

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in the Elementary Classroom:

Hi. I'm Jehanne Beaton and I work at the University of Minnesota, and this is a webinar on culturally relevant pedagogy in the elementary classroom.

Relationships are key to learning in any classroom. And so, students' lives are the center of everything I teach. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, or CRP, provides students with intellectual challenges, honors students cultural competence, and allows students to examine the status quo. In this video, we'll show you how to apply CRP to an elementary classroom. In the early grades, there's a lot of emphasis on reading and math, and sometimes social studies gets pushed to the back burner. And yet, social studies is the perfect place to start using culturally relevant practices. So, the goal of this webinar is to provide an example of what culturally relevant pedagogy looks like in a history lesson that's geared for second graders.

These are second graders. Historical thinking. Historical thinking is thinking like a historian. Historians analyze primary sources that were created during a certain time period, so that they can make their own interpretations of a topic, or that particular time period. That's what I want my students to be doing. Unlike secondary sources, where the interpretation has already been made by the author or the historian, looking at primary sources provides an entry point for all students to access the historical content by making their own connections.

So, I'm focusing in on a Minnesota standard and a Wisconsin standard. The Minnesota standard is historical thinking. And Minnesota has grade-specific benchmarks identified. So, here this benchmark is part of the historical inquiry standard. And it is geared for second graders. Wisconsin standards are slightly different. They are grade banded. And so, this standard, this Wisconsin standard, can be applied to students, that are geared for students from five to eleven years old. For our purposes in this lesson, we're focused on historical thinking. And we're zooming in on second graders for this culturally relevant example.

So, what is culturally relevant pedagogy? Culturally relevant pedagogy has three tenets. The first tenet is that every child is challenged intellectually in the culturally relevant classroom. If I'm asking students, second grade students, to analyze historical artifacts and generate their own ideas about the past, that is intellectually challenging work. I also see this particular tenet of CRP as a push for higher order thinking. And so for this lesson, we're going to push for high thinking through primary sources. And I've got Bloom's Taxonomy here to remind me what I'm looking for. I'm really aiming for those four top levels: Apply, analyze, evaluate, and create. For historians, they begin to analyze a primary source by making observations, reflecting on what they already know, and asking questions. In a culturally relevant classroom, I want students to do that. But I also want kids to be developing historical empathy, so that they're making connections between themselves and the people in the, in history that they're focused on. But also, they are beginning to place themselves in those people's shoes. So, to ask students to unpack what they see and make sense of a primary document is challenging, intellectually challenging work. I'm asking students to engage in work that real historians do. So, students are going to be examining authentic artifacts from history.

The Library of Congress has over six million items that are accessible online. State historical societies also have lots of great images, maps and other primary sources that are related to their regions. I found these particular photos, this one and the one from the previous slide, in the Library of Congress digital archives.

I've listed three higher thinking questions that I want my students to respond to, if they were examining this historical artifact. This first question, tell me a story about this family's day, asks students to imagine what might have happened for the family on the day of the photo. This is the highest level of higher thinking, according to Bloom. It pushes students to think from the family's perspective, because history is really about understanding the plight of other human beings throughout time.

The second question, why might this family have posed for this portrait, is an analysis, or is an evaluation question, excuse me. Again, this is pushing kids to imagine, but also evaluate this family's circumstances as evidenced in the photo. This question gets at the purpose of the artifact. Why was it created? But also asks students to think about the emotions and motivations of the people themselves in the photo.

This third question, also higher thinking, is an analysis question. In what ways is this family like yours? Here, I'm asking students to compare and contrast their family characteristics with the family in the photo. This gets, this question gets my students to think about the, what we have in common across time and place and culture, as well as what might be some differences.

The second tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy says that culturally relevant classrooms are places where students' cultural competence is honored and nurtured. Gloria Ladson-Billings, who coined the phrase "culturally relevant pedagogy", was interviewed for Rethinking Schools magazine. And she says "Teachers who are prepared to help students become culturally competent are themselves culturally competent. They do not spend their time trying to be hip or cool and 'down' with their students. They know enough about students' cultural and individual life circumstances to be able to communicate well with them. They understand the need to study the students because they believe there is something there worth learning. They know that students who have the academic and cultural wherewithal to succeed in school without losing their identities are better prepared to be of service to others; in a democracy, this commitment to the public good is paramount."

So, I connect this particular tenet of CRP to Emily Styles' work on windows and mirrors in the curriculum. Styles talks about how important it is for students to see themselves in the curriculum, and to be themselves in the classroom and at school. And then also, to see through windows into other people's experiences and lives. In a culturally relevant classroom, students are encouraged to bring their cultural stories and lives into the classroom as part of the learning. So, the texts I select, whether they're picture books I embed in my curriculum, or the books I have around my classroom, or the historical texts I select. So here, these are all photos from the Library of Congress digital archives. I want, in selecting these artifacts, my goal is always to provide students with windows and mirrors, windows into the curriculums so that they can see and learn about the experiences of others, and mirrors so that the children can see their own lives and experiences as reflected in the curriculum.

For this particular lesson, because we're focused on artifacts, I want to select primary sources that are grounded in the familiar, so that they are absolutely relevant to my students' lives. So, I'm going to find, I'm going to look for primary sources that all kids can, all kids know and can talk about. So, I'm focused on things that we can find in homes. Every person throughout time has faced the challenge of how to care for our human, basic needs. So, I've got a chamber pot and, of course, a toilet. To make this culturally relevant, this lesson culturally relevant, I want to find a way for students to talk about primary sources from their own lives as well. So, I'm going to ask students to bring in objects from their homes, so that they can be the experts on the ways they live. If they can't bring in an actual item, they can take a

photograph of that item, or select a picture from a magazine, and that can be analyzed as a primary source too.

The third tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy holds that students need opportunities to examine and question the status quo. Questions such as: Why are things the way they are? Why is this considered normal or true? Is it fair? Should it be different? And if so, how? These are all really important questions for this particular tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy. So, this tenet of culturally relevant pedagogy begs the question of what kinds of primary sources I'm going to ask kids to examine, so that they're thinking about home.

It's important that kids, like I said, focus on universal artifacts, items that everyone needs because we're all human beings. Those artifacts should have relevance to their own lives today. I also want kids to analyze primary sources, that are thinking about the ways people lived in the past, and how they live now. And I want to somehow facilitate the conversation about whether or not how we live now is better. Because sometimes progress isn't better. And I want them to critically examine that idea of progress, which is going to be challenging for seven- and eight-year-olds.

This secondary text, *History of the World in 1,000 Objects*, is a great resource from the Smithsonian. It might, it would give your students another entry point into an initial understanding of primary sources and artifacts. And it's a wonderful resource.

So, to start our lesson, I'm going to set up this lesson so that I've got kids in different groups. And they're going to do some focused research, where they're examining familiar household items. I'm going to divide them up into different groups so that that research is more focused. So, we've got a keeping clean group, a group that focused on eating, a group focused on sleeping, a group focused on shelter and clothing. And then I'm going to set them up with sort of big questions: How did people keep themselves clean in the past? And how do people keep themselves clean today? And they're going to, those questions are going to facilitate that comparison. I'm also going to potentially, I might need more than five groups.

So, some other categories I might include would be: How did people have fun in the past, and how do people have fun today? Or how did people get around in the past, and how do people get around or travel today? Given that my students are mostly seven and eight years old, I'm going to do a lot of the research for them and prepare them with those resources so that they don't have to figure out how to find those documents on the Library of Congress site. So, that requires a lot of pre-planning and preparation on my part.

I can use web sites like Library of Congress, or my state historical society, to find pictures of actual items from around the world. There are also drawings that are accessible. But I think photographs and images of real life objects are more tangible for students. So, I'm going to focus in on the sleep group, how did people sleep in the past and how do people sleep today, to illustrate my example here. I found some examples for the sleep group. And the first here is an Egyptian bed from the Bronze Age, between three thousand and a thousand B.C. Most of these beds were made of wood. But for wealthier families, some of the beds would be more ornate and carved. And sometimes they'd be adorned with wood. This bed is called a press bed, and it was advertised during the mid-1800's in England. I always think this is a fascinating bed to look at. I think kids would find this really interesting. This is a Norwegian Viking bed from the tenth century. It was actually found on a ship. The platform of this bed was made from wood slats. And then they would make the mattresses from hay that was stuffed in cloth sacks. Here's a bed

that was slept in by Catherine de' Medici in her castle in France in the 1500's. I want to make sure that I have at least one primary source for every child in the groups.

So, if I've got five children in the sleep group, I need to have five primary sources, so that every kid can examine a source themselves. And I want to make sure that those sources are diverse in terms of their time period and their place in the world where they're from. Here I've got two more primary sources. I've got a bunk bed from Idea, and I've got a photo of three kids sharing a bed in a tenement house in London in 1930.

If I give students historical images or artifacts to analyze, and I want them to pull clues from them, it might be helpful to give them contextual information for topics that they don't know much about. For example, here I have an image of a slave bed. And this is from Texas, from the Texas Historical Society or Association, excuse me. I want to give the students some basic information about slavery as a system in the United States, so that the kids can help understand where this bed was from, when, under what circumstances the artifact was used.

So, I've got a sample student handout here. I've got a very simple description of the slave bed. I also might include a more detailed description, like what you see on the right, that gives much more contextual information, and I might put that on the back of the student handout. So, they have both the smaller description, and the more complex description that they can access. So, each student has their artifact. They have their student handout. They've got a small description of the context the artifact is from.

Then they're going to get some post-it notes. They're going to get three different color post-it notes. One's going to be a green one, where I ask them to make an observation. One is going to be pink for a reflection. And one is going to be yellow for a question. So, each student is going to write an observation, a reflection, and a question of their particular artifact. It's important that I explain to the students that an observation is something they can put their finger on, they can see in the image or in the artifact. A reflection is something that they are thinking about, or they're inferring from what they are examining in the artifact.

So then, once the entire sleep group has made observations and reflections and written questions about their particular artifact, we're going to put those, we're going to have them organize their post-its on a poster. And we're going to try and group the same post-its together, so all the observations are together, all the reflections, and all the questions are together. Then they can actually, as a group, read each other's post-it notes and begin to start summarizing what they've observed, what they've reflected, and what questions they have about it. What it was like, how people slept in the past, and what they did to make sleep something that was enjoyable or get through it.

So, once they've done this, they've got their posters with all their post-it notes, we'll hang these posters around the room, and the students will report out to the large group. When they come together, we can talk about the things that they recognized in their artifacts that they still have in their own homes right now. Maybe some things that they notice are different about ways people lived in the past, or similarities. And then, which artifacts were most important in helping them understand how people lived, or how people slept, or ate, or dressed in the past. And why those artifacts were important to their understanding.

From there, I have to remind myself that the standard asks me to focus on how people's lives have changed over time. This also connects to the Wisconsin standard B.4.4, which is compare and contrast changes in contemporary life with life in the past, by looking at social, economic, political, and cultural roles played by individuals and groups.

So, I'm going to have students go back to those posters and then they have to start making connections between what they saw in the artifacts with artifacts in their own lives. So, I'm going to ask students to bring in artifacts from their own lives. This will get kids to think about how people's lives have changed over time. And hopefully, or not, I mean maybe they haven't, things haven't changed. But also allows students to begin to examine the status quo.

So, for this particular part of the project, the kids are going to connect their artifacts from history with their contemporary artifacts. So, I'm imagining this kind of format for a second poster, that then we would begin to have, like, a display for the class to examine each other's. With the students' group who are working on the question of how did people eat in the past, and how do people, you know, how to people eat now, different students are going to bring in contemporary artifacts from their own lives, and combine those images with the images of the artifacts from the past.

In the center, we'll have the group do some writing, where they're synthesizing and analyzing and doing an evaluation of how things have changed. And then once all the students have, all the different groups, have their posters ready, we'll set up the posters so that the students can do a gallery walk and examine each other's research.

Here's another example. This is the sleep poster, right, so we've got contemporary images and historical images. And again, we probably have more images than, we've got five kids in a group. We have five historical documents, and then hopefully, five contemporary ones. OK. So, that's the end of the lesson.

My job then is to figure out, I want to take a minute and reflect on how well I addressed the three tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy. How did this push my students to work at the edges of their abilities? In what ways does this lesson ask my students to develop their own cultural competence? And in what ways does this help my students examine and critique the status quo?

So, with that first tenet, right, my students analyzed historical artifacts and primary sources, which is an academically challenging task. They've used observation and analysis skills to come up with their own interpretations of how people lived in the past, based on the evidence in those artifacts they examine. They are working in cooperative groups, which allows them to hear each other's opinions and sift through those multiple perspectives as they're examining their artifacts. They're also trying to determine the purpose of the artifact. So, they're thinking sort of beyond the actual, just the text itself, but into how the text was created. Then my students are engaging in high order thinking by connecting and comparing those historical artifacts to contemporary artifacts from their own lives, and doing some sort of synthesis to make sense of that comparison. And finally, oh, I think I've said this already. But I'll say it again. They're examining contemporary artifacts from their own lives and comparing them to historical artifacts.

So then, the second tenet asks how well I'm providing opportunities for my students to maintain and develop their own cultural competence. So, by selecting universal artifacts, students are more able to relate to the content of the standard. I'm also asking kids to bring in artifacts from their own lives, which allows them to be the experts in the lesson. They can describe the artifacts they bring in from their own homes and compare those contemporary artifacts with what they're seeing in the historical primary

sources. This helps to send the message that who they are matters to our ability to co-construct knowledge as a class. By studying my students, I'm able to be very intentional about which primary sources I'm including in the primary documents that I put together for their research. I want to make sure I'm offering windows into each other, other people's lives that are different than them. But also, I want to provide mirrors to my students so that they're lives are reflected in those primary documents. So, if I've got a majority Latino classroom, I want to make sure that the primary sources that I find have some Latino families from history, so that they're seeing themselves. If I have students whose families are gay and lesbian, I want to make sure that I have pictures of pictures of families that are gay or lesbian, that are same sex couples.

In order to address the third element of culturally relevant pedagogy, I've intentionally included artifacts that demonstrate that not everyone lived under the same conditions, or with the same luxuries in history. So, we've got the bed from Catherine de' Medici, we've got the Viking ship bed, and then the slave bed and the tenement bed. So, there's a lot of different ways of living, and ways of sleeping, that are portrayed in these three, these four different artifacts. I selected these primary sources to sort of begin to help kids clue into the fact that there were lots of differences in living conditions in the past, in order to sort of prompt that discussion, I can ask questions like which bed could the kids want to sleep in the most? Which one looks the most comfortable? Why do people, why might people have had different beds during different parts of time in history? Or what might have been happening that made someone's bed less comfortable than some else's?

Another way that this lesson helps students to challenge the status quo is by including primary sources and artifacts from all over the world. This helps my students see that technological development and advancement happened everywhere. I've got those four examples, these documents here, from Jamestown, from the Han Dynasty, from Olmec Empire, and from Chicago, Illinois.

Finally, by selecting primary sources that show varied ways people have lived in the past, the lesson helps students, this is more of a subtle way of helping kids see challenge and critique the status quo. But by selecting these varied artifacts, I'm showing kids that there have always been many ways to live. There's not a single one right way. Students also learn that their peers may live differently than they do, because all the kids are bringing in artifacts from their own homes. This facilitates the understanding that there are lots of ways to be normal and, you know, what we consider as living now.

So, that's the end of our webinar. In this lesson, second grade students have the opportunity to analyze historical artifacts, also called primary sources. This is how historians study the past. And it's great instructional practice for social studies. It also addresses state standards. And we've selected two from Minnesota and Wisconsin as an example. In addition, we crafted a lesson that was culture relevant, so that students engage in developmentally appropriate historical inquiry. It's intellectually challenging. It supports cultural, students' cultural competence, and allows each student to critique the world around them. Thanks very much. [ends 27:11]