

# Work as Community Building

## A Small-scale Barn Raising

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As a former elementary teacher, and now a teacher educator, I strive to create learning activities that are relevant and personal to the students and rooted in the community in which they live. Equally important is seeking opportunities to share these activities with local teachers. I currently teach in a university that is located in the heart of Pennsylvania Dutch Country. The Pennsylvania Dutch, or (more accurately) Pennsylvania Germans, are well regarded for their work ethic and their love for God, family, and community.

Driving through Pennsylvania Dutch Country, visitors see the vast rolling landscape covered with miles of working farms that are largely populated by Amish and Mennonite families. Large red barns decorated with brightly colored hex signs dot the landscape. These barns are crucial to farm life. When a Pennsylvania Dutch farmer loses a barn to fire, the community comes together to build a new barn in a single day.<sup>1</sup>

Students in Kerri Schegan’s fourth grade class participated in a barn raising enactment that would enable them to grapple with the compelling question, “How can work build a sense of community?” Compelling questions and inquiries are at the heart of Dimension One of the C3 Framework’s Inquiry Arc, and they are the backbone of this unit.<sup>2</sup>

### *Dimensions of the C3 Framework’s Inquiry Arc*

1. Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries
2. Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools
3. Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence
4. Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action

### **Division of Labor, Specialization, and Community Building**

An enactment strategy is grounded in inquiry, requiring students “to find out, establish, or make something during the enactment.”<sup>3</sup> In this activity, groups of students worked together to “make a barn.” Student groups received plastic bags containing a limited amount of construction materials: one piece of black construction paper, two pieces of red construction paper, one roll of tape, five straws, one pair of scissors, and one black marker. Students were given ten minutes to work with their group members to build a desktop model of a barn, using only the materials in the bag. During the building process, they also had to consider the compelling question, how

did the work they were doing build a sense of community? Kerri circulated and observed, but did not provide directions or suggestions to groups. When the time ended, Kerri called an end to building and facilitated a discussion to determine which groups successfully constructed a barn and what factors promoted successful group work



Students concluded that those groups that utilized division of labor (e.g. one person took a leadership role, one person tore the tape, etc.) were successful.

Following the enactment, the class read *Barn Raising*; its bountiful illustrations and minimal text, provided numerous examples of how members of this Amish community work together to clear away a fire-damaged barn, build a new one in its place, and provide meals for the workers. Kerri spoke her thoughts aloud, modeling for the students how to make inferences based on the text and illustrations.<sup>4</sup> She referred to supporting questions (another aspect of Dimension 1 of the C3) for the inquiry, such as

- How are groups working together?
- Who is working toward the community effort?
- Are they in an area of specialization? How so?
- What work are they doing?
- What skills are they using?
- What ideals and attitudes foster community building through work?

A division of labor is seen in the book, as the men work together to construct the frame, roof, and walls of the barn. Kerri pointed out these examples of division of labor and made connections to the class' barn raising enactment. At the close of the reading, one student remarked that, during the barn raising enactment, "We had a head carpenter like they did in the story." Another student pointed out, "The men worked together and used pulleys to bring up the walls of the barn, and our group worked together to put up the walls."

Specialization is evident throughout the book as well. While the men work to build the barn, women are busy cooking and preparing tables for the mid-day meal. It may be inferred that the

| Handout A: Pennsylvania Dutch "Book Tasting" Menu  |   |                            |
|--|---|----------------------------|
| Division of Labor  | Specialization  | Work as Community Building |
| What are the factors that allow for division of labor? List ideas and explain your thinking. | What are the factors that allow for specialization? List ideas and explain your thinking. | Name of the book taster:   |

majority of men are physically stronger and therefore capable of lifting the massive beams that make up the barn's skeleton. Given their community's values and upbringing, Amish women have a great deal of experience cooking and are more likely skilled chefs. Several students inferred that a factor that allows for specialization is, "To do what you are best at. If you are best at raising the sides [of the barn], then you would do that."

The book *Barn Raising* by Craig Brown is rich with examples of how the ideals and attitudes of the Pennsylvania Dutch support community building. In one illustration, a young boy provides water to the men as they work in the hot sun: this exhibits his care and concern for the welfare of others. The recipient of the new barn showed gratitude by thanking those who came to work that day. Members of the Amish community showed friendship by putting the needs of others before their own, setting aside a whole day to construct a new barn for one in need. Community building is evident throughout, as the many work together toward a single goal.

### Economics and Community Building Text Set:

Kerri spoke her thoughts aloud, modeling how to draw inferences about division of labor and specialization from the text. She drew upon social studies themes, such as **7** PRODUCTION, DISTRIBUTION, & CONSUMPTION, and **10** CIVIC IDEALS & PRACTICES.<sup>5</sup>

Then she introduced a text set,<sup>6</sup> a collection of resources, for students to use for further inquiry into these themes and concepts. I used several NCSS lists of Notable Trade Books for Young People ([www.socialstudies.org/notable](http://www.socialstudies.org/notable)), the Children's Notable Lists from the American Library Association, as well

as other notable lists to compile the text set for this lesson. Many of the selected titles are notable and award-winning books, and they are readily available for loan from many school and local libraries.

### Text Set: Work as Community Building

Ammon, Richard. *Amish Horses*. New York: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 2001.

Bean, Jonathan. *Building Our House*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013.

Brown, Craig. *Barn Raising*. New York: Greenwillow, 2002.

Cooper, Elisha. *Farm*. London, UK: Orchard Books, 2010.

de Angeli, Marguerite. *Henner's Lydia*. Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 1998.

Deutsch Costabel, Eva. *The Pennsylvania Dutch*. New York: Atheneum, 1986.

Good, Merle. *Reuben and the Fire*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1993.

National Geographic Channel. *Barn Raising*, 2:40-minute video (2015), channel. [nationalgeographic.com/amish-out-of-order/videos/barn-raising](http://nationalgeographic.com/amish-out-of-order/videos/barn-raising).

Oatman High, Linda. *A Humble Life: Plain Poems*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, 2001.

Rubel, David and Carter, Jimmy. *If I Had a Hammer: Stories of Building Homes and Hope with Habitat for Humanity*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick, 2010.

Wolfman, Judy. *Life on a Pig Farm*. Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books, 2001.

Yolen, Jane. *Raising Yoder's Barn*. Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1998.

The text set was placed in a prominent area of the classroom, invitingly displayed to attract readers, which allowed students to continue their inquiry into work and community building. When compiling a text set, it is important to determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions and to take into consideration the different opinions people (such as authors and illustrators) have about how to answer such questions. Dimension 2 of the Inquiry Arc was addressed when students had the opportunity to apply disciplinary concepts and tools. Students described ways in which people benefit from and are challenged by working together and explained why individuals specialize in work.<sup>7</sup>

### Gathering Evidence of Work as Community Building

The third dimension of the Inquiry Arc requires that students gather evidence to develop well-reasoned explanations in response to a compelling question and supporting questions: "Use evidence to develop claims in response to compelling questions."<sup>8</sup> Students used the text set and other sources to conduct a "book tasting,"<sup>9</sup> during which students select texts or other resources from texts sets compiled by their teacher. Students use the texts to formulate and support a claim that responds to one of the unit's compelling questions. Text sets, by their very nature, provide students with an opportunity to manage their learning by selecting topical and relevant books and other sources from which they may conduct inquiry. I compiled the text set above to facilitate inquiry about work as community building.

The fourth grade students relished the book tasting and were drawn to particular titles. *Farm* by Elisha Cooper was a popular choice, as many students requested to have it when other students were finished. Teachers may wish to include several copies of this title within the text set. Some students

felt that *Raising Yoder's Barn* was most helpful to assist with answering the compelling question. One student said, "It was most helpful because it was about a guy whose barn burned down, and the whole community went to help him build a new barn." Students were also eager to visit the classroom computer station to view the National Geographic video, *Barn Raising*.

As students "tasted" books from the text set, they used a "tasting menu" to guide inquiry and record ideas (HANDOUT A) We use a tri-folded menu with a list of teacher-created compelling and supporting questions, areas for four book choices with spaces for the gathering of textual evidence, and areas for explanations about factors that promote division of labor and specialization. Pennsylvania State economics standard 6.4.4.A requires learners to, "list and explain factors that promote specialization and division of labor."<sup>10</sup> Students may choose to work with group members, partners, or as individuals to complete the tasting menu.

The fourth grade students recorded numerous ideas on their tasting menus that reflected their understanding of how work helps build a sense of community. One student selected the text, *Reuben and the Fire*, and noted as evidence, "Everyone helped get the animals out of the burning barn." She also listed three examples of the ideals and attitudes depicted in the book: "helpful, kind, and caring." Another student noted how cooperation balances a division of labor, "Teamwork helps to build a barn, build anything, or do anything." A third student listed her ideas about specialization from *Life on a Pig Farm*: "Someone would feed the pigs and another would tag the pigs, so they were good at doing that job."

### Building a Classroom Community through Work

Students used the evidence they collected on their tasting menu to express how work may build a sense of community. It was evident to students that individuals within the Pennsylvania Dutch community, and in other communities (such as those depicted in *If I Had a Hammer*), make use of their skills for the betterment of all and adhere to ideals and attitudes that promote a sense of togetherness. Using one's skills for the betterment of all is a value that teachers want to instill in their classroom and school community with hopes that students will later take this value into the larger world community as adult citizens.

The lesson took on a personal, classroom-based application, concluding with students taking action "to address local, regional, and global problems, and predict possible results of their actions."<sup>11</sup> Each student reflected upon the skills and ideals that he or she has to offer the classroom community. Finally, all students created a "notification" in response to these questions:

- What is your area of specialization?
- What skills will you bring to our classroom and school community?
- What ideals and attitudes will you promote in our classroom?

Students then posted the notifications on a "Community Classified Board" so that their skills could be used year-round to meet the needs of the learning community. Kerri's students expressed how their identified skills and attitudes would work to build community. One student offered her drawing skills to her class members, "I will help you and teach you how to draw." She also acknowledged her "patient and kind attitude" as something she would bring to any situation.

Dimension 4 of the Inquiry Arc, advocates that students take informed action.<sup>12</sup> These students recognized that a rural Amish neighborhood is not the only place where members' work can benefit the community. Students themselves can constitute a classroom community, offering their own specialized skills for its betterment. ●

### Notes

1. Helen Forrest McKee, "Amish Barn Raising: A Way of Life," *Mother Earth News* (May/June 1978), [www.motherearthnews.com/nature-and-environment/amish-barn-raising-zmaz78mjzhin.aspx](http://www.motherearthnews.com/nature-and-environment/amish-barn-raising-zmaz78mjzhin.aspx).
2. NCSS, *College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History* (Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2013), 24.
3. Jeffrey D. Wilhelm, *Action Strategies for Deepening Comprehension* (New York: Scholastic, 2002) 33.
4. Common Core State Standards Initiative, "English Language Arts Standards: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.4.1", [www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/4](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/4).
5. NCSS, *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: A Framework for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment* (Silver Spring, MD: National Council for the Social Studies, 2010).
6. ReadWriteThink, "Creating Text Sets for Your Classroom" (NCTE/IRA, 2004), [www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson\\_images/lesson305/creating.pdf](http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson305/creating.pdf).
7. NCSS, *C3 Framework*, (D2.Eco.4.3-5), 25, 37.
8. NCSS, *C3 Framework*, (D3.4.3-5.), 55.
9. Angel Bestwick and Karen Wanamaker, "Feeding on Children's Literature: Book Tasting as an Innovative Instructional Method" Presentation at the NCSS Annual Conference, Boston, MA, November 21-23, 2014; ReadWriteThink, "Creating Text Sets for Your Classroom," (NCTE/IRA, 2004), [www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson\\_images/lesson305/creating.pdf](http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson305/creating.pdf).
10. "Pennsylvania Academic Standards: Economics" (2015), [www.pdesas.org/Standard/Views](http://www.pdesas.org/Standard/Views).
11. NCSS *C3 Framework*, (D4.7.3-5), 62.
12. Ibid.

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