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Expanding Our World through Global Inquiries

by Mary Ann Conrad

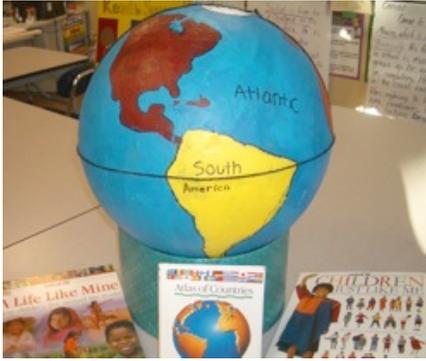
Our group of language arts and social studies teachers, along with writer Nancy Bo Flood, met monthly to reinforce our commitment to promoting global awareness among our students, many of whom have not traveled far beyond their Navajo communities. We were a diverse assortment of young and old, Anglo and Navajo, all teachers under the same pressure to improve progress in our classrooms in an effort to bring up our school test scores.

Chinle Junior High is located in the heart of the Navajo Nation of Northern Arizona. Our students are 95% Navajo, and many have limited command of their own Navajo language and of English as well. Culturally, our students are engaged in rich oral stories that are told in the winter and passed down from generation to generation by those entrusted with them. Their struggles with English and with reading the written word have made passing standardized tests a major challenge for many of students. This challenge has been passed on to us, their teachers.

Teachers met weekly in cluster groups where we focused mostly on teaching academic vocabulary effectively. However, we gathered as a global literacy group at lunch every four weeks and discussed our commitment to global awareness. We decided on a slogan "Alike, yet Different" to describe our approach. In April we hosted a world reading night featuring books representing countries from each continent. Student Council members led attendees from continent to continent where they had their "passports" stamped as they explored the artifacts and local foods. At the same event Nancy Bo Flood signed copies of her new book [*Cowboy Up*](#), which features the Navajo rodeo.

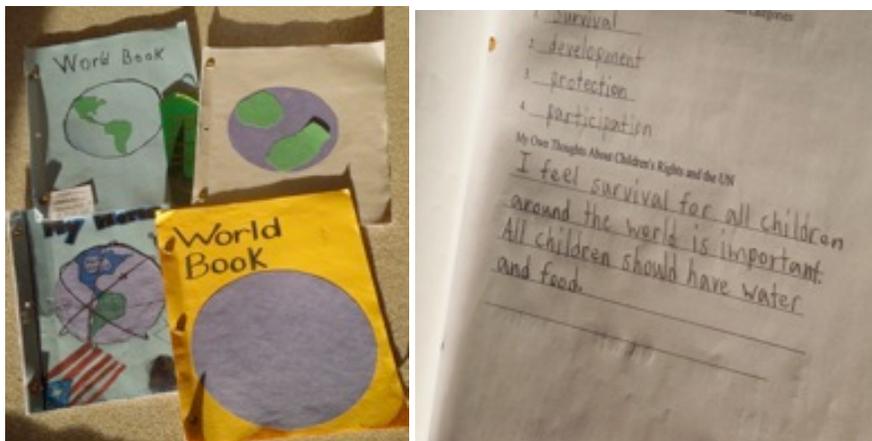
By the end of the school year, half of our group members had moved on. Chantell, one of our youngest teachers, decided to leave the teaching profession to join the Peace Corp. Before leaving, she taught three weeks of summer school with a focus on world geography and literature, saying, "This is the way teaching ought to be."

This vignette tells only part of our story and the impact of our focus on world literature. It begins in a special education classroom when 7th and 8th grade students came back fresh from winter break to find a large paper mache sphere in the center of the room. They were engaged before the bell



even rang! Just before the holidays, this teacher, an avid recycler, had been delighted upon walking into a math teacher's room to find a large ancient globe split in two pieces and without a stand. With the vision of a world-class forager, she pounced. No more need to spend the holidays searching out a large balloon.

During the early weeks of January students in three different writing classes painted and labeled oceans and continents while searching their new atlases for information about each continent. While some painted, others began the covers of their individual World Books. These were eight teacher-created chapters of maps and cloze exercises and questions to assist students in reading the two major books purchased from UNICEF, *A Life like Mine* and *Children Just like Me*. Inside the cover were flags to color--Arizona, US, and the UN to remind them that citizenship which begins in the Navajo Nation expands in an ever widening circle. The blue flag of the United Nations hung just inside the door of the classroom.



Emergent readers worked alone or in pairs to read about the United Nations and its concerns for children around the world. They wrote about the rights of children and about global issues, such as water and food resources, education, cultural belonging, and the need for peace and safety. They learned about food customs, clothing, possessions, values, and religious and family structures across the globe. They learned location. Every child they read about sent them to the political

globes they hauled joyfully into the classroom when they arrived mid-January. They compared their lives and culture to the lives of children from other continents and countries.

This project continued throughout the semester, culminating in final student projects. Each student created his or her own personal double page spread modeled after the pages in *Children Just like Me*.

Other highlights of our world unit included reading about tooth customs around the world, learning about Celia Cruz and salsa dancing, and celebrating the Navajo rodeo with Nancy Bo Flood's gift of a classroom set of books. One student pointed out where he sat, a tiny nearly invisible boy in the rodeo stands. It seemed right after "traveling" so far, to come home and find our places, our homes, our people and to celebrate them in the fresh way one always does after have been away.

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Mary Ann Conrad is a special education language arts teacher at Chinle Junior High and facilitated the global literacy teacher study group.

Considering Identity through the Lenses of Literature and Writing

by Amanda Villagomez