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October 28th - December 8th, 2019

Subject(s): Language Arts/Social Studies

Project Title: Letter Writing

Duration: 1-1.5 Months (45min-1hr sessions, 1 session per week)

Associated Cost:

Postage for a bundle of about 25 letters

Material:

The Jolly Pocket Postman

Letter writing material

Venn Diagram Sheets

Prior Knowledge:

- Reading material contains references to Euro-centric fairy tales and nursery rhymes, including 3 men in a tub, Puss in Boots, the crooked man, Jack and the beanstalk, Rapunzel, Alice in Wonderland, the big bad wolf (story unspecified), the gingerbread man, and the Wizard of Oz, among others.
- If any students are unaware of all of these references, one or more of those stories must also be made available to briefly read before the main book.
- Make sure the class has a possibility of being familiar with some of these references. Make sure the teacher is aware of most if not all of the references.

Purposes:

- Modes of communication: writing letters and sending them overseas emphasises how through time we have strived to connect ourselves to each other around the world.
- Writing Letters: We can use modes of communication with an infinite variety of language, some as intimate as letter writing use specific language that can be taught (example, greetings, sign offs, formal vs informal letter structure, etc.).
- Connect with others: By providing real recipients to the letters, the writers can come to understand how language can make one empathise with the perspectives of other cultures.
- Language as intent: As the reading material for this activity is outdated and region specific (1995, UK), the language within the material is subject to critical and analytical discussion (i.e. why did everyone call 'postal workers' 'postmen'?).

Read Aloud: The Jolly Pocket Postman

Guiding Questions

- What is a postman?
- What does a postman do?
- Are there other words for 'postman'?

- Why is the word 'postman' used?
 - possible extension: inclusive language (postal worker, post woman, mail carrier, etc.)/history of male (mail is a humorous and relevant homophone) dominated language in education
- language varieties
 - point out the UK vs US English/spelling
 - prepare class for possible misunderstandings in dialect (the book says "blow me" at one point)

While reading:

- Touchable objects, not enough for fair distribution, recommend showing to class as a whole
- Books within the book, time provided, have class guess what might have happened had "the tyre not been flat" before reading the mini-book that answers the question.
- Students could even draw or write or act out their ideas before the reveal.
- Ask if the class recognizes characters from other literature sources as you read (nursery rhymes, fairy tales, pixar movies, video games, etc.) [pages unnumbered, stop on page "A letter for the miller, ..." "A postman in a tunnel..." " Away from the house and down the lane..."]
- Open the class discussion upon finishing the book.

Cross-literary Connections: Venn Diagram Activity

- Ask the class again who they recognized from other works
- Ensure nobody is left out, ask specific guiding questions (ex. To a student who seems lost: what color is Rapunzel's hair?)
- Hand out venn-diagram sheets
- Individually or in groups or as a class list the references from other works
- Venn diagram section names:
 - Leftmost: things that happened in the original story (explain the meaning of this, things that only happened in the fairytale/rhyme/source and NOT in the Jolly Postman
 - Rightmost: things different from the original story
 - Middle: Things that both had in common
- Share results in a class discussion

Extension Ideas:

- Have students create their own variations on the nursery rhymes/fairy tales
- Alternatively use fairy tales/folk tales, or stories of any alternative culture (ex. traditional stories from cultures represented in the class) and have the class invent variations on them that add a new problem to the plot (like a tyre going flat).

Write Letters To Penpals:

- Draw the letter writing to real life (they may have never heard of postage, in this class, they might get birthday cards in the mail or dentist reminder, ask the class)
- Collaborate with another class to have names for the class to address the letters to.
- Offer context for the letter writing. Why is this important? Who will read these? What should we put in them? If they write back, what do we want to know?

- Spend a lot of time deciding how the letters will be written, this section can be used as an opportunity to teach standardized English and compare it to standard letter components throughout Canadian English writing in the 20th and 21st centuries.
- Emphasise how important letter writing was in history
- Connect to real life by contrasting letter writing to texting, tweeting, or other common modes of communication grade 4/5s might use.
- How is written language different in these forms of communication?
- Why is it important to understand the differences or similarities?

Possible Ideas:

- Include photographs in the letters
- Include a classwide letter to the principal(s) with a class photo
- Make a video for the school and send it online.