

Classroom Activities for Diversity

Omiunota Nelly Ukpokodu

The student population in America's public schools is becoming increasingly diverse. Unfortunately, many categories of "minority student" (ethnic, cultural, and/or linguistic) perform less well on measures of academic achievement when compared with white middle-class students. Recent studies suggest that this "achievement gap" may be a result of teachers not addressing the needs (or the strengths) of these students. (See "Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners," pages 31-32.)

When it comes to styles of teaching, one size does not fit all. Teachers should deliberately consider the academic needs, cultural and family backgrounds, and learning styles of their young learners. Early in the school year, teachers can make initial assessments of students' backgrounds, abilities, and needs—and take these factors into account as they plan future lessons. On the following pages are three examples of activities that accommodate different types of learning and that address cultural diversity in a student population. The first activity is appropriate for grades 1 or 2, the second activity for grades 4–6, and the third for 5–8. These activities are not intended to be something special and apart from ongoing lesson plans. Rather, teachers can adapt these activities to match a particular curriculum and their specific class of students.

In these activities, various students can succeed in diverse ways. The learning tasks apply to different dimensions of learning. Various aspects of the activities provide opportunities for students to connect concepts to their frames of reference and points of view. Keep an open mind to various responses and reactions as you lead your class through one of these activities. ■

OMIUNOTA NELLY UKPOKODU is a professor in the Division of Curriculum and Instructional Leadership at the University of Missouri in Kansas City, Missouri.



Activity I:

Who We Are—My Cultural Artifact Box

GRADES: Lower elementary (grades 1 or 2)

CONCEPTS/SKILLS/VALUES: Respect, family history, speaking, cultural awareness, listening and questioning skills

THEMATIC STRAND: 1 CULTURE

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY: Each student brings to class an artifact that has some cultural significance to him or her, that tells something about his or her relatives or homeland. Ask students to bring in an object in a box that can be passed around for others to touch and feel. When the activity begins, students are asked to sit in a circle and to take turns sharing their artifacts. Students show their artifact to the class and share some cultural or historical information about it or why the artifact is important to them or to their family. Students are also asked to think of one question to ask a classmate about his or her artifact when all have finished sharing.

LEARNERS ACCOMMODATED:

(a) Visual learners can see the object and make visual representation of it in their minds.

(b) Auditory learners have the opportunity to talk about their artifacts and also ask questions.

(c) Kinesthetic/Tactile learners: When the artifact is passed around, these learners have opportunities to touch and feel the objects.

ADAPTATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS FOR DIVERSITY:

(a) ESL students: Without some modification, students with limited English skills may feel uncomfortable with the activity format, which puts them on the spot, especially if they struggle with the language. To enhance their chances of success, ESL students can first pair up and interview each other about their artifacts. This will give the students an opportunity to practice speaking before facing the larger group. In addition, you can ask ESL students to brief you about the item before class, and then present their artifact to the class using their home language. The teacher can follow with a brief explanation of the item in English. Since they are presenting in their own language, ESL students will likely demonstrate fluency, confidence, and competence. This flexibility also allows ESL students' classmates to view them as competent. It promotes respect among learners and builds a learning community.

(b) Ethnically Diverse Learners: This activity should naturally accommodate ethnically diverse learners who speak English, since they are sharing about an object that they know the history of.

(c) Students with Exceptionalities: Like ESL and ethnic students, students who experience conceptual difficulties or have poor presentation skills will benefit from the partnership activity. Working with partners, these students can learn from and be guided by their peers. Pairing up accelerated learners to work with their partners will give them a chance to demonstrate their understanding of the concepts and skills embedded in the activity.



Activity II:

Document Analysis

GRADES: Upper elementary (grades 4–6)

CONCEPTS/SKILLS/VALUES: Observation, description, interpretation, constructing meaning, inference, and comparing and contrasting.

THEMATIC STRAND: **II TIME, CONTINUITY, AND CHANGE**

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY: The teacher distributes a copy of a primary source document (letter, interview transcript, journal page, antique map, etc.) such as one of those provided online by the Library of Congress or the National Archives. Everyone reads the document, helps define (with the use of a dictionary) unfamiliar terms, lists the main points, and draws inferences from the material (such as, “What is the significance of this document for citizens today?”) Next the teacher calls on a student to list on the board his or her main points and inferences. Then each student in turn can go to the board and add any observations and thoughts that are not already represented.

LEARNERS ACCOMMODATED:

- (a) visual learners read information
- (b) auditory learners share information.

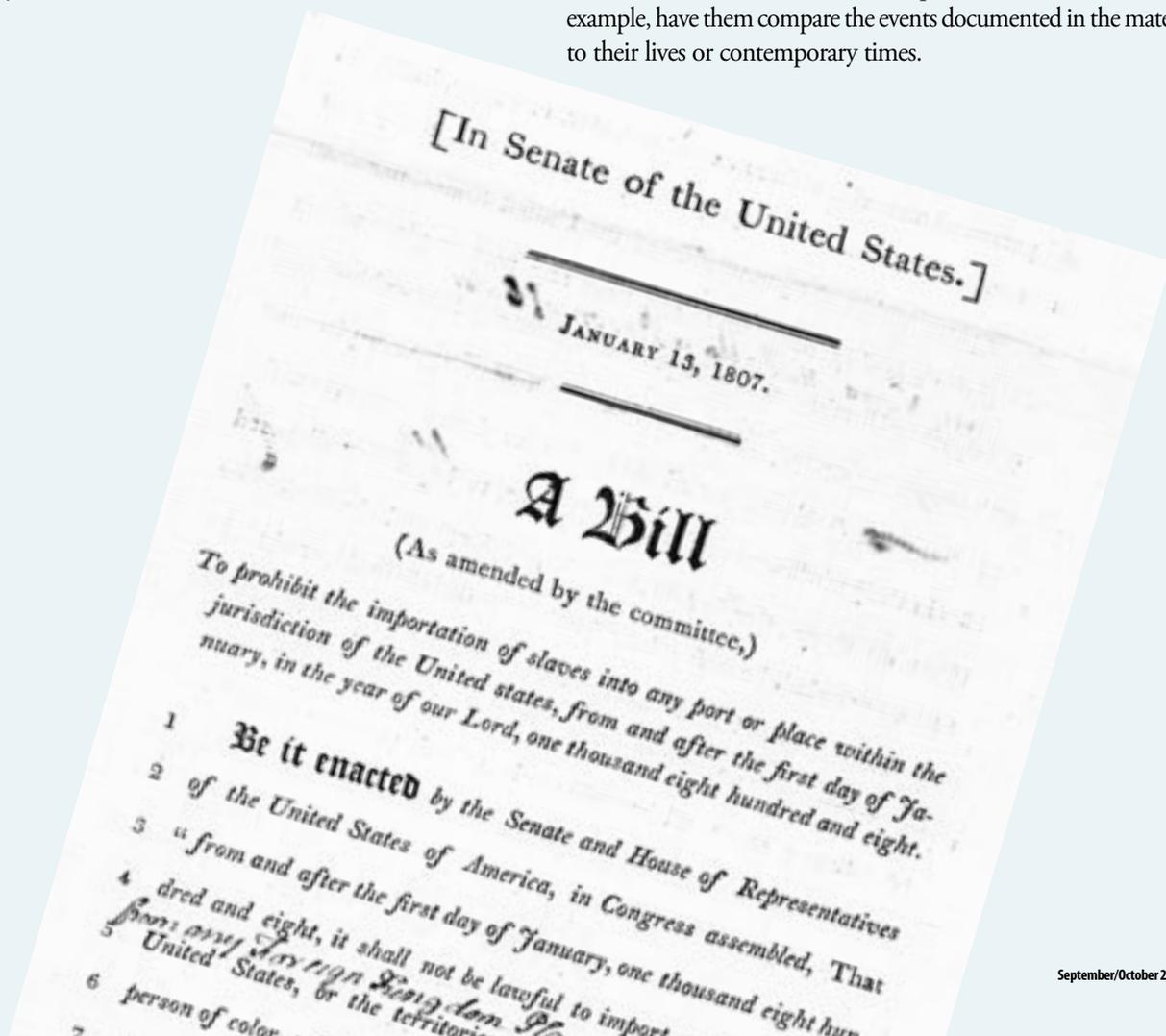
ADAPTATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS FOR DIVERSITY:

(a) Kinesthetic/Tactile Learners: Divide the class into small groups. Each group can act out an event or a scene related to the document.

(b) Ethnically Diverse Learners: Students can work in small groups. An effective way to adapt or modify this activity is to include materials that allow ethnically diverse students to use their experience or frame of reference in analyzing the document. Encourage these students to connect the events to their own cultural experiences. Teacher and students should be open to multiple perspectives and listen for the logic behind the interpretation.

(c) ESL Students: Use partnership to increase their learning chances. Pair ESL students up with other students who are linguistically competent to work together on the activity. Since verbal instructions are less helpful, write instructions on the board or on a piece of paper for the ESL students. Encourage students to bring from home primary source material that reflects their cultural background. This extension activity can reinforce the skills being taught. Since ESL students tend to need more processing time, allow them more time to work on the activity if they need it. For ESL students, demonstrating what is to be done can be tremendously helpful: The teacher can model what is expected or ask some students to model the activity, making corrections as needed.

(d) Students with Exceptionalities: Students with learning disabilities and students experiencing conceptual difficulties will benefit from the use of small group or partnership learning. For accelerated learners, increase the sophistication of the task. For example, have them compare the events documented in the material to their lives or contemporary times.



Activity III:

Physical Geography in Miniature

GRADES: Middle school (grades 5--8)

CONCEPTS/SKILLS/VALUES: Landforms, prior knowledge, creativity, communication skills, eye-hand coordination, observation, interpretation, and thinking skills.

THEMATIC STRAND: III PEOPLE, PLACES, AND ENVIRONMENTS

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY: Distribute a blank white sheet of paper to each student, and ask each student to choose a brightly colored crayon. Give the following instructions: take off one shoe, place the piece of paper over the sole of the shoe, and use the crayon to make a rubbing of the shoe sole. Demonstrate this with an extra shoe, showing the class how to make a shoe print on the paper. Have the students observe their own shoe prints. Have students identify and write a little about patterns they have observed. Have students take turns describing or explaining their patterns or imprint. Depending on the type of shoe, students may discover patterns that look like mountains, hills, valleys, bridges, islands, etc. Encourage the students to use the names of landforms to fancifully label the bumps and valleys on the soles of their shoes.

LEARNERS ACCOMMODATED:

- (a) This activity meets the needs of visual,
- (b) auditory, and
- (c) kinesthetic/tactile learners.
- (d) Accelerated learners will use their superior and creative ability to identify sophisticated physical and human characteristics such as valley, island, peninsula, mountains, etc.

ADAPTATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS:

(a) Students with learning disabilities could be paired up with a partner to help guide them through the activity if they experience conceptual difficulty. The teacher could also model this activity by giving an example of a landform term used to describe a shape on the bottom of a shoe.

(b) Pair ESL students with other students for participation in the activity. The teacher could also provide a map or pictures with physical landforms to aid them in participating in the activity. The teacher could work one-on-one with ESL students and guide them in recognizing the landforms. ESL students could be asked to share with the class what the physical landforms are called in their language, and then the prints can be labeled bilingually. This activity can enhance the confidence of (and peer respect for) ESL students, as it provides opportunities for them to teach their classmates.

