



English/Language Arts International Education & Global Connections

Parents, teachers, education leaders, business and community leaders--we all want to inspire our children to learn. This is especially important in the English/language arts area which provides the vital content, skills, and processes for thinking and learning in all subject areas.

Here in Indiana, even as we work to set high expectations for achievement, our local communities and state are changing. We live in an increasingly complex, technological world with a global economy that broadens our social networks and re-defines the work force needed in the 21st Century. Not only is our population becoming more diverse but also our connections through the Internet and work are moving us beyond our state and national borders.

It is no longer enough to have curriculum and textbooks that deliver high-quality traditional knowledge. We need to think in terms of international education and global networks. We need to dedicate ourselves to the task of helping our children look beyond their classrooms, schools and districts toward the exciting world that will exist in their future.

We need to create an educational environment community-wide that enriches the English/language arts--reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, literature, composition, speech, media, and journalism--through global awareness activities and that infuses the English/language arts curriculum with an international perspective.

Start by Building Global Awareness

Many teachers build an international perspective in the classroom through units of study that draw on their own travels abroad or the richness of diversity in the student body or community. But what if the school has few or no international experiences or connections? What if there are few or no resources to develop in-depth units of study on the world beyond our borders? Then, the best place to start is by building global awareness through the vast array of information currently available in books, video or online.

One of the most valuable books for an overview discussion that builds an international perspective is a children's book, ***If the World Were a Village: A Book about the World's People*** by David J. Smith. Published in 2002, it is still available at online bookstores. Smith asks the reader to imagine the whole world as a village of just 100 people. He then points out that in this village: 22 people would speak a Chinese dialect; 20 would earn less than a dollar a day; 17 would not be able to read or write; 60 would always be hungry; 24 would have a home television. Every page gives expanded information on nationalities, languages, ages, religions, food, air and water, schooling and literacy, money and possessions; energy. To update the statistics and information, visit the websites for **U.S. Census Bureau**, **Worldwatch**, and **UNICEF**.

Create a Curriculum with an International Perspective

Since a country's literature is a window into the culture, explore ways to give the English/language arts curriculum at all levels international enrichment.

One of the best sources to aid with curriculum development is ***Going Global: Preparing Our Students for an Interconnected World*** (Asia Society at www.asiasociety.org). This 2008 publication provides excellent ideas for international activities in each subject area. In the traditional English/language arts curriculum (pages 31-33): *It offers students and teachers an opportunity to discover universal themes and characters, to understand the power of stories over time, to deepen insight into other cultures and histories, and it illustrates how to write for multiple purposes and audiences.* The topics covered are: Universal themes, diversifying literary selections, literature from around the world, literature across the curriculum; writing about international themes.

To develop international booklists for your classroom, school, district or community, visit the website for the **American Library Association** (www.ala.org). The "Growing Up around the World" booklist features five bibliographies listing books that depict contemporary life in other countries. The regions represented are: Africa; the Americas; Asia and the Middle East; Australia and New Zealand; and Europe. The lists were compiled by the International Relations Committee of the Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC).

On your international booklist, include magazines and online newspapers that provide current information on the world outside the United States. Two good magazines for young people that fit this category--and are often available in hard copy in public libraries--are:

- ***FACES: The Magazine About People*** available online through CRICKET (Cricket Magazine Group - Cobblestone Publishing - Carus Publishing).
- ***National Geographic Adventure Magazine*** available online through National Geographic (adventure travel).

Magazines and newspapers provide an excellent model for writing. Students could research and write feature articles about issues and events in other countries. They could interview someone from another country for a human interest story written in journalistic style (5 Ws--who, what, where, when, why--and how).

Create Research Units and Projects That Explore the Literature around the World through Imaginary Travel

Coordinate the units and projects with ***Indiana's Academic Standards for English/Language Arts***.

An excellent source for springboard ideas on in-depth literary and travel units is: "**Miss Daisy**" (audio CD, 1993) an excerpt from ***Listening for the Crack of Dawn*** (1990) by Donald Davis. Davis is a national Storyteller-in-Residence at the International Storytelling Center in Jonesborough, Tennessee. Both the CD and the book are available through an online bookstore. This remarkable fictional story of a long-time elementary teacher in rural Appalachia--no diversity, no resources--in the 1950s provides a credible model of a year-long thematic unit on a trip around the world. The story is engaging and delightful. If the listener or reader approaches it as a curriculum developer would, however, it outlines an in-depth unit of instruction that is student-centered, uses the English/language arts processes and skills to research and explore the world across all the subject areas, and moves students to excel in learning.

Synopsis

As Miss Daisy, a fourth-grade teacher, explained it to her student, the plan for the year was simple. The class would take an imaginary trip around the world. They would be responsible for planning the trip (learning about money, distance, transportation, food, clothing, etc), researching (reading and writing) all the important information about the countries visited (history, languages, authors, cultural events, etc), and re-enacting major events (such as the Olympics when they pretended to visit Greece) or activities during the imaginary visits (such as creating a "butterfly so big you could ride on it"--a metaphor for everything being bigger than usual in the Amazon--for an art project).

If units on an imaginary trip around the world or trip to a region or country becomes a part of the curriculum, it should coordinate with regions and countries outlined by grade level in the **Indiana's Academic Standards for Social Studies**. Activities could also coordinate with all other subject area standards.

Enrich the teaching of this type of unit by using all the travel books, travelogues, and videos available on the Internet as reference sources for research. Students can also write their own scripts and present multimedia or radio or television travelogues, similar to those on cable television's **Travel Channel**, as end projects for a short unit or as part of a larger unit.

There are some excellent resources on international storytelling available online at the **International Storytelling Center** in Jonesboro, Tennessee, and the **American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress**. The American Folklife Center was created by Congress in 1976 and through a partnership with the International Storytelling Center serves as a repository for storytelling around the nation and the world.

There are excellent international resources on reading and writing instruction at the websites for two major English/language arts professional organizations.

- **International Reading Association** (www.reading.org). Explore the site for Reading Online (www.readingonline.org).
- **National Council of Teachers of English** (www.ncte.org). Explore the sites on international writing.

Participate in School- or Community-Wide Activities

There are a number of international projects that can become a part of the activities of an entire school or community that would involve a high-degree of student involvement with the English/language arts content, skills and processes while expanding everyone's knowledge of the wider world. Consider participating in or modeling a program after the following:

- **United Nations Literacy Decade** from 2003-2012 (www.unesco.org) - **UNESCO** has led the way for the *international community to recognize that the promotion of literacy is in the interest of all, as part of efforts towards peace, respect and exchange in a globalizing world.*
- **Pen Pal Writing Exchange Programs** - There are various sites--many are commercial--that can help a school or community get involved in an international pen pal writing program.
- **2008 International Festival**, Indianapolis, Indiana - The Festival will be held at the State Fairgrounds, November 20-23. This type of festival can serve as a model for a similar local international festival or for an international book festival or for an international storytelling festival.