

Tasting the Sky: Life on the West Bank

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Purpose- To help students extend their contextual understanding of reading and writing in cross cultural literature and within these cultural environments.

Overview of main ideas from the book: In this memoir of a childhood in Ramallah, on the West Bank, Bakarar offers a child's view of the daily indignities, oppression, and textures of life in an occupied land. The starting point for her letters to the world is her detention, on the way home from the university, where she has gone to check a mailbox for news of the world. She recalls-the terrors of the Six-Day War; the privations of refugees and the possibilities that she discovered in the first letter of the Arabic alphabet.

Connection to the Curriculum- literature and geography. Tasting the Sky expresses the power of language and how it becomes the author's true home- (one which can never be taken away.)The lesson also addresses how a place changes over time.

Grade Level 7-8

Connections to the National/Arizona Geography Standards

Strand 2: World History

PO 8. Describe two points of view on the same historical event.

Strand 4: Geography

Concept 2: Places and Regions

PO 1. Describe the human and physical characteristics of places and regions.

PO 4. Describe how a place changes over time. (Connect with content studied.)

Strand 2: Comprehending Literary Text

Concept 2: Historical and Cultural Aspects of Literature

PO 1. Describe the historical and cultural aspects found in cross-cultural works of literature.

Time- 2-3 class periods (after completion of the novel). [Period One for questioning, discussion and setting the stage, Period Two for writing activity]

Materials: Tasting the Sky, map(s) of the middle east and of the West Bank, colored pencils, copy of “The 6 Day War”, letter writing materials and prompts for the Post Box 43 activity. (For extension -short videos).

Objectives- Students will be able to compare and contrast childhood memories of the war and growing up on the West Bank, against accounts written about the Six- Day War in the MSN Encarta articles. Students will be able to articulate the power that language had on the writer and how she used it, by writing to each other.

Preparation for the Lesson- The teacher will introduce the literary term, *memoir*. How is memoir different from autobiography?

Memoir (dictionary.com)

- a record of events written by a person having intimate knowledge of them and based on personal observation. (Memoirs are more focused on specific life experiences)

Autobiography (dictionary.com)

- a history of a person's life written or told by that person.

Opening the Lesson- The teacher will use a world map of the middle east to help narrow and refocus student attention to this part of the world. (An optional map activity might include labeling the map with the names of countries); The class will quickly brainstorm historical and geographical facts from the story, and will contribute personal knowledge to create a historical context for the story,

Write the following quote on the board and let students reflect on it individually until the end of the lesson. (Don't discuss it at this point)

“ When a war ends, it does not go away. It hides inside us.”

Step 2: Pass out copies of the MSN Encarta readings on the 6 Day War. Separate the class into small groups of 4- each person in the group will have a copy of one of the readings. Give time for silent reading- encourage students to highlight or underline important points as they read.

Step 3: Give time for the groups to share several points from the readings with each other.

Step 4: Ask students to reform into new groups. Place all Reading 1s together,

Reading 2s together etc. Ask each group to synthesize the most important aspects of their reading as it pertains to the novel, Tasting the Sky. and share it.

Step 5: Write this collective information on a chart or on the board and leave it for reference, comparison and contrast and point of view questions that might arise from the writing activity.

Step 6. Pair the students so that you form well balanced writing partners. Each student will have one writing prompt, which is pulled directly from the reading and which represents a memory from childhood of the 6 Day War.

Step 7: Each student writes a personal response (in a letter form) to the prompt they receive. (everyone gets one).
Students will then “post” this response to their paired writing partner. For fun, and added interest, you could create a “letter box” barrier between each pair of students and they could pass writing to each other through the box.

Step 8: After sufficient time has passed for students to write and reply to each other (one to two times), regroup the students and respond to the following question (which has been on the board).

Assessing Student Learning-

“ When a war ends, it does not go away. It hides inside us.”

What does mother mean by this quote?

Step 9: Return to the factual information on the chart paper. Where do the story lines intersect? Where do they differ? Where are they the same or similar?

- Formative assessment- through monitoring of student responses
- Summative assessment (of writing) through use of writing conventions and content

Extending the Lesson:

Ask students to write about a childhood memory, and then use a parent or family member memory, or a newspaper article to compare and contrast against the childhood memory.

The teacher will introduce the concept of “fence.” Ask the students to demonstrate an understanding of fence before supplying the dictionary offerings.

Fence: (dictionary.com)

- a barrier enclosing or bordering a field, yard, etc., usually made of posts and wire or wood, used to prevent entrance, to confine, or to mark a boundary.
- to enclose by some barrier, establishing exclusive right to possession
- to defend; protect; guard:
- to ward off; keep out.

Ask the students to reflect on the uses of ‘fence’ within the memoir. This concept of fence extends beyond to (possible responses) concentration camps, reservations, mental issues such as autism, prisons and jails.

View the short videos of the West Bank and compare the contemporary images with childhood memories.

*Palestine, West Bank, Israel, Arab, Islam, Judaism, 6 Day War are all powerful, and value-laden terms. The story and lesson lend themselves to group discussion (which needs to remain academic) and which respects the possible religions and ethnic sensitivities of the class.

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