

Persevering Despite Obstacles

4th Grade

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Thematic Framework

Central Questions and Rationale

The central questions that will guide students in their thinking throughout this unit are:

1. What does it mean to persevere despite obstacles?
2. What qualities or traits does it take for a person to persevere despite obstacles?
3. How do we learn to persevere despite obstacles in our own lives?

As my students will learn to think and respond as early American colonists in their social studies Interact unit, they will discover the ways in which the colonists struggled and faced many hardships in their journey to the new world including a lack of adequate food and resources, harsh weather conditions, disease, and poor living conditions. As part of the social studies unit, they will also learn about how perseverance enabled the colonists to survive amidst many challenges. While the literature in this unit does not specifically address the hardships faced by early colonists, students will learn the bigger picture about perseverance as a human trait that enables people to persevere despite obstacles.

Throughout the literature they will read in this unit, students will hear varying stories of struggle, perseverance and personal success. My hope is to not only develop their skills and confidence as readers and writers, but to also develop students understanding of perseverance as a powerful human quality that can be used to conquer all struggles in life, big and small, and one in which they can connect to their own lives.

As my fourth graders are beginning to develop as abstract and independent thinkers, reading, writing and communicating about the many ways we can persevere in life despite obstacles will enable my students to grow as thinkers and learners and empower them to persevere through challenges in their own life.

In teaching this unit, it is important to recognize the moral and ethical considerations of this theme. That is, students may have different ideas on what constitutes struggle and hardship in their own life. For instance, I have one student whose mother committed suicide a couple years ago, and another student whose family is in the midst of a divorce. Recognizing and being sensitive to the various personal hardships and struggles that my students may be facing, from big to small ones is important in establishing a safe and supportive environment for students all to learn.

By having mini lessons that aim at developing various reading and writing strategies, as well as having students chose books to read in groups where they can think and analyze together, students will gain skills in becoming more confident and independent readers and writers.

In this unit, my central questions are aligned with the Reading EALRS and GLEs, the Communication EALRS and GLEs and the Writing EALRS. Reading GLE 2.4.1 (Applying the skills of drawing conclusions, providing a response and expressing insights to text) and Reading GLE 2.1.4 (Applying comprehension monitoring strategies before, during and after reading and using prior knowledge/schema) and Reading GLE 2.1.3 (Determining importance using theme, main ideas and supporting details) encourages students to think critically about the theme of perseverance, what qualities are exhibited in people who persevere and how they have persevered in their own life to overcome obstacles. As students gain an appreciation and love of literature through reading various texts, as well as learning to work together in groups to discuss texts, students will gain a deeper understanding of perseverance and be able to compare and contrast stories of perseverance together. This meets Reading EALR 4.2 (Develop interests and share reading experiences), Communication EALR 2 (Using comprehension skills and strategies to work effectively with others) and GLE 2.2.2 (Applies skills to contribute responsibly in a one-on-one or group setting). Students will also participate in a variety of writing activities throughout the unit in order to practice using a different medium of communication for exploring their thoughts and understanding of persevering despite obstacles. (Writing EARL 2.2 and 2.3, the student writes for different purposes and writes in a variety of different forms/genres).

Description of Learners

The fourth grade class I am preparing this unit for range in age from 9-10 years old. The class consists of fourteen girls and ten boys. The class is fairly homogenous and the students are, for the most part, highly capable learners. That being said, with any group of twenty-four students there are variations on ability. There are about seven students in the class that are part of a Spectrum, or gifted program. Otherwise, most students are above average learners with only a few that struggle, mainly from attention issues. I have only a couple of struggling readers in the class. Ethnically and culturally, the class is also fairly homogenous with nineteen white students, and only five minority students. Of the minority students, two are African-American, two are mixed Asian-American and African American and one part Native American. Socio-economically, almost all of my students come from middle class to upper-middle class backgrounds.

Students in my class are used to participating in learning activities that include whole class discussion, working in small groups, as well as reading and writing independently. Therefore, the learning activities and experiences they will participate in for this unit will be familiar and students can rely on prior experience to more easily access new material that they will learn. The learning activities in the unit also help to create an inclusive classroom where different learning styles are appreciated, including cooperative learning and various multiple intelligences such as linguistic (through a journal entry, for example), kinesthetic (active learning in literature circles), spatial (through an art response), and interpersonal (through literature circles). Finally, I have thought about multiculturalism in the texts that I have chosen, which include a range of biographies on minorities and women. Ultimately, the unit is designed so that all students can be successful.

Developmentally, the learning activities of this unit correspond to my students in a couple of ways. The cooperative learning approach is more suitable and effective for students at this age because students can look to their peers to trade ideas and for support, which they would not so easily get from all teacher led instruction. Additionally, since students at this age are concrete

operational thinkers, the learning activities enable students to actively participate and engage in examples through the texts that they read as a group.

Assessment

I will have a number of assessments for this unit including a pre-assessment, a formative assessment, a post assessment and a self-evaluation. For a pre-assessment, students will complete a writing piece on the first day of the unit that asks them to respond to the central questions: What does it mean to persevere despite obstacles, what qualities does it take for a person to persevere despite obstacles, and what does it mean to persevere despite obstacles in our own life? Giving students this writing assignment before we even begin discussing the themes, will allow me to gather some information on what students think generally about the topic. Their samples will help guide me in teaching the theme of perseverance and I will be able to clear up any misconceptions students have about the topic.

I will give them this same writing assignment at the end of the unit to see how students' ideas and thoughts about perseverance have changed and, hopefully, deepened throughout the course of the unit. Post data will also allow me to have some sound information on student learning and the impact of the unit on students. The data, then, will allow me to, if need be, adapt or alter any lessons or assignments for the next time I teach the unit. Ultimately, my goal is to make sure I have created and executed an effective unit where my students will come away with some memorable and worthwhile learning.

As a formative assessment, I will conduct a teacher evaluation that assesses the interpersonal skills of each member of a literature circle. I will do this by observing one literature circle group at a time, for one whole class period. This will allow to me assess and give students immediate feedback (orally after I evaluate) on how well they work together in a group dynamic. I will also assess and give feedback to each individual student on the thoughtfulness of their individual contributions to the group and how well they worked in the group. Since this unit is based on the cooperative learning (literature circles), it is crucial that each student is contributing individually and that the group is working together effectively. Note: For the purposes of this assignment, I have only included the individual student, teacher evaluation.

In addition to the post assessment writing activity where students discuss the central questions and theme of the unit (as described above), students will be asked to complete another final writing activity in which students pick two characters from the biographies they read to compare stories of struggle and perseverance. Students are asked to demonstrate an ability of making connections and making generalizations about perseverance by comparing at least two traits that both characters exhibited.

In addition to the assessments I have described above, students will also complete a journal entry and autobiography as two other forms of assessment. Here, students will write a journal entry from the perspective of a fictional or real character, talking about one of the people in the biographies they read. The autobiography assignment will ask students to write a story about a time in which they had to persevere to overcome a challenge, big or small.

Finally, the self evaluation will give students the opportunity to reflect on the ways in which they contributed in analyzing the text and the ways in which they worked together in literature circles.

I am confident that by the learning activities I have chosen for this unit, students will gain a deeper understanding of what it means to persevere despite obstacles. Students will do this by reading various biographies on people who persevered despite obstacles, by discussing themes and elements of the stories with their peers, and by participating in several writing activities. In doing so, students will also develop their reading comprehension and critical thinking skills as they analyze text for meaning.

Positive Impact on Student Learning

The pre and post writing activity, comparison writing activity, journal entry, autobiography, as well as the teacher evaluation and student self-evaluation all allow me to effectively assess my student learning goals. The assessments also specifically address my learning targets. My data, then, will enable me to see whether or not I have had a positive impact on student learning. If I do not get the data I am hoping for, I will need to make adjustments to the curriculum for the next time I teach it.