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Author(s): Hinshaw, Craig

Abstract: Details the book making project by an art class at Hiller Elementary School in Madison Heights, Michigan, based on the book 'Learning to Swim in Swaziland,' by Nila K. Leigh. Use of accordion books as format; Decision on the content of the book based on the chosen objectives; Parental involvement in the bookmaking; Reflection of the ethnic diversity of the class on the book. INSET: Accordion book.

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'LEARNING TO SWIM' IN MICHIGAN

At Hiller Elementary in Madison Heights, Michigan, about one third of the student body is a mixture of about 60 different ethnic backgrounds including Chinese, Iraqi, Korean, Mexican, Polish, Vietnamese and Yugoslav. It is not unusual for students to arrive at Hiller unable to speak any English.

Gloria Bennett, a third-grade teacher at Hiller, showed me the book Learning to Swim in Swaziland by Nila K. Leigh (New York: Scholastic, 1993), and asked if I could use it to develop an art lesson. She was interested in a lesson that would give E.S.L. (English as a second language) students the opportunity to share experiences of their home country with each other and the rest of the class.

When Leigh went to Africa with her parents, she wrote lots of letters to her classmates back in New York City, and those letters were later turned into Learning to Swim in Swaziland. This book is interesting because it is told from an 8-year-old's point of view. Much of the charm of the book lies in her illustrations, colorful drawings and photographs.

It was decided that accordion books would be the format we would use with two objectives in mind. First, I wanted the books to be more of a journal (a personal account) than a report (facts and figures) on a country. Second, I wanted the books to be visually interesting.

We made the covers from two 8" x 11" pieces of cardboard. Students covered these with maps I had salvaged from old National Geographic magazines. For the pages, I cut 35" x 10" rectangles from a heavy paper stock and scored lines every 7 inches, making the folding easy for the third-graders. The first and last fold was glued to the covers, providing each student with an eight-page accordion book.

Now we were ready to start on the content. After discussing the two objectives, I gave the students a sheet of suggestions for each of the eight pages. These suggestions had to be broad enough to allow the students from Madison Heights to also complete their books in a stimulating and challenging way. Suggestions included:

1. A picture of yourself.
2. A map of your home country.
3. Something about the geography.
4. Something special about your country.
5. Something you miss about your home. If you are from Michigan write something you like about it.
6. Why did you move to Madison Heights?
7. Something special about your home.
8. Author's page: tell something interesting about yourself.

We studied Leigh's book for illustration ideas such as drawn maps, rebus writing, fancy lettering and photographs.

Ms. Bennett decided to send the students' books home so they could be completed with the help of their parents. When the finished books began coming back to school she excitedly shared them with me. The books were revealing to both of us. We learned some families left their countries to escape wars, evade being drafted into an unpopular military regime or to pursue higher degrees of education.

We were touched to see photographs of friends and relatives "back home" and read accounts of how much they were missed. The books were filled with foreign money, hand-drawn flags and writing in native languages. The books from the Madison Heights students were also fascinating: They told of their hobbies, family vacations and how proud they were to live in Michigan.

I was impressed with the loving care the parents had obviously spent organizing the books with their children. It was evident they had shared experiences working through the pages.

After reading their books I saw these immigrants to Hiller School in a new and more understanding way. It became clear to me how much all parents want the best for their children. I felt proud having been part of this successful lesson and hope to continue being the best possible art teacher for their children.

By Craig Hinshaw

Craig Hinshaw is the art specialist for the Lamphere Schools in Madison Heights, Michigan.

Inset Article

ACCORDION BOOK

The accordion book is to be about you, your history, your heritage, your travels and family. Listed are suggestions for each of the eight pages.

- 1) Picture of yourself. Where are you from? If you have a picture of yourself in your home country that would be nice. A school picture will be fine too. Write one or two sentences about your country or town.
- 2) A map. Draw a map of your home country.
- 3) Tell something about the geography. Are there mountains, deserts, cities? What is the weather: cold, hot, rainy? What is the major industry: farming, business?
- 4) Something special about your country. Make a flag. Write one or two special things about your country. What is special to you? This book is about your experiences.
- 5) Something you miss about your home. (If you are from Michigan write something you especially like about it.)
- 6) Why did you (your family) move here? (If you are from Michigan why has your family stayed here; parents' employment, family?)
- 7) Something special about your home.
- 8) Author's page. Include a picture of you and family or you and a pet, etc. Tell something interesting about yourself.

Added suggestions: If you are from another country this can become a travel book telling where you are from and how you traveled to reach Madison Heights.

Make the book interesting to look at. Use crayons, colored pencils, collage (cut pictures from magazines), travel ticket stubs, photocopy money from your country to include. Try rebus, picture writing.

Make it fun. This is not a book report with lots of research. Think of it more as a journal.