Michelle Pfeiffer

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| Michelle Pfeiffer – Hmong Summary and Lesson Plan:  As I collected the data about the Hmong culture, I just kept stopping in amazement at the repeating theme of the ‘journey’. It seems this is a people who have been displaced, traveling, and facing hardship of one kind or another repeatedly over the past 5,000 years. The ‘Trail of Tears’ journey from China to Indochina was a difficult one to say the least. Wars, starvation, refugee status, and all of the challenges the Hmong have overcome and continue to overcome are incredible.  The adaptations the Hmong have had to embrace in language/dialect, way of life, clothing, and environment are numerous and show what a resilient and strong people they are.  Linguistic isolation was another key factor that I kept coming back to. I simply cannot imagine the Hmong families that have children that were born and raised in the United States, but who never speak English in their own homes. What disequilibrium this must create as the child goes from his/her home culture to his/her school culture each and every day. I cannot imagine experiencing this. It is my wish to foster understanding and empathy for students who succeed in biculturalism, finding success in both worlds, and figuring out how to thrive under both umbrellas. While linguistic isolation statistics are improving (from 60% of Hmong households in the 1990’s speaking little/no English down to approx 35% currently), language continues to pose a barrier to education and communication for Hmong Americans.  How does this information translate into the classroom? As I explored this question, I kept coming back to two ideas:**biculturalism** and the idea of **cultural disequilibrium**. As I read about the following, I was inspired to think about what it must be like when two worlds collide.  -the Hmong language and linguistic isolation,  -the value placed on education but the lack of resources to support that at home,  -the conflicting cultural messages between home and school cultures for Hmong students,  -the practice of corporal punishment,  -healing practices such as cupping or spooning,  -and the simple things Americans take for granted that might offend a Hmong person (i.e. handshake, complimenting children, eye contact, and so on)…  These ideas inspired me to address concepts of **biculturalism and cultural disequilibrium** in my lesson activity:  **Lesson Plan: Two Worlds Collide – 5th grade**  **Objectives:** Students will…   1. collect new understandings about Hmong culture through research. 2. consider what it means to be bi-cultural through class discussion. 3. experience disequilibrium by switching between two very different cultural paradigms while playing the ‘SWITCH’ game. 4. reflect on their experience and the connections to Hmong cultural dynamics through small group discussion and by writing a journal reflection on biculturalism**.**   **Vocabulary:  Hmong, bicultural, disequilibrium, cultural norms**  **Snappy Launch**: Read **Many Ideas Open the Way: A Collection of Hmong Proverbs:** “a remarkable blend of the new and the old and of cultures near and far, making us realize that no matter what our ages or where our homes are, we can all share a bit of wisdom from each other.” (Amazon.com).  **Procedure**:   1. Explain that today we will learn some things about Hmong culture and history. 2. Ask students to think about the things that make up their **culture**…at home and at school; make a list on the smartboard (language, family structure, expectations, rules, punishments, foods we eat, clothes we wear, customs / traditions, etc). 3. Explain that we will be playing a game called ‘SWITCH’ today. 4. First step: As a class, come up with two completely different ‘cultures’ that can be simulated in the classroom (refer to class-made list from #1). 5. Create 5 ‘cultural norms’ for each culture: list them clearly on the board. The ‘norms’ need to align… for example:   **Culture 1                                                   Culture 2**  speaks English              <>             can only communicate through written language  always wears shoes       <>             always removes shoes upon entering classroom  sits on the floor             <>             sits in chairs  never wears jewelry       <>             always wears a jewelry   1. Today as we are working on gathering information about the Hmong Culture, we are also going to play the game ‘SWITCH’. 2. Lay the ground rules for ‘SWITCH’ activity: when you hear the word ‘SWITCH’, you will quickly and quietly change from one ‘culture’ to the other. I want you to do this as seamlessly as possible. You should not take away from your research time. Part of the challenge is to make the transition smoothly, and without disruption. You will adjust your seating, shoe situation, language, etc according to your cultural ‘norms’. If you forget, there is a clear list on the smartboard. 3. Break into research groups and begin collecting information on Hmong culture. 4. Conduct SWITCH activity as students are working in research groups. 5. Informal presentations: each research group presents their findings… // discuss. 6. Now that you know a little bit about the Hmong culture, I want you to think about WHY we played this game today. Did this activity remind you of anything from Hmong culture? What does it mean to be bicultural? To experience cultural disequilibrium? 7. **Analysis**: Have students complete a written analysis individually and *then* discuss in a small group: What did this experience feel like? What would it be like to truly be bicultural? How could you be true to yourself, be respectful to your family, and ‘fit into’ your school culture also? Is it possible to do all three? Yes/No: Ask students for explanation / rationale behind their analysis. 8. **Synthesis**: Students consider the following questions in their journals: 9. Being bicultural means… 10. One example of a cultural tradition is… 11. Something expected in my school’s culture is… 12. One thing my family does at home is… 13. When I had to SWITCH ‘cultures’, I felt… 14. Something I noticed about myself when I switched cultures… 15. One thing that was difficult… 16. One thing I noticed others doing… 17. Something I appreciate about Hmong culture: 18. Collect written journal entries 19. Bring group together for discussion / wrap-up: *Today we did a little experiment to try to experience****cultural disequilibrium****. I hope you were able to better understand what it must feel like when students experience one culture at home and then come to school and experience something quite different. Can you describe what it felt like in one word? (have a few students share)…I’d like you to remember this the idea of ‘SWITCH’ the next time you talk to a student who is bicultural. It is an amazing thing to honor not one culture, but TWO!*   **Assessment**:  25 points – Participation in class & small group discussions  25 points – **Analysis**: **4**-Thorough, thought-out written responses with thoughtful rationale;  **3**- Simple written response with rationale;  **2**-Answered questions briefly, little rationale; **1**-One word answers / little effort on written responses, no rationale provided.  25 points - **Synthesis**: **4**-all questions answered with careful thought & consideration; **3**-most questions answered pretty well; **2**-some questions answered; **1**-student did not take his/her time on this & will have to complete another time.  25 points – full & thoughtful participation in ‘SWITCH’ activity.    **Resources:**  [Many Ideas Open the Way: A Collection of Hmong Proverbs](http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=Many%20Ideas%20Open%20the%20Way%3A%20A%20Collection%20of%20Hmong%20Proverbs)by Randy Snook  "[Caught Between Cultures: Hmong Parents in America's Sibling Society](http://hmongstudies.com/TamaraKaiserHSJ5.pdf)" by Tamara L. Kaiser, Ph.D. | |