Nancy Ventresca

The Fantastic Ekphrastic Scholastic Seminar

**Exploring Identity Through Poetry and Art**

**Introduction**

Thurgood Marshall Elementary School is a large suburban elementary school located in Newark, Delaware. It is the largest elementary school in the Christina School District, with an anticipated enrollment of well over 800 students for the 2018-2019 school year—that is higher than two of our three high schools! We have a dedicated faculty that works very hard to meet the needs of a very diverse, multicultural population.

As the Advanced Academics teacher, my role is to serve the students who are identified as being in the top ten percent of academics. Students are recommended by teachers and parents or are identified by a variety of measures including the CoGAT (Cognitive Abilities Test) test (administered at the end of second grade) and/or other standardized tests. My classes are roughly 10 percent of each grade and students come to my room during Intervention time, while some students might be getting support and others remain with the classroom teacher. My curriculum is largely Math and Reading but I use my DTI units and more to be more cross-curricular in nature. For instance, a previous DTI unit was created as an extension to the fifth grade (science) Ecosystems unit and incorporated math, science, art, writing and a field trip experience**.**  Once identified for my program, many of my students are with me for several years and this offers rich opportunities to include students’ interests and allows me to get to know them well.

**Rationale**

Students come to my room to be challenged, to be heard, and to learn to persevere. Things in the regular classroom often come easily to them and they can complete their seatwork quickly and accurately. This can easily breed discontent if they are not differentiated for and given activities that challenge and inspire them. When they come to Advanced Academics they sometimes find that they are suddenly not always correct and that it is okay to make mistakes. We cultivate an environment of excitement and passion for learning. Ways that we do this include academic conversations about current events, higher level reading materials and topics of their individual passion.

As mentioned, our school is very culturally diverse. This unit is intended to be taught at the beginning of the year as both an introduction to ekphrasis and as a chance to develop and share the qualities that make them unique. Students will examine the concept of identity and reflect on their family and culture as an important part of who they are. We will read a variety of poems and literature and students will explore ekphrasis as a way to respond to visual images derived from their personal cultures.

**Overarching Understandings and Questions to Keep in Mind for the Development**

**of the Unit**

***Enduring Understandings:***

*Students will understand that:*

* *Everyone has a unique story to tell*
* *Our past experiences influence our identity today*
* *Writing is a process that includes planning, drafting and revising*

***Essential Questions***

* *What is identity?*
* *How does my past and family influence how I feel about myself?*
* *What is ekphrasis?*
* *How can I express the way that visual images and art can make me feel?*

***Standards Addressed***

This unit has the potential to address Common Core standards in understanding multi-modal texts, writing, listening and communicating, and visual arts

**Materials for Teachers and Students**

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| **Title** | **Author** |  |
| The Kaleidoscope of Visual Poetry: New Approaches to Visual Literacy | Bennett, Tamryn | teacher |
| Love That Dog | Creech, Sharon | student |
| Dog-ku | Clements, Andrew | teache**r** |
| I Am the Darker Brother: An Anthology of Modern Poems | American, Black and Arnold Adoff | teacher |
| Accents | Frohman, Denice (YouTube) | teacher |
| Ekphrastia Gone Wild: Poems Inspired by Art | Lupert, Rick | teacher |
| Heart to Heart: New Poems Inspired by Twentieth-Century American Art | Greenburg, Jan | teacher, student |
| National Geographic Book of Animal Poetry: 200 Poems with Photographs that Squeak, Soar and Roar! | Lewis, Patrick J. | student |
| The Poet Speaks of Art (website) | English.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poemst | teacher |

Students will also research and bring in their own images and ideas from their homes/families. Other resources and content from upcoming seminars will be included.