

Praxis Application

Greek mythology is a large topic of interest for people of all ages. The grade 4 Ontario Curriculum for social studies calls for an “understanding of how we study the past.” This includes a focus on social organization, and daily life of societies that existed between 3000 BCE and 1500 CE. Ancient Greek culture and history fits right into this time period meeting this curriculum requirement. In addition, the vastness of Greek mythology presents a sound theme for an interdisciplinary approach to a unit of study. Ancient Greek culture can be introduced through “many disciplinary perspectives” and students can participate “in a variety of activities to understand life” as an Ancient Greek (Vacca, R.T& Vacca, J.L, and Mraz, M, 2012, p.148). The multiple gods and rituals in Greek life allows many experiences through class. For example, the festival of Dionysus can be explored through drama and language arts as displayed in this lesson. Dionysus being the god of theatre, wine and recreation.

The Olympic Games is another aspect of Ancient Greek civilization that includes a tribute to another Greek god, Zeus. The games were also held for other reasons including religious ceremonies, honour of deceased, and fertility. These are aspects of Greek civilization that can be included in a social studies lesson as well as a physical education lesson (Damen, 2012). A further historical adaptation of Greek mythology can be used in a physical education class. Individual students or teams could take on the names of historical figures and compete in Olympic activities like Achilles or even Hercules.

This interdisciplinary approach allows students to learn about different time periods, modes of expression and ways of thinking in more abstract forms.

“Strategies, habits of mind, and processes used in arts learning can be effective in teaching core curriculum concepts and skills and helping students acquire the 21st century skills. For example, along with creating works in the arts, the arts content standards require: reading about the arts and artists; researching the arts from the past and present; writing and talking about the arts and artists to reflect on one’s own observations, experiences, and ideas about the arts and the world.” (California County Superintendents Arts Initiative, 2015, p.6).

Writing and talking about the arts is similar to a form of character journal. A character journal is often used as an effective teaching resource for English teachers. Students writing their own plays and adapting their own roles whilst staying true to the dramatic conventions of the play is an effective mode of translating through multi content usage (p.292, Content Area Literacy). This is what our lesson intends to do.

In Chapter 11 of Content area reading they focus on Trade Books as a source of schema activation and a way of ensuring “students are exposed to content in a variety of formats.” In that chapter they focus on making students lifelong readers. Reading is a skill that teachers develop with students. With the use of our puppet show in this lesson we are *also* trying to ensure content is presented in a variety of formats, but we have focused not on a skill still being developed but on a skill that is innate in all humans and most animals; play. In an article titled Deep Play Donald Ackerman says that play is “our brain’s favourite way of learning and maneuvering” (Ackerman, 1999, p.11)

Furthermore, in chapter 1 of content area literacy the hands on exercises suggested call for a role-play of a debate and then a discussion about the content as a part of a lesson (Vacca, 2014). This is the same theory of using a puppet show to introduce Greek Mythology. To let the students take on a role in the topic of study creates a deeper connection to the content in whatever form that role-play takes. In our lesson we require students to take on a part in a play. This requires them to become actively engaged in the scenes they wrote and/or are studying. This activity requires Immersion and collaboration from the students but for the context background information on the topic will begin the lesson or unit. This also allows them to connect to a historical figure, and learn about a playwright from ancient Greece. The historical context is included in the introduction of different types of plays ie. tragedy, comedy, and satyr. Using a puppet show also allows students to adopt this new information in a form that they are familiar with. Of course, the requirement to write their own version is the ultimate purpose of a multiliteracy approach. By designing a play of their own it causes reflection and understanding of new concepts. Scaffolding the information through a familiar form of play. Through performing scenes in various groups the students are also gaining insight on the importance of group work and creative collaboration.

Lastly, the use of a puppet show is an extremely versatile form of learning. Puppet shows are useful for serious and heavy topics of study, like drug use and bullying. Being a puppeteer creates a connection between the content and the student because they are so thoroughly engaged through playing and activating the area of the mind that academics place more importance on. Ackerman says that “for humans, play is a refuge from ordinary life, a sanctuary of the mind, where one is exempt from life’s customs, methods, and decrees” (Ackerman, 1999, p.7). A puppet show allows left and right brain to meet.