

Kenyon College

Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange

Borders in Play Reflections

Borders in Play

2017

Nate Novak Reflection 1

Nate Novak
Kenyon College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital.kenyon.edu/bordersinplayreflections>



Part of the [Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons](#), and the [Modern Languages Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Novak, Nate, "Nate Novak Reflection 1" (2017). *Borders in Play Reflections*. Paper 9.
<https://digital.kenyon.edu/bordersinplayreflections/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Borders in Play at Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Borders in Play Reflections by an authorized administrator of Digital Kenyon: Research, Scholarship, and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact noltj@kenyon.edu.

Nate Novak
Professor Román-Odio
Span 380: Cultural Productions of the Borderlands
12 October 2017

Reflection 1: Describe

For the past three Tuesdays, my classmates and I travelled to Columbia Elementary school in Mt. Vernon. Columbia, separated from the rest of town by the Kokosing River and railroad tracks, is located within an economically decaying industrial part of Mt. Vernon. This location acts as an indicator of the material situation of the children who attend it, generally coming from low-income families. When first arriving at Columbia, the exterior of the building appears to fit well in the declining area around it, however, upon entering, one finds a well-maintained building that offers a positive learning environment for the students, functioning as an educational escape from its blue-collar surroundings. The children are constantly surrounded by positive messages—something they may lack outside Columbia's doors. Particularly, in Mrs. Ferguson's room, there is a sign on the mirror that reminds the child looking into it that they are important, a critical message to someone at such a malleable age. Such positive messages are irreplaceable in fostering the children's growth into productive and responsible young adults.

Professor Román-Odio and Mrs. Ferguson were present and provided invaluable support to the children, assisting me throughout the whole process. Seeing the children being guided by a teacher such as Mrs. Ferguson gives me hope not only for the future of these children, but also for the educational system of the United States, as she is an exemplary public servant to the Mt Vernon area. Teaching at my side, Isabella Bird-Muñoz was an integral part of this project. She provides excellent insights into the work, making the experience profoundly more fulfilling for both the children and me. And, of course, our students were present: Jada, Grace, Aric, Case, Chase, and Brock. These are six wonderful children who surprise me every day with their

engagement with the material and their emotional self-awareness. While some participate more than others, everyone shows a clear academic and emotional connection to the stories and poems. Many of these children experience situations similar to the characters in the material due to difficult home lives and other emotional barriers. While not present in the classroom, Principle Dill made a point of approaching and thanking each of us when we arrived, making me feel welcomed and vital to the development of these students.

I read aloud and fostered discussion with the children along with Isabella. Through reading the stories ourselves, we clearly articulated the material and led discussions about the themes. Isabella and I also forged relationships with the children, learning something about them and about ourselves every day. The children did a wonderful job connecting with the material and sharing their own life experiences that relate to the stories, displaying a clear understanding of the material. What is most interesting is those who believe they struggle academically participate the most and are the most insightful of the students. Chase, in particular, shines through during the lessons, however he indicated on the cultural quilt that school is hard for him and suffers emotionally at home. It is rewarding to see him, who had admitted to being a victim of bullying before attending Columbia, connect so deeply with the characters who are mistreated, particularly Margot in “All Summer in a Day.” The girls of the group are the quietest, however they certainly engage with the material, as they make insightful comments when they do speak. I believe both understand the material very well, but may be crowded out by how much the boys talk. However, when they do raise their hand, they are chosen to speak first.

To conclude, while these children struggle in school and at home, it is inspiring to see them surrounded by wonderful adults who genuinely care about them, and Columbia Elementary is doing marvelous work to ensure these children learn in a positive environment.