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Creating a Kind and Just World: The Power of Literature to Create Hope for Foster Youth

Heather Pezel

LS 400

Dr. Miguel Lopez

Abstract

Within our community, there are children in the foster care system who suffer for various reasons. As these children journey through life, they do not always come across caring adults, worthy peer relationships, or are given a voice to talk about their experience when wanted. Yet, as adults, and as educators, we are responsible for providing children with a “kind and just parent” (Ayers) whether in the classroom, at home, or in foster care placements. This capstone documents how Jacqueline Woodson’s young adult novel, *After Tupac and D Foster*, and William Ayer’s, *A Kind and Just Parent*, were woven together into a curriculum for adults that work with at risk youth. The curriculum guides teachers to recognize what children in the foster care system might experience and how we educators can support them. The curriculum was designed with the goal of helping all of society’s children, but especially the most vulnerable, to understand their own lives through the characters in the novel, and, in turn, use the novel as a tool to enable peers to relate more deeply to foster youth. By using young adult literature to bring to light what foster care youth experience, educators can “normalize” the idea of the foster care system, hopefully presenting it in a new, more positive, light. The curriculum, is designed to help children and teachers within our community feel more comfortable talking about foster care by giving children the chance to talk about their experience, while building healthy peer relationships, thus, building a kind and just world along the way.

Creating a Kind and Just World: The Power of Literature to Create Hope for Foster Youth

Introduction

Foster care is an almost hidden system that is rarely talked about within our schools and classrooms. I think that it is important to give children a voice that they can use not only to talk about their experience but to talk to the peers around them and make the foster care system a more normalized concept. As aspiring teachers, it is our job to give hope to our foster youth, making them feel important in a world where they may feel unwanted or different. I believe that there is power in literature and by using literature to empower students we can create a world where children know themselves, and are able to self-reflect in life.

Imagine you are child, in second grade, and have just been taken out of your home. You were taken to a system where you aren't known, and the future is known. Your only safe haven in this time is school. You know that every day, you will be able to go to school, see your friends, your teachers, and are able to be yourself. You go to school and realize that there isn't anyone going through the same situation as you, so you think, because your situation isn't talked about within your classroom. You are confused, sad, alone, and have no one to turn to because you don't think anyone understands you. You are feeling this way until your teacher brings out a story to discuss in class with everyone and there is another child in this story that is just like you. Little did you know there was another child like you, in foster care, and you only realized this because your teachers gave you the voice and the opportunity to talk about your situation, making it a more normalized concept.

Children need a consistency in life and need to feel like they aren't alone. As teachers, we have the power, within the classroom, to serve children and every situation that they may be in.

Within my paper I will talk about the power of literature within the classroom, and how this affects every child's life.

Literature Review

In our education system, we care about protecting and sheltering our foster youth within our classrooms because of everything that they go through in life. When we are protecting our foster youth, we are able to keep them safe from harm and injury, whether mental or physical. In our classrooms, we believe that this is what needs to be done because of the trauma that happens in the foster system. Although teachers think this is what needs to be done because by doing this we give them a safe haven at school, it is hard because by protecting and sheltering them we are potentially taking away the only voice that they may actually have. Children are taken from their homes because of an already serious situation, putting them in another situation where they are placed in foster care. When children are stripped from their homes and put into the foster care system, they are potentially being put in an even more harmful situation, where more than likely physical abuse will occur. According to Euser, et al. (2014) physical abuse can be defined as “every form of intentional physical abuse by an adult with or without an object, weapon or substance, and which causes or is liable to cause serious physical or psychological harm to the minor” (p. 64). When this abuse happens their innocence and voices are being taken away within their foster home, making them lost within their own world. If we want children to feel safe in their classrooms then we need to give them the opportunity to speak up if they need or want to, letting them know that they are safe. Several studies have shown that “38% of 7–18-year-old children reported severe physical punishment or beatings in a one-year period” (Euser, et al. p. 65). When these children are abused, they don't feel safe and they don't feel like they have anyone, specifically adults, to talk to about themselves and their lives. We are creating an

injustice by not allowing these children the opportunity to speak openly about their experiences and feelings.

Students will come into our class and we want them to think it is a safe space. As teachers, we are blind to the issues that foster youth are going through because, in reality, educational systems have made education and teaching more about the test scores and how well each school is doing than the relationships involved. It is like having blinders on and we only see what we want to see, which in return only allows our students to see what we want them to see. When we as teachers are blind to certain situations, we allow our students to be blind to these situations as well because we are not allowing ourselves to have these teachable moments with our students. We hope that life will go on and that everything will work out the way it is supposed to. According to Duncan- Andrade, these types of situations could be considered hokey hope (2009). We “hope” that things are going okay with our students, we “hope” that certain situations will be swept under the rug, and we “hope” that no one will realize we have become blind to these situations. When we allow ourselves to be blind to the issues, we are allowing our students to be blind as well, creating an epidemic that does not help anyone. We cannot expect our students within the foster care system to create relationships of trust with any adult, including ourselves, if we do not allow them to speak openly. Chambers and Palmer (2011), tells us about a young high school girl who was moved from school to school while within the foster care system. It took high school student, Ilena five and a half years to finish high school and lost access to many programs while having to repeat courses because of all of these moves and changes. Luckily, Ilena did finish high school but it is not always like this within the lives of our foster youth. Majority of foster youth who move schools at this rate, will end up disengaged and

will drop out. This is why we need to create educational stability within the lives of our foster students.

We can create classrooms where everyone is treated the same, but is treating everyone the same something we really want? We don't want a classroom where everyone is treated the same, we want classrooms where everyone is treated for their own specific needs. We can be sure that no one is brought out of their comfort zone, that no one has to talk about their lives if they don't want to because we don't want them to feel uncomfortable. This ensures that everyone is treated the same and no one's feelings are hurt, but this also ensures that not everyone will have a voice, including our foster youth. We need to normalize the foster care system because it is a reality especially for students like Ilena and all of the other 428,000 children who enter the foster care system on any given day (Children's Rights, 2017). We want to create a classroom where our foster youth are given the option to speak up and talk about their experience when needed.

While some children in the foster care system get the chance to join a family with loving parents, and siblings and extended family, with the opportunity at a better life, many children within the foster care system are not. According to Courtney and Heuring (2005) children who age out of the foster care system are at high risk and have difficulties transitioning into life as an adult outside of a system that is well known to them. These children are going through situations that they should not have to and are experiencing high percentage of different things like school failure, unemployment, poverty, pregnancy out of wedlock, victimization, and getting into trouble.

William Ayers is an esteemed professional when it comes to education. He is a Professor of Education and Senior University Scholar at the University of Illinois at Chicago, member of

the executive committee of the Faculty Senate and founder of both the Small Schools Workshop and the Center for Youth and Society, where he taught courses in interpretive and qualitative research, oral history, creative non-fiction, urban school change, and teaching and the modern predicament. Ayers has written many books on social justice, democracy and education, the cultural contexts of schooling, and teaching as an essentially intellectual, ethical, and political enterprise. As Ayers is researched, it is clear that he is more than qualified to talk about any type of education. With his studies, he is able to make out what is happening in the world and what needs to be done. (Bill Ayers, 2018)

In Ayer's 1997 volume, *A Kind and Just Parent*, he argues that our juvenile justice system is anything but kind and just, it is strictly the opposite. We can simply define being kind and just as being friendly, helpful, and generous while also being morally right and fair. He says that as an American society we need to work on what some think is an everyday reality; being a kind and just parent. Through different activists, such as Jane Addams and the ladies of Hull House, he shows us that we need to reinvent the different systems of our community in positive and loving ways. Though some cannot see the similarity in the two, Ayer's also shows many parallels to his argument within the sister program of foster care. The foster care system is unkind and unjust.

There are many connections between the juvenile justice system and the foster care system that some may be blind to. According to Melissa Johnson-Reid and Richard P. Barth (2000), children within the foster care system have a high chance of becoming incarcerated. Coincidentally, children in both systems are not treated the way a kind and just parent would treat them. As Ayers worked within Chicago's Juvenile Court being a tutor, teacher and observer, he was able to get enough research and backup to tell us about school within the prison

system and what works and does not work. Ayers tells us the story of Mr. B's classroom explaining the issue within our communities. Although this book talks about how Mr. B's classroom was specifically helpful to these students who were in the juvenile system, I think the issue at hand is how we handle and treat children outside of the juvenile and foster care system. How and why are these students getting into trouble? These children are out on the "bricks," joining gangs, selling drugs, and buying guns. It is easy for them to get into trouble while doing activities like this, but as a community, we are still expecting them to do well in school and not get into any trouble. Some of these children and their siblings also have family members who are locked up, who are in gangs or who are not around. They do not have the best role models in life and this causes them to react in the same ways. Most children within the juvenile system do not have a "kind and just parent" to show them what is right and wrong, but this is what every child deserves. As these children grow up they are not given the uniform opportunity to succeed when they are put on the streets without proper role models.

In relation, as a sister program, we have children within the foster care system who do not have a kind or just parent. Why treat children in the foster care system so poorly when it is not their fault that they are in the system in the first place? The foster care system really is unkind and unjust, just like the juvenile justice system. The foster care system is supposed to protect children while in unwanted situations, but they do the opposite. Many of these children will start out in the system while being protected through family court because of bad situations but majority of the children being protected also end up on the delinquency side of court primarily by the police. In a lot of neighborhoods, the community thinks that these children are rounded up simply to get their names into the system. Would they consider this being kind and just? I don't think so.

Similarly, in Ayer's 2014 volume, *Teaching the Taboo*, he argues that the education system is like a prison system where we follow the norm and do what we have to do to get by while teaching, instead of helping each individual student in a kind and just way, because that's "the way it spozed to be" (Ayers, 2014). This is "designed to mold and control the heard, to engineer and shape up the unruly crowd, to grind potentially free people into a herd-mind of obedient soldiers, servile and efficient laborers, mindless consumers" (Ayers, 2014) which could arguably be considered the opposite of being kind and just.

Ayer's tells his readers that "there is a terrible, unmistakable link between poverty, abuse and neglect, and the juvenile delinquency" (p. 41). As a society, we want the "trouble makers" locked up so that they can learn their lesson but what we don't realize is that just because we put someone in a prison or jail cell, doesn't mean they are going to learn their lesson. According to Duncan- Adrade (2009), it is possible that these children are being fed false hope, thinking they might learn their lesson while incarcerated. Many people will not learn their lesson while locked up because we do not give them the opportunity to, causing most of them to become second offenders. The nice thing about the different classrooms in Audy house, where Mr. B teaches, is that they are realistic with these children. They allow them to come to terms with what is ahead in prison and they, in a way, prepare them. Every child deserves an education, even children who are incarcerated. I think that Mr. B is an exemplary teacher when it comes to teaching in a school like this because he knows that juvenile justice is more than what it is put out to be. In reality, Mr. B is "teaching the taboo." They are going against the typical modern-day teaching and are doing what needs to be done for the students at hand.

The Juvenile system is more than just putting a troubled child into a cell and letting them sit there until they have learned their lesson. There is a long history between the children and

court cases since 1899 that brought us to where we are today. According to the Juvenile Law Center, the court process for juveniles was not the most formal. It usually consisted of a simple conversation between the judge and the child, who did not have legal representation. Everything happened behind closed doors, with the public or community having very little knowledge. All of this injustice came to light in the formal 1967 US Supreme Court Decision, *In re Gault*. In this Supreme Court Case, the judge determined “that the Constitution requires that youth charged with delinquency in juvenile court have many of the same due process rights guaranteed to adults accused of crimes, including the right to an attorney and the right to confront witnesses against them” (Juvenile Law Center, 2018). The first children’s court case was established on July 1, 1899 in Chicago, where their goal was to create a special, separate place for children in crisis, away from adult courts and the horrors of adult jails and poor houses. The changes were astonishing. Between the years of 1897 and 1899, there were 1,705 children incarcerated and between 1900 and 1902 there were only 60 children put in jail, the rest were shown to probation and other services to help rehabilitate and protect children. Although numbers dropped, the question is whether the way we treat children in the juvenile system is kind and just.

The founders of the first children’s court had a simple vision. They envisioned the Juvenile Court functioning in the best interest of the children and youth, acting in any circumstances, they said, as “a kind and just parent” would act. In today’s juvenile system, we focus more on rehabilitation than we do locking up or punishing like the criminal justice system. Another asset to the juvenile system is that “youth are entitled educational programming while incarcerated” (Juvenile Law Center, 2018) and within these classrooms is where we should be looked at as a kind and just parent. This is what Ayer’s argues and shows in his experience within Audy house, where Mr. B teaches students going through the process of juvenile court.

They are taught every day for a certain number of hours, where they not only learn about different subjects, but also about life lessons.

In Mr. B's class, he is very big about the freedom he gives the students. The only thing the students need to do in order to do something that they want is to ask. He wants them to feel very comfortable, and until they break his trust, they are allowed to go where they want during free time whether it be another classroom or to the weight room in the back. There are set rules that restricts the students in some way. He does not allow the students to curse. If they do, they are sent to stand on the wall for an extended period of time. They are not allowed to smoke, and if they do they are sent back up to the cell units where they are held in confinement for a certain amount of time. By setting boundaries but also allowing freedom, he shows these children within the juvenile courts that he cares for them and that he is going to set them up for success. Mr. B in some ways, is acting as a kind and just parent to these children and they feel safe with him and in his classroom before they are sent off to prison to do time for their crime. After time in Mr. B's classroom, the children have a new mindset, hopefully, setting them up for success. The way these two classrooms are set up within the juvenile system is the way we should be in every system; juvenile, foster, and education. It will give children "freedom" and hope that there is good in the world.

Ayers finishes his 1997 volume, *A Kind and Just Parent*, telling us that "the overwhelming majority of delinquent youth in detention are nonviolent offenders. These kids need alternatives to gangs and crime, programs that engage them and teach them and employ them and find a place for them, a positive role to play. Teenagers are by definition immature; they need to find a structure through which they can survive poor judgment and impulsiveness." Our children simply need, a kind and just parent.

Methods

Participants

The participants within this study are children ages 11+ that are or have been in the foster care system. I am also doing this study with teachers or professionals who wish to work with at risk youth and who may be able to connect to this curriculum on a personal level. While building my curriculum, I did realize however that this curriculum would be beneficial for students who are not involved or affected by foster care but also for teachers who do not work directly with these children. By having this curriculum for adults and children who are direct affected by the foster care system, we can be sure that the curriculum, is taken seriously and don't with intent. This will make it a meaningful lesson and a meaningful seven weeks for the teacher and children involved. If this curriculum is used by teachers and students not affected by foster care, we can be sure that the curriculum is being used within the community, and that foster care will be something that is talked about within the classroom, making it a more normalized concept.

Researcher

I was lucky enough to grow up in a family with two parents, a sister, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins and was not directly affected by the foster care system, along the way I did realize that foster care was something that was talked about within our classrooms at all. This was interesting to me because in classes, within books, we saw different and many stories about "traditional" families but never did we see stories on families that were different or about children that struggled. This was interesting to me once I got into college, specifically at CSUMB because here, we talked about all types of families and situations and how important it is to talk about these families and what many children actually go through in life.

As an aspiring teacher, I think that it is important to empower and encourage students to go through schools talking about their lives and personal experiences allowing them to make the worthy peer relationships along the way. I want to be a teacher who gives foster care children a voice and make this a more normalized system within in our classrooms and schools.

Procedure

When I first thought about what I wanted to do for my capstone project, all I knew was that I wanted to work with Foster Youth in the Foster Care System, I did not know what I wanted to do with them, how I wanted to help them, or how I could bring to light their situations and what they go through being with in a system that does not necessarily care about them. As I first started meeting with Miguel, we first started out by discussing how I wanted to get involved with this population of Foster Youth. We discussed whether I wanted to work directly with Foster Youth and bring to light their situation and what they went through or if I wanted to work with teachers of Foster Youth and show them how they need to be more educated and enlightened in order to educate their students in their classroom.

Miguel laid out possible projects for me that would be helpful in my quest to help the foster youth within our community. I decided that a project that might work well for me was one with which I could use young adult literature to help show what children in the foster care system might go through and how it affects everyone involved. I read a book called *A Kind and Just Parent* by William Ayers and this helped me frame my thoughts around the book for the book that I chose, *After Tupac and D Foster*, by Jacqueline Woodson. I chose to work with this book for many reasons. I think that this book connects with the book *A kind and Just Parent* because they are like sister programs, where they aim to help children and almost hinder them instead. Jacqueline Woodson gives an accurate representation in her story on how The Foster

Care System works but it has different points of view from different characters, in which anyone in the world could connect to in some way. With this book, I decided that I would work with a group of Foster Youth, big or small, divide the book into sections, and somehow do a “book club” with them in order to see how this book really does represent their lives.

As I started out with this project, I read the book one time through and highlighted points that stuck out to me, without knowing how I was going to frame my curriculum or my project with the children. After I read the book, I continued my research, online and within other books, expanding my knowledge about foster youth to help frame my thoughts and more specifically my project. Miguel continuously challenged me with rereading the book at least four more times, while highlighting not only facts about the characters but also deeper thoughts about the social injustice at hand. While reframing the way I wanted to do my lesson plan I came up with many ways to put it to use. I started out by coming up with themes to help myself to come up with questions to lead discussions, I switched from themes of the chapters to themes of the characters and this is where I stuck. After deciding that I would focus on characters as my leading discussions, I decided to start framing my curriculum with my research on the foster care system and how foster youth are treated, and I came up with the skeleton of how things would be done with this group of children.

First, I broke the book up into seven different weeks where I would meet with the children and talk about the specific sections of readings assigned. The reason this curriculum is broke up into seven weeks for such a short book is because I want to give the children time to accumulate their thoughts while reading the different sections and doing the assigned tasks before meeting as a group again. It is important for the children to read the assigned section at their own pace, making sure that they comprehend the story and understand the main points. The

children will also be given a set of guiding questions to help them focus on the main points and concepts in the story. This will help them to stay on task and not get confused while reading.

All of the children will be assigned a character to focus on while reading the book, *After Tupac and D Foster*. We will use life sized figures on butcher paper to help represent each character in the book. While reading the book, you will look for aspects of the character that stand out to you. You will take these different aspects of the character and write them on the butcher paper accordingly. For example, if the character is heartfelt, caring, and loving, you could write this aspect of the character on their heart.

The different characters that will be used from the book are D, “the girls,” all of the moms (including Ms. Irene, Neeka’s Mom, the narrator’s mom, FLO, and D’s “real” mom), and Tupac. With a spunky and strong mindset, D Foster is a child in foster care who happens to wander into the neighborhood of two girls, enlightening them on her journey of being a child in foster care. She gives an accurate representation on what it may be like for a child in foster care. The unnamed narrator is a quiet yet curious girl who grew up with the strong willed Neeka. Living across the street from each other, they have been attached at the hip, but are joined by a new mysterious friend (D Foster) who challenges them in more ways than one. They are an accurate representation of what it might be like for children who live their lives with their parents but befriend another child in foster care. There are different moms throughout this book. From Moms who were and were not able to keep their children in the same home as them to Moms who foster children who cannot live in the same home as their biological parents, each mom has a different story and a different purpose. It is important to connect to each of these mothers to see their struggles and victories throughout the story and to see how they are affected by the foster care system. Being a musician during the girl’s upbringing, Tupac helped the girls cope with

different situations. He wrote music that helped the girls connect but also went through different events in his life that allowed the girls, specifically D, to connect to him on another level. I think that it is important for us to determine why Tupac, of all rappers in the world, was chosen to be in this book.

The different things you will look for in the characters are personalities, lessons learned, thoughts, actions, or anything that sticks out to you. It is an open page for you to decide how this character(s) stands out to you. I also want you to think about how the foster care system might specifically affect the character you are focusing on, and how you might relate to them.

Data Analysis

As a curriculum builder, I put together a lesson that would help children succeed in life, in the classroom, and would help them talk about their experiences easier. We can be sure that children took away what they were supposed to, thoughts on a kind and just parent, being given a voice, and worthy peer relationships, by the set of ending questions provided in the lesson below. We can also see how the children did by their growth throughout the lesson. We can manage and track their growth by seeing their progress along the way. It is important to see the encouragement, hope and confidence grow within these children during this lesson because essentially, that is what we are expecting from them. We want children to leave our presence knowing that their lives matter, that they do have a chance to succeed, that someone is there for them in their life, and that there is power in literature.

By providing the children with the concluding questions, we can compare them to the opening questions and see the difference. We can also watch the children over time and see how they have grown as a student in general, as an at-risk student in the foster care system, and as a peer to other people in the group. Really the evaluation of this curriculum will solely be based on

how the children have learned and how the children have grown throughout the seven-week lesson.

As a teacher, I would expect us to grow and learn just as much as the children. We need to take away the same aspects as the children. On an academic level, we can recognize that we've done our job based off of the children and how their assessments and evaluations ended up. If our children grew and took away everything we expected we know that we as teachers did what we needed to do and provided our children in the classroom with the best curriculum possible for this lesson. It is important that if the children did not take away the concepts and ideas that we wanted, that we change the curriculum in ways that are needed and provide the next group with the necessities and tools to learn and grow.

Appendix

Curriculum

Details:

Grade/Class:

For this specific curriculum, the appropriate age level is sixth grade and up. I believe that sixth grade and up is an appropriate age level for this curriculum because they are able to comprehend, on another level, the different concepts and themes of the literature involved. It will be able for children of this age group to connect to the story and the characters within the story because these are some things that they might go through and might be able to understand more about. With the different themes of this book and the different underlying messages any age group below sixth grade might not be able to understand therefore will not be able to attend to the tasks and assignments that go hand in hand with the curriculum.

Student population:

This curriculum is specifically suited for children who are in or who have experienced the foster care system but can also be used for all children in sixth grade or higher, making it an easier transition into understanding the foster care system. Although this specific

curriculum is suited for children and more so children who have been affected by the foster care system, it can also highly benefit teachers who are working with at risk youth. This curriculum can open the eyes of those teachers who may not be used to having children in the foster care system in their class, because in reality, as adults learn how to teach, it may come off as an easy job, simply following the standards and teaching to the state tests. This curriculum will bring up the difficulties of finding and giving hope to children in the foster care system.

Content Objectives/Learning Outcomes/Goals:

As children read the book, *After Tupac and D Foster*, it is important for the students to find hope in their situation. We want them to be able to connect to the story and focus on the process of finding a kind a just parent, a voice, or healthy peer relationships within their lives, whether that be at home, in the community, or at school. This curriculum will help them connect with these themes but also with the characters within the story. This curriculum should also help teachers understand the youth within our community but also within their classroom. By showing teachers how to connect with their students, specifically with students in the foster care system, we create the chance of having a safe space for all children, where they do have a voice, healthy peer relationships, leading to them finding a kind and just parent somewhere in their lives, maybe even within their teacher.

Pedagogical Reasoning/Conceptual Frame:

Concepts:

The concepts taken away from this story, *After Tupac and D Foster*, will be framed around the effects of the foster care system. The children and teachers who put this curriculum to action will be able to connect and recognize the underlying themes of this story, seeing that there are ways to connect to large and small aspects. Anything from all of the characters to the clothing that they wear or the things that are said.

Content:

The content of this curriculum consists solely of what children in the foster care system needs in order to succeed in school. With the content of this curriculum, teachers of at risk youth will be able to work with youth in the foster care system to create a comfortable and safe environment. My hope is that with the content of this curriculum,

youth within the foster care system will realize their worth, that they are not alone, and that we as adults, and most of us as aspiring teachers, will be able to instill hope for life and show them that they do have a voice, can develop worthy peer relationships, and are worthy of a kind and just parents.

Skills:

As the children are introduced to this curriculum, they will not only be able to read a book in depth, but also connect it to a specific topic in depth, being able to understand why they are reading it and how it specifically relates to them. They will be able to relate it to real life situations and realize the importance of literature within their lives. They will also learn the importance of getting work done in the expected amount of time, reading with objectives, and the importance of building relationships with others around them.

Background Knowledge:

While building this curriculum I needed to be aware of the foster care system, putting in my research and knowing what I was talking about. It is also important for not only myself, but for the children and for the teachers who will be teaching it to know about Tupac and why specifically he was used so much as the main part of the story. Most importantly we need to know why we are in this field of work and we need to be able to relate it to the children in our classrooms but more specifically to the at-risk youth within our classroom.

Warm Up Questions:

As the children read the book, *After Tupac and D Foster*, I want to learn how they identify with the book. But before co-reading the book with them, I wish to see what they know and feel about the foster care system. I believe that in answering these questions, we share a common understanding of the foster care system before we begin the book.

1. On a scale of one to ten (one being the best, 10 being the worst) how would you rate the foster care system on what it does for children like yourself based on your experiences?
2. Why? Give specific examples.
3. What is your experience in foster care placements?

4. How do you think the foster care system is helping you or setting you up for success in your life?
5. Do you feel like you are “given a voice” in life (i.e. foster homes, school, relationships) to talk about your experiences in the foster care system?
6. Is it easy to make friends when placed in different foster care homes at school or in your neighborhood?
7. Do you know who Tupac is?

Tupac:

Children will watch videos about Tupac, his songs, and his life, in order to fully understand him in depth. This will allow them to understand why he is embedded in this story and why the girls within the story are connected to him on such a personal level.

Brenda’s Got a Baby

Dear Mama

Keep Ya Head Up

Splitting the book into sections:

***After Tupac and D Foster* brings to light different aspects of the foster care system and how it affects everyone involved. Although *After Tupac and D Foster* raises sensitive subjects, I think that it is an enlightening book and one with which children can connect. Moreover, I hope that, in addition, as we co-read *After Tupac and D Foster* we are able to see how the characters in the book help us to reflect more deeply and broadly about the foster care system.**

- Week 1. Introduction to the project
- Week 2. Prologue and Chapter 1-2 (pg. 1-31) 31 pages
- Week 3. Chapter 3-5 (pg. 32-49) 18 pages
- Week 4. Chapter 6-9 (pg. 50-66) 16 pages
- Week 5. Chapter 10-13 (pg. 68-93) 23 pages
- Week 6. Chapter 14-18 (pg. 94-123) 29 pages
- Week 7. Chapter 19-26 (pg. 124-151) 26 pages

Project while reading the book:

You will all be assigned a character to focus on while reading the book, *After Tupac and D Foster*. We will use life sized figures on butcher paper to help represent each character in the

book. While reading the book, you will look for aspects of the character that stand out to you. You will take these different aspects of the character and write them on the butcher paper accordingly. For example, if the character is heartfelt, caring, and loving, you could write this aspect of the character on their heart.

The different things you will look for in the characters are personalities, lessons learned, thoughts, actions, etc. It is an open book for you to decide how this character(s) stands out to you. I also want you to think about how the foster care system might specifically affect the character you are focusing on, and how you might relate to them.

Characters

1. **D-** With a spunky and strong mindset, D Foster is a child in foster care who happens to wander into the neighborhood of two girls, enlightening them on her journey of being a child in foster care. She gives an accurate representation on what it may be like for a child in foster care.
2. **The girls (Narrator & Neeka, best friends in story)-** The unnamed narrator is a quiet yet curious girl who grew up with the strong willed Neeka. Living across the street from each other, they have been attached at the hip, but are joined by a new mysterious friend (D Foster) who challenges them in more ways than one. They are an accurate representation of what it might be like for children who live their lives with their parents but befriend another child in foster care.
3. **Moms (Ms. Irene; Neeka's Mom, Narrator's mom, FLO; foster mom, D's "real" mom)-** There are different moms throughout this book. From Moms who were and were not able to keep their children in the same home as them to Moms who foster children who cannot live in the same home as their biological parents, each mom has a different story and a different purpose. It is important to connect to each of these mothers to see their struggles and victories throughout the story and to see how they are affected by the foster care system.
4. **Tupac-** Being a musician during the girl's upbringing, Tupac helped the girls cope with different situations. He wrote music that helped the girls connect but also went through different events in his life that allowed the girls, specifically D, to connect to him on another level. I think that it is important for us to determine why Tupac, of all rappers in the world, was chosen to be in this book.

Weekly/ Daily/ Hourly Planning

Week One (Monday)

Time	Activity
10:00 AM - 10:20 AM	Introduce project/ the importance Go over opening questions (refer to questions above) Expectations for the project
10:20 AM - 10:40 AM	Go over Tupac Videos
10:40 AM - 10:55 AM	Hand out book, sticky notes, highlighters, butcher paper
10:55 AM - 11:10 AM	Introduce characters (refer to definitions above)
11:10 AM - 11:20 AM	Choose characters
11:20 AM - 11:40 AM	Show how the book is going to be split up
11:40 AM - 11:55 AM	Give children the guiding questions for the first section of reading (refer to questions below) Show how you want the questions to guide their reading
11:55 AM - 12:00 PM	Q&A

Week Two (Monday)

Time	Activity
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10:00 AM - 10:30 AM	What stuck out from the reading? Questions they have on the reading? How did the guiding questions help them (or not)?
10:30 AM - 11:00 AM	Talk about their specific character What they wrote on their character outline on the butcher paper? Why? Did others see the same characteristics in the same character, their character, or in themselves?
11:00 AM - 11:15 AM	Introduce guiding questions for next section of reading (see questions below)

Week Three (Monday)

Time	Activity
10:00 AM - 10:30 AM	What stuck out from the reading? Questions they have on the reading? How did the guiding questions help them (or not)?
10:30 AM - 11:00 AM	Talk about their specific character What they wrote on their character outline on the butcher paper? Why? Did others see the same characteristics in the same character, their character, or in themselves?
11:00 AM - 11:15 AM	Introduce guiding questions for next section of reading (see questions below)

Week Four (Monday)

Time	Activity
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10:00 AM - 10:30 AM	What stuck out from the reading? Questions they have on the reading? How did the guiding questions help them (or not)?
10:30 AM - 11:00 AM	Talk about their specific character What they wrote on their character outline on the butcher paper? Why? Did others see the same characteristics in the same character, their character, or in themselves?
11:00 AM - 11:15 AM	Introduce guiding questions for next section of reading (see questions below)

Week Five (Monday)

Time	Activity
10:00 AM - 10:30 AM	What stuck out from the reading? Questions they have on the reading? How did the guiding questions help them (or not)?
10:30 AM - 11:00 AM	Talk about their specific character What they wrote on their character outline on the butcher paper? Why? Did others see the same characteristics in the same character, their character, or in themselves?
11:00 AM - 11:15 AM	Introduce guiding questions for next section of reading (see questions below)

Week Six (Monday)

Time	Activity
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10:00 AM - 10:30 AM	<p>What stuck out from the reading?</p> <p>Questions they have on the reading?</p> <p>How did the guiding questions help them (or not)?</p>
10:30 AM - 11:00 AM	<p>Talk about their specific character</p> <p>What they wrote on their character outline on the butcher paper?</p> <p>Why?</p> <p>Did others see the same characteristics in the same character, their character, or in themselves?</p>
11:00 AM - 11:15 AM	<p>Introduce guiding questions for next section of reading (see questions below)</p>

Week Seven (Monday)

Time	Activity
10:00 AM - 10:30 AM	<p>What stuck out from the reading?</p> <p>Questions they have on the reading?</p> <p>How did the guiding questions help them (or not)?</p>
10:30 AM - 11:00 AM	<p>Talk about their specific character</p> <p>What they wrote on their character outline on the butcher paper?</p> <p>Why?</p> <p>Did others see the same characteristics in the same character, their character, or in themselves?</p>
11:00 AM - 11:30 AM	<p>Discuss the follow up questions (see questions below)</p>
11:30 AM - 12:00 PM	<p>How did the project impact the students over all?</p> <p>Was it helpful for them/ do they think it would be helpful for others to understand their experience in foster care?</p>

	Compare different pieces of butcher paper
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Guiding Questions

Week two

Prologue-Chapter 2

1. Who is Tupac?
2. Why is Tupac important in a story about Foster Care?
3. How and why are foster mothers important to children in the foster care system?
4. “If I make it to eighteen. If I don’t act right, I’m out of the system and on my own. And probably *homeless*.” P. 13 What do you think this quote means and why is it so significant to this section of reading?
5. On page 16 compare how D talks about her foster mother and how protective Neeka’s mom is over the girls. What is the difference in the two types of mothers?
6. Why do the girls, specifically D, want to “know the answers to everything”? What is the significance?
7. Why does D want to “walk out of her own life” and “step into one of those other place”?
8. What in life brought D and the girls together?

Week three

Chapter 3-5

1. Why are the mothers of the narrator and Neeka so protective when it comes to D? How does this affect the girls?
2. On page 43 the narrator says that “D was *home* to me and Neeka. D was *Ask me no questions and I’ll tell you no lies*. She was *sun* and *crazy loud laughter* and *warm rain*.” Why is D so important to these girls?
3. On page 43 and 44, the narrator's mother is very cautious about D saying that she needs to be careful because “WHO KNOWS” what D is going to lead them into. Why do you think that this leads to her thoughts of “*Who’s her mama? Who’s her daddy? Where’s my daddy? Always stuff we ain’t gonna know?*” Why are mothers so protective at first when it comes to D?

Week four

Chapter 6-9

1. How did Tupac being sentenced affect the girls? Why?
2. How did Tupac being shot affect the girls? Why?
3. Notice D's connection to Tupac on a personal level. Why do you think her connection to him is so strong?
4. The girls think that D is lucky because she gets to "roam" and do what she wants and they can't leave the streets but D thinks that girls are lucky because they have "real" mothers and homes as opposed to being in foster care and with parents who are not biological to you. What is your reaction to this?

Week five

Chapter 10-13

1. How do the girls feel while going to the amphitheater with D? Why do they feel this way?
2. Is D really from "the planet of free" as a foster youth? The girls see her as lucky and free, but is she really in her situation?

Week six

Chapter 14-18

1. "Flo don't own me." "Foster mamas take you in and then let you go." How does D's perspective of her foster mom change from the beginning of the story to now, during these quotes?
2. In this section, D talks about her experience within the group homes she has been in. Based off of the quote below, how do you think this affects D and the girls? Do you think it is hard for the girls to hear this type of situation that D has been through? "Why do we keep calling them homeless and foster and runaways. These kids ain't none of that. They're throw away kids. Their parents don't want them."

Week seven

Chapter 19-26

1. How do you think the girls feel when D shows up with her biological mom, after being gone? What do you think the girls are thinking when they see D with her biological mom?
2. How did the girls react when Tupac got shot again? Why?
3. Chapter 22 Tupac getting shot again
4. What happened to Tupac after getting shot? And how do the girls react? Why?
5. What are the girls ending thoughts about D and Tupac? Why do they choose to think this way?

Follow up questions

1. How accurately did this book represent the foster care system as a whole? Explain.
2. Did the book make you think about your experience in foster care system in a different way?
3. How do you connect to the different characters in the book? Why?
4. How did the foster care system help D in the book? Why?
5. D shows throughout the book that she has developed a strong voice within her community and her relationships. What shows that D has a voice? How do you think she developed this voice?
6. Was it easy for D to make friends? Why or why not?
7. D talks a lot about figuring out their “Big Purpose” in the world, what do you think your big purpose in the world is?

Assessment and Evaluation:**Student**

By providing the children with the concluding questions, we can compare them to the opening questions and see the difference. We can also watch the children over time and see how they have grown as a student in general, as an at-risk student in the foster care system, and as a peer to other people in the group. Really the evaluation of this curriculum will solely be based on how the children have learned and how the children have grown throughout the seven-week lesson.

Teacher

As a teacher, I would expect us to grow and learn just as much as the children. We need to take away the same aspects as the children. On an academic level, we can recognize that we've done our job based off of the children and how their assessments and evaluations ended up. If our children grew and took away everything we expected we know that we as teachers did what we needed to do and provided our children in the classroom with the best curriculum possible for this lesson. It is important that if the children did not take away the concepts and ideas that we wanted, that we change the curriculum in ways that are needed and provide the next group with the necessities and tools to learn and grow.

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