher-librarian Susan Funk. The teachers combined ideas from professional resources such as *Teaching with Intention* (Miller) and *The Critical Thinking Consortium* with the Saskatchewan Social Studies 4 Curriculum to create an engaging and interactive inquiry unit that focused on the importance of agriculture in Saskatchewan.

Students were given a framework for research that included a pathfinder for identifying questions, key search terms, related topics, and recommended resources. They then went on to collect information using data sheets on their specific topic. Students used a variety of print and online resources such as *WorldBook Online*, as well as interviews with local farmers.

Following their research, students used tools and software such as Wikispaces, Comic Life, and VoiceThread to share and communicate their new learning. They first posted their information to a page on a wiki (<http://ag inquiry.wikispaces.com>). Following that, the students used their information to create a public service announcement in Comic Life to explain the importance of their issue to an MLA and convince the politicians of the need for action. These posters were added to a VoiceThread (<http://voicethread.com/?#u2410479>) where the students showcased their product and reflected on their learning.

Inquiry Unit Plan

Mini Inquiry: The driving question is “How is agriculture important to all of us?”

Social Studies Curricular Outcome: RW 4.2 Importance of agriculture in SK

Opening Focus: What is Farming?

The class brainstormed: What do we know about farming/agriculture in Saskatchewan? To help investigate the question deeper, the students investigated web sites, pictures and objects.

Technology tools, including Visuwords (<http://www.visuwords.com/>) and Googlemaps (<http://maps.google.ca/>), were used. In pairs, the students discussed what they viewed and their wonderings.

After investigating the materials, the students recorded one interesting idea and one wonder. The class reconvened and shared.

The pairs reunited and determined ideas and wonders to add to the class folder. To culminate, each student wrote and sketched in a learning journal a pressing wonder and observation from the day.

Focus Two: Asking Questions

Model Lesson: How Do We Group And Augment Our Questions?

Students looked at their ideas and expanded the questions by asking “What if”, “Now what”, and “So what”. Most of their questions focused upon farming and the future – climate change, costs and making a living, caring for animals, eating locally. Students were grouped by area of interest into issue-based inquiry topics.

Focus Three: Introducing Pathfinders

Model Lesson: How Do We Find Relevant Material?

The teacher-librarian modelled brainstorming key terms and related ideas. She demonstrated using the online library catalogue to expand the students’ list of terms and find Dewey numbers for their topics.

Focus Four: Using a Pathfinder

Model Lesson: How Do We Record Key Terms and Related Topics?

The teacher facilitated a class sharing of pathfinder key terms. Each group recorded useful terms on the pathfinder for use in their work.

Focus Five: Introducing Destiny

Model Lesson: How Do We Determine Importance and Record Relevant Information?

Using the online library catalogue, students found a book relevant to their topic. The teacher facilitated a picture walk in which important information is denoted using sticky notes. The

students shared their found books with the class, as well as one or two new ideas/terms or interesting ideas from book walk.

Focus Six: Using Reference Sources

Model Lesson: How Do We Determine Importance and Record Relevant Information?

The students continued the strategy of determining importance with online information. They used World Book online to locate information and denote important and relevant information. The information was recorded using jot notes. The students shared their findings with the group.

Focus Seven: Exploring Books

Model Lesson: How Do We Use Print Books to Further Our Knowledge?

Students recorded jot notes based on subquestions developed to support their inquiry question. These subquestions were supplied by the teacher in response to the overall need in the classroom. Findings were shared with their group.

Focus Eight: Preparing For an Interview

Model Lesson: How Can Human Experts Further Our Knowledge?

The teacher facilitated a discussion of methods for setting up for interview of human experts on their issues. Each group developed questions. Each group designated a member to ask one of each of their subquestions.

Focus Nine: Conducting Interviews

Model Lesson: How Can We Ask Questions to Further Our Knowledge?

The class interviewed a variety of human experts who could deepen their knowledge of their self-selected agricultural inquiry: a farmer, community gardener, and a Mennonite Central Committee staff member. The presenters were provided the topics of the inquiry prior to their visits. After the presentations, each of the groups reviewed their learnings and added to their notes to their inquiry folder information.

Focus Ten: Using a Wiki

Model Lesson: How Can Share Our Learning Publically?

The class collected information and posted on a class wiki. Each group added their ideas to a wiki page to facilitate recording in a common place and to synthesize their findings.

Lesson Eleven: Introduction of Comic Life Poster Project

Model Lesson: How Can We Form A Call To Action?

The class was provided the following scenario: “You are a concerned citizen of Saskatchewan. Compose a graphic poster to explain the importance of your agricultural issue to our MLA and convince him of the need for the government to take action”

The teacher identified and explained the roles for Comic Life poster response: each group required a story-board artist, a researcher and a graphic designer.

Lesson Twelve: Storyboarding

Model Lesson: How Can We Storyboard An Effective Call To Action?

Each group utilized their information to create a storyboard for a Comic Life poster on their issue. The storyboard artist was responsible for ensuring the finished product accurately reflected the ideas of the group.

Lesson Thirteen: Let's Work!

Model Lesson: How Can Images Help Propel An Effective Call To Action?

The groups continued to construct Comic Life posters and collect pictures for use in the poster. The teacher facilitated how to respect for intellectual property through the use of copyright free image sites and the collection of the URL from the pictures to be placed in their bibliography. The researcher and storyboard artist shared the search for and saving of suitable images. The graphic artist constructed the layout and added the images to the poster.

Lesson Fourteen: Introducing BibMe

Model Lesson: How Can We Respect The Works of Others?

The teacher facilitated how to document the sites used to guide their learning. She showed how to create a bibliography using BibMe. Student used their URLs from the picture selection to create citations.

Lesson Fifteen: Introducing Voicethread

Model Lesson: How Can We Reflect Upon Our Learning?

The teacher facilitated how to use Voicethread to share their work. Students added their reflections of their learning and the process to the Voicethread. They responded to questions such as, “What did I learn?”, “What am I most proud of?”, and “What do I hope my work will change or add to our community?”