

Walls, Towers, and Sphinxes: Multicultural Concept Construction and Group Inquiry

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HOW DO CERTAIN LANDMARKS symbolize a particular place and its culture? One can easily identify the United States of America by the Statue of Liberty, France by the Eiffel Tower, Egypt by its Great Sphinx, and China by its Great Wall. But what do these landmarks tell us about these places? What are the characteristics of the place and culture that are symbolized by these landmarks? These questions can serve as the framework for a multicultural inquiry into landmarks that moves students towards an understanding of the unique histories and accomplishments of many of the societies that are now part of America's cultural landscape.

Advocates of a multicultural curriculum in the public schools argue that including the heritage and cultures of the many cultural and ethnic groups in our society will result in a better educated citizenry with a better understanding of the broader society of the United States.¹ To achieve this goal it is important that students investigate ways of living in cultures different from their own and the contributions of different cultures.²

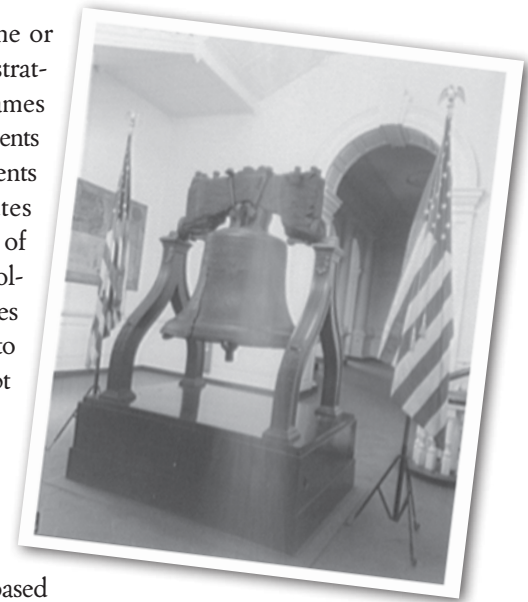
First Step: Concept Construction

For all students, and elementary students in particular, clear and structured learning is a key to understanding.³ To create a multicultural study of landmarks for young children, it is necessary to first help students construct and acquire an understanding of the concept of landmarks and be able to apply this understanding to their prior knowledge.⁴ There are several strategies for developing an understanding of concepts. In one strategy, the student studies examples of the concept, determines common attributes, and gives

the concept a name or label. In another strategy the teacher names the concept for students first and asks students to discuss attributes and find examples of the concept.⁵ The following example uses the second strategy to develop the concept of landmarks.

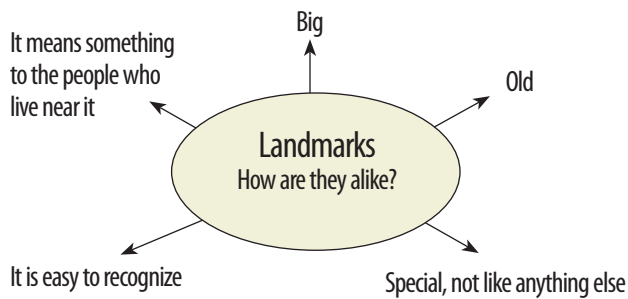
What is a Landmark?

The teacher asks students to generate a list of landmarks based on their own knowledge. The list that is generated may look like the following example with a mix of local, national and international landmarks.⁶ The list may also mix together things created by humans and natural structures. Before considering the attributes of landmarks in general, the teacher can clarify different characteristics for students by asking them to categorize the landmarks by whether they are natural landmarks or created by humans and whether they are of local, national, or international interest.



Landmark	Created by Humans	Made by Nature	Local	National (U.S.)	International
Our local courthouse	✓		✓		
Plaque about our town's first settlers	✓		✓		
Oldest House in our area	✓		✓		
Golden Gate Bridge	✓			✓	
Statue of Liberty	✓			✓	
Liberty Bell	✓			✓	
Grand Canyon		✓		✓	
Great Wall of China	✓				✓
Taj Mahal	✓				✓

After generating a list and noting characteristics such as the location of landmarks and their type, the next step is to ask the students to look at their examples and determine the attributes that all landmarks have in common.⁷ The following schematic web suggests how this discussion might progress in an elementary classroom.



These attributes of landmarks can be applied to the examples in the chart that was generated in the class discussion. The teacher may ask the students to think more critically about some of the attributes listed in the schematic web. Do the landmarks have to be big? For example, how big is the plaque in the middle of our town? Does something need to be known by everyone in order to be considered a landmark? For example, the landmarks in our hometown may be special and unique for our town but not well-known elsewhere.

A Part of Our Culture

At some time during the lesson, the teacher needs to discuss culture and its attributes with students. This discussion is necessary because the group inquiry that follows the introduction of concept construction is based on landmarks created by humans. These landmarks represent the culture of a particular place and people, so that the students' understanding of the attributes of culture is necessary, as well as their understanding of the attributes of a landmark. The students can refer to previous knowledge of culture and its attributes that they acquired through other class discussions or activities. Some prior activities are a study of the different foods that children from different cultures prepare on major holidays, the languages spoken by the parents or grandparents of children in the class who are from other places, or some of the traditional clothing that is worn in other countries. Landmarks created by humans can be related to these other examples of culture since they are created by humans and usually represent the accomplishments of a particular culture. Natural landmarks, such as the Grand Canyon in the United States and Mount Fujiyama in Japan, are easily identified with those particular places. Because they are not created by humans, however, we do not represent them as cultural attributes.

Second Step: Group Inquiry

An inquiry into landmarks is an example of "authentic" research where students construct their own questions about topics that puzzle them and try to find answers.⁸ Additionally, the idea of a group inquiry, in this instance collaborative group research, is a scaffolding technique to ease students into further research activities. First they conduct research in a group with other classmates before undertaking

an individual research project.

Landmarks and similar topics lend themselves to collaborative research. In this type of research the class is divided equally into groups, each of which is assigned a specific landmark to research. Prior to the beginning of the research the teacher introduces the class to a number of international landmarks, with the intention of not only identifying the attributes of landmarks but also exploring landmarks as expressions of the culture of a particular place and people.

One way to generate a list of international landmarks, as shown earlier, is through a class discussion in which students are asked to differentiate between local, national, international, physical and human made landmarks. Another way to generate a list is to use children's books such as *Ben's Dream* by Chris Van Allsburg or *Talking Walls*, and *Talking Walls: The Stories Continue*, both by Margy Burns Knight.

A Visionary Visit to Real Places

Ben's Dream is a children's book with beautiful illustrations of landmarks from around the world. Ben, the main character in the story, dreams that he floats around the world viewing landmarks from his front porch. Some of the landmarks include the Statue of Liberty, the Eiffel Tower, the Sphinx, the Taj Mahal and the Great Wall of China. In the two *Talking Walls* books, Margy Burns Knights selects walls from a variety of locations around the world that represent the culture of the people in that place. Van Allsburg's drawings in *Ben's Dream* are unusual in their perspective. For example he draws the Eiffel Tower from underneath, the Statue of Liberty from behind and the Taj Mahal in the distance with only the dome and minarets visible. If students are introduced to the book during the process of choosing international landmarks to investigate, they will enjoy determining which landmarks are depicted based on these unusual drawings.

Third Step: Structuring the Inquiry

Once the class decides the group of landmarks to research, each group chooses or is assigned one of the landmarks. In preparation for the research the students formulate questions that each group can ask about the landmarks. The teacher helps the students to begin the inquiry questions and helps direct the students' natural inquisitiveness. Initially, the teacher should direct the questions toward concrete information. The answers that these questions generate may be used as an entry point for questions that encourage deeper and more abstract thinking.⁹ The goal of the inquiry into landmarks is for students to consider how the landmark represents a particular place and culture. Therefore, the beginning of the inquiry might focus on concrete questions of who, what, where, when and why. The teacher will need to guide the students away from questions that are superficial (such as how many bricks are in the Great Wall of China) by asking the students to focus on how the Great Wall was built, which would include the construction materials.¹⁰

Comparing

If the research of each group is recorded in a graphic organizer such as a data retrieval chart, then it is possible for the students to make

Landmarks of the World

As illustrated in *Ben's Dream* by Chris Van Allsburg

Landmark	Statue of Liberty	Big Ben	Eiffel Tower	Leaning Tower of Pisa
Who built it?	Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, Gustave Eiffel, Richard Morris Hunt	Sir Charles Barry designed the tower which contains Big Ben	Gustave Eiffel designed it	Unknown
What is it?	151 foot copper statue of a woman, who symbolizes liberty and freedom	The largest bell in the clock tower attached to Westminster New Palace, the seat of government for Great Britain	An observation tower for the 1889 Paris Exposition	Bell tower in church complex
Where is it?	Liberty Island, New York City Harbor	London, England	Paris, France	Pisa, Italy
When was it built?	1884 to 1886	The clock tower was constructed from 1836 to 1868	1887 to 1889	1063 to 1350
Why was it built?	A gift from France in honor of the first centennial of the United States.	It was first a royal palace, then the Westminster New Palace became the Houses of Parliament for England and all the United Kingdom.	Built for the 1889 International Exhibition, Paris, the centenary celebration of the French Revolution	Bell tower for Roman Catholic cathedral built in the Romanesque style

A Complete List of the Landmarks in the Three Recommended Books

Ben's Dream

1. Statue of Liberty
2. Big Ben Clock Tower
3. Eiffel Tower
4. Leaning Tower of Pisa
5. Parthenon
6. Great Sphinx
7. St Basil's Cathedral
8. Taj Mahal
9. Great Wall of China
10. Mt Rushmore

Talking Walls

1. Great Wall of China
2. Aborigine Wall Art
3. Walls of the Lascaux Cave
4. Western Wall in Jerusalem
5. Mahabalipuram, India's Animal Walls
6. Walls depicting the pilgrimage to Mecca
7. Granite Walls of Great Zimbabwe
8. Berlin Wall

Talking Walls: The Stories Continue

1. Peace Wall in Moscow, Russia
2. Friendship Wall in Union, Maine
3. "Repaired Wall" in Indianapolis, Indiana
4. The Walled City of Fez, Morocco
5. Maya Murals in Bonampak, Mexico
6. Prayer Wheel Walls in Tibet and India
7. Wat Po Temple in Bangkok, Thailand
8. Hadrian's Wall, England
9. Holocaust Memorial in Kazimierz, Poland
10. Divali Wall Paintings in India
11. Ndebele Wall Designs in South Africa
12. Dog Wall in Shibuya Station, Tokyo, Japan
13. Peace Lines in Belfast, Northern Ireland
14. Pablo Neruda's Fence in Isla Negra, Chile
15. Dikes in the Netherlands
16. Chinese Poems at Angel Island, California
17. Anti-Graffiti Network, Philadelphia



Parthenon	Great Sphinx	St. Basil's Cathedral	Taj Mahal	Great Wall of China	Mt. Rushmore
Architects were Iktinos & Kallikrates; head sculptor was Pheidias	Unknown	Barma and Posnik	Specific design credit is uncertain	Unknown	Sculptor was Gutzon Borglum
A Greek temple	The Sphinx has the head of a king wearing his headdress and the body of a lion.	Russian Byzantine Cathedral	Islamic tomb	Fortification, wall	A carving of the faces of four presidents in granite side of Mt Rushmore.
On the Acropolis in the center of Athens, Greece	Giza, outside of Cairo, Egypt	Moscow, Russia	Agra, India	China	Rapid City, South Dakota
Between 447 and 432 B.C.	2600 to 2480 B.C.	1554	1630 to 1653	214 B.C.	1927-1941
Dedicated to Athena Parthenos, the patron goddess of Athens	Guards the pyramids	Commissioned by Tsar Ivan the Terrible	Built by Emperor Shah Jahan for his wife Mumatz Mahal.	A 1400-mile-long fortification, running generally east-west along the northern edge of China.	Washington represents the struggle for independence; Jefferson, government by the people; Lincoln, equality and the union; and T. Roosevelt, the role of the U.S. in 20th-century world affairs.

comparisons, draw parallels, and deepen their questioning (See Appendix). For example, many of the landmarks in *Ben's Dream* are places of worship such as the Greek Parthenon, the Cathedral at Pisa and St. Basil's Cathedral. Students might consider why a group of people would build magnificent houses of worship. Additionally, they may consider why these particular structures, which are so different, are associated with a particular time, place, and people: the Doric columns and friezes of the Parthenon with ancient Greece, the ornate colonnades of Pisa's Leaning Tower with medieval Italy, and the multicolored onion domes of St Basil's with Russia during the time of Ivan the Terrible. To further pursue the architectural legacy of each of these cultures, students could identify buildings in other parts of the world that reflect these particular architectural styles and consider the influence of each culture on the rest of the world, and the United States in particular.

As part of the process of writing a research report, students do more than simply copy facts out of an encyclopedia. They should be designing questions and building on the answers to the initial

questions by extending their research. They should be using graphic organizers, such as data charts, which help them find and organize information from various sources without plagiarizing.¹¹

In order to conduct such research, the teacher makes a variety of resources available to the student. Possible resources are non-fiction books on different landmarks; encyclopedias; children's magazines, such as *Cobblestone*, which focuses on the United States, *Calliope*, which covers world history, and *Faces*, with articles on world cultures and geography; videotapes from sources such as PBS and National Geographic; and websites selected by the teacher, such as www.greatbuildings.com.

Fourth Step: Completing the Inquiry

Students may complete and present their group research in a class book that is bound and kept in the classroom, or in a PowerPoint presentation. If a book on landmarks is completed, each main chapter will consist of each group's research on their particular landmark. The writing of each main chapter should follow a process approach



innovations and development.

Additionally, students can look at the symbols that the United States holds in high regard, such as the Statue of Liberty. It symbolizes the ideals of liberty and a new beginning for immigrants from all over the world. The Statue of Liberty, which was designed and manufactured in France, can be compared to the Eiffel Tower, which was erected as a symbol of the French Revolution. Students can consider how well the United States and France maintained the legacy of their revolutions that championed freedom and equality for all people. The investigation and subsequent understanding of our own cultural icons and those of other cultures from around the world can help create a future citizenry that knows and appreciates its neighbors and fellow citizens from different and often unfamiliar places. 🌐

in which the children write, peer review, edit, teacher review and edit.¹² Compiling the final book would also involve assigning writing tasks to particular groups to complete the introduction and summary, as well as the addition of illustrations, such as a picture or drawing of each landmark; timelines that show the construction of landmarks from the oldest to the most recent; lists that categorize timelines by historical period such as the Renaissance; and a world map that gives the location of each landmark.

Another possibility for displaying the research findings for each group is a class museum.¹³ Each group would create a display of the landmark which could include pictures or models and information pertaining to each landmark. The museum would be open for viewing by other classes in the school and by parents and relatives on a special presentation night.

Deepening the Inquiry

The goal of this inquiry has three parts. First, students identify the attributes of concepts and explore how they are grouped and labeled. Second, the students conduct an inquiry as a group and practice research skills prior to undertaking research on their own. Third, the inquiry encourages students to consider the contributions of different people to human history and to American society. The beginning questions of who, what, when, where and why lead to deeper and more abstract questions about these contributions.

The Egyptians accomplished great feats of engineering such as the construction of the Sphinx and the pyramids at Giza. They did this construction without the help of modern technology. A consideration of how the structures were built and how they represent the accomplishments of Egyptian society will enhance students' appreciation of Egypt's contribution to history.

Similarly, without the aid of modern technology the Great Wall of China was constructed and stretches fourteen hundred miles across northern China. At that time China saw itself as located at the middle of the world and consequently called itself the Middle Kingdom. For centuries the Chinese were more advanced than Europe in their

Notes

1. G. Pritch Smith, "Research and the Conservative Agenda," *Multicultural Perspectives* 1 (3), (1999): 3-6.
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3. Walter C. Parker, "Teaching an Idea," *Social Studies and the Young Learner* 3, (1991): 11-13.
4. Peter H. Martorella, "Knowledge and Concept Development in James P. Shaver," *Social Studies*, in *Handbook of Research on Social Studies Teaching and Learning* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 370-384.
5. Hilda Taba, Mary D. Durkin, Jack E. Fraenkel, and A.H. McNaughton, *A Teacher's Handbook to Elementary Social Studies: An Inductive Approach* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1971); Parker, "Teaching an Idea."
6. Interesting information about monuments in the 50 states can be found in James W. Loewen, *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999).
7. Linda S. Levstik and Keith C. Barton, *Doing History: Investigating with Children in Elementary and Middle School* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 2001).
8. J. Blythe, *History in Primary Schools: A Practical Approach for Teachers of 5- to 11-Year Old Children*. (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1989).
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10. Gail E. Tompkins, *Language Arts: Content and Teaching Strategies* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2002), G. Wells and G.L Chang-Wells, *Constructing Knowledge Together: Classrooms as Centers of Inquiry and Literacy* (Portsmouth, NH: Heineman, 1992).
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Children's Literature Discussed

- Van Allsburg, Chris. *Ben's Dream*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982.
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- , *Talking Walls: The Stories Continue*. Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House, 1996.

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