

Speculative Fiction: Using an Ethnic and Cultural Lens for Story Telling
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Prospectus
Problem Statement

The greatest impact an educator can have is to show her students how to love content material or subjects. Fifth graders usually enter fifth grade despising something. I usually find out early in the year what that something is. Sometimes you will hear how much they," hate Math or Physical Education and Science." During the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year at least ten out of twenty-seven students verbally expressed their disdain for Reading. Actually they said," Ms. I hate Reading!" So I began my year looking at thirty-seven percent of my class hating reading.

Carefully looking at this issue I had to consider several factors. These factors would help me select independent novels to entice the love of Reading for fifth graders. The mean age in my classroom was eleven and a half. Other factors included the availability of books at home and a library located within close proximity to our school. Luckily the Port Richmond Library was within three blocks walking distance. My boy-girl ratio was fourteen girls to thirteen boys. So finding material that piques interest in both boys and girls at this age might present an interesting challenge. (Delaney, 2009)

As I was trying to wrap my head around making sure my students loved every minute of the ELA block in increments of 120 minutes required by the School District of Philadelphia. So I decided to respond to my student's overwhelming hate for Reading. I started by looking at specific genres. I noticed that in the curriculum there were plenty of mysteries, realistic fiction, adventures, and moving stories like, *The Great Migration* by Jacob Lawrence. The cover of the book which includes many fantastic paintings is one of the anchor novels from the Ready-Gen curriculum for fifth grade. It's actually one in a set of twelve. Each student is given the entire 12 novel pack at the start of the school year. In all honesty I only like eight of the twelve novels.

The twelve novels are divided into four units. Each unit is divided into two modules. Each module contains a fiction and a nonfiction selection. Students are asked to analyze literary selections including poetry, biographies, and news articles. Each novel is used as Shared Reading. The shared Reading is about twenty to twenty-five minutes of the ELA block.

My unit would start with the reading of *Riot Baby* written by Tochi Onyebuchi. The book follows Ella who has the ability to see things that haven't happened yet. She begins to struggle with her abilities once Kev, her older brother is incarcerated. The story is set in Los Angeles.

I selected this particular novel because I could read it to my students as an interactive read aloud. Students would then engage in conversations about the characters and the text.

The genre itself adds to our classroom library. Many of the independent books are classic Science Fiction, Mysteries and Biographies.

Out of the twelve novels only two are actually science fiction. There are at least three that cover Science topics. At this point once I previewed the novels then I asked myself,

“Is this material going to sustain or encourage all of my students to have a love of reading for the entire school year?”
cover Science Fiction but not speculative fiction. The collection didn't contain any graphic novels of any kind.

So I began researching speculative black fiction for African American youth that mirrored the same theme as some of the anchor novels. One problem arose when I began searching for text that revealed imagination and curiosity. So I enlisted the help of a few students and asked them to read at least three chapters of a book listed on the web site, Goodreads and Google Books. Google books often will allow you to sample chapters free without an account. (Kinkaid 2005)

Five students agreed to read, “*Kayah Abaniah and the Father of the Forest*.” The students were most interested in the main character's ability to be a telepath. Kayah confronts love, rivalry, and academic life as he wards off creatures from Trinidad and Tobago's folklore. The students reported that the novel held their attention and provided a look into a culture they knew nothing about.

One of the goals of this unit is to explore speculative black fiction and its appeal to both boys and girls as they navigate life and face many challenges and struggles. It is the hope of this unit that students connect with global themes and create their own stories. Students will create their own stories from interviewing family members and learning about the

ability to share specific family traits and characteristics. Basically they'll be telling their own origin stories and making them fantastic. (Gunn,James 2005)

The name speculative black fiction is not labeled African or African - American because it is inclusive of all people of the diaspora and the places and their culture.

Many of my students share a variety of cultures and ethnic backgrounds allowing storytelling from a unique perspective. They sometimes feel the need to value one over the other. In this unit through storytelling students will learn to value heritage and the culture and heritage as part of their recognition. This unit will introduce students to speculative fiction and the powers of storytelling which allows them to expand their imaginations as they explore their culture and heritage. It's a great way to

help students create magic through their storytelling. In this unit there will be time to explore several authors that represent the best in speculative fiction for fifth graders in a

K-5 setting. As I browse through the many titles and choices I find it disheartening that many of the novels appear inappropriate for use in a K-5 setting. (Rabkin 1976)

Many texts contain many images of guns or weapons and women dressed in tight materials that definitely were inappropriate for my fifth graders in a K-5TH grade setting.

The mean age in my classroom is eleven and a half with a few outliers that are twelve or thirteen. So I am tasked to find appropriate material or encourage my students to enhance their storytelling and create appropriate material for their age but still allows them to imagine.

Throughout the unit students will have many opportunities to explore their culture, find common links to diverse stories, enrich their knowledge about the world around them. Finally students will have time to highlight unique traits to focus on their superpower and everything that makes them special.

Objectives / Goals :

This unit will attempt to invite students to create an origin story through a storytelling lens.

The goals for this unit centers upon many factors. I've decided to concentrate on four goals:

- Select appropriate speculative fiction as anchor text for fifth graders in a K-5 setting.

- Encourage students to interview elders to acquire stories about their culture.
- Develop origin stories that tell about a specific event or person in each student's life.
- Design a speculative fiction story using the 100 Book Challenge Research model.
- Encourage students to complete their FPO's before they start writing their books.

Background:

Present the following information for students. Review the elements of fiction writing and introduce the elements of Speculative Black fiction.

Generate a Smart Board Venn diagram to make sure students can visualize The elements that are similar and different.

Characteristics of Black Speculative Fiction

Elements of fiction writing	dialogue	Speculative Black fiction writing	Fantasy Science fiction horror	Hybrids: Dystopia Weird fiction Ghost stories
Characters	Narrator : first or third person Omniscient or limited	characters	Characters from the black diaspora	Set in present time or the very near future
Plot , point of view	Setting, style , theme		A technology or concept is introduced	technology

Kru : A Speculative Story of how Mrs. Savage Came to Be

setting	Liberia	South Carolina	1878	2033
characters	Kru	President Wiliam Tolbert	The Tolbert clan of South Carolina	The Tolbert clan of Liberia

plot/ events	Kru travels to Liberia from South Carolina	Her telepathic travel propels her 155 years in the future.	She tries to understand her powers .	Courage and heroism Prejudice War
Global themes	love/ hate survival	Good vs. evil	Coming of age	Power and corruption

Focus Standards:

CC.1.1.5.E

- Read with accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
- Read on-level text with purpose and understanding.
- Read on-level text orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings.
- Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding,

rereading as necessary.

Content Standards

Focus: CC.1.4.5.N

Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters.

Comprehension and Collaboration:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 5 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1.A

Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.2

Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.3

Content: CC1.4.5.

Use narrative techniques such as dialogue, description, and pacing, to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations; use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.

RL.5.1. Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

RL.5.2. Determine a theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in the text, including how characters in a story or drama respond to challenges or how the speaker in a poem reflects upon a topic; summarize the text.

Teaching Strategies:

Read the interactive read-aloud entitled, Head, Body, Legs A Story from Liberia.

Introduce students to retelling techniques:

- Setting
- Characters
- Problem

- Happenings - events
- Solution

Suggestion: Design a five-finger retelling hand for each student. Students can use the hand to help retell any story when they engage in small group work or in the whole class.

In small groups of four have students retell the story to each other. Set an egg timer for two minutes.

Circulate and make sure students are taking turns to Encourage non-verbal students to draw their retellings by utilizing the tools on sketch pad.

Students can create their own retelling by using a story-board.

They can use shetchpad.com or tynker-cad .Both of these online gems are free for student use.

Story telling

Story telling includes telling of how things came to be. In many cultures pourquoi tales do just that. Some pourquoi tales focus on why an animal came to have a particular part. In the pourquoi tale called, Why the Elephant 's Trunk is So Long. Specific tales are country or continent of origin.

In telling the story of Liberia it is important to tell my students the significance of the country.

The colony of Liberia was actually started by the American Colonization Society (ASC) in 1820 which repatriated freed slaves from the United States to Liberia. As a middle schooler I heard this story from my father's side of the family reunions in Georgia, my dad's birthplace and in Florida where both my parents met.

At one particular reunion I was told by my grandmother that my father's great uncle was William Richard Tolbert, Jr. President Tolbert was the 20th president of Liberia from 1971 to 1980.

Language Focus :

Liberia	Civil war	clan	technology
repariated	colony	telepathy	technologies
shores	colonized	telepathic	advances
Americo-Liberia,	colonization	futuristic	retraining

Including this type of information can enrich a student's perspective as their origin storytelling evolves. Researched information allows each student a chance to tell their story from an authentic view.

Inviting students to tell their origin stories requires communicating with their elders. Some students lack the connection to a grandparent or great grandparent. It is important to establish a rapport with the families to extend an invitation to a great aunt /uncle or family member.

Also once the family interviews are completed it is important to celebrate countries and continents of origin in the classroom. These were some of the representations in my 2019-2020 classroom this year:

Africa - Liberia , Morocco , Nigeria

Asia - Russia

Europe - England ,Germany , Italy , Poland, Russia

North America - Blackfoot Indian , Shawnee , Sioux ,

South America - Brazil, Chile, El Salvador , Mexico, Peru , Yucatan

Here just a few suggestive questions :

Can you tell me about a person who has been kindest to you in your life?

Can you tell me about one of your happiest memories?

Can you tell me about one of your most difficult memories?

Can you tell me about someone you'll always remember?

Can you tell me about someone who has had a big influence on your life? What lessons did that person teach you?

What do you feel most grateful for in your life?

What are some of the most important lessons you've learned in life?

What is your favorite memory of me?

What are you proudest of in your life?

Can you remember a time in your life when you felt most alone?

If you could hold on to one memory from your life forever, which would it be?

How has your life been different than what you'd imagined?

If this was to be our very last conversation, is there anything you'd want to say to me?

For future generations of your family listening to this years from now: is there any wisdom you'd want to pass on to them? What would you want them to know?

Is there anything that you've never told me but want to tell me now?

Are there things about me that you've always wanted to know but have never asked?

Turn the tables: tell the person you're interviewing what they've meant to you.

Is there anything that you've always wanted to tell me but haven't?

Can you tell me where and when you were born?

Who were your favorite relatives?

Do you remember any of the stories they used to tell you?

How did you and grandma/grandpa meet?

What was my mom/dad like growing up?

Do you remember any songs that you used to sing to her/him? Can you sing them now?

What were your parents like?

What were your grandparents like?

How would you like to be remembered?

Was there a teacher or teachers who had a particularly strong influence on your life? What did you learn about teaching from them?

Looking back, what advice would you give to yourself in your first year of teaching?

This information was obtained in late October 2019. My class had a chat and chew with their elders. They collected the information as part of a homework assignment.

So modeling for students is key. Using my own personal story can help set the stage for this unit;

Writing the story: Students will use the information gathered from their personal interviews to create their characters and setting. They can use the family names once guardians grant permission to do so.

In my case I used my great great uncle's cousin's name , Kru.

Story starter:

As she marched at gunpoint she remembered the bloody images of the most hideous civil war in Liberia. She remembered elders recanting the many lives lost , over 200,000 thousand and how their bodies slowly dissipated and returned to the earth. She was unsure of her fate now. It was more than twenty-four years past the civil war. It took eight years for the fighting to stop.

Nothing felt real. As she stood in the country of Liberia she wondered how she got there. She was the granddaughter of a former American slave from South Carolina who emigrated to Liberia in 1878. She was part of the Tolbert clan. The Tolbert clan

was one of the largest Americo - Liberian families in Liberia. Her name was Kru . Kru means beautiful girl.

Kru felt the need to ask questions but nothing came out. She had always been vocally silent. Kru only communicated with her

grandmother. They communicated through their eyes. Looking at a digital periodical on the news stand she was puzzled by the date.

According to today's date it was 2033. Somehow she was 155 years in the future .

Keep students focused . Their literary pieces need to contain some aspects of the following : fantasy , magical realism, historical fiction , and Afrocentricity.

Components:

Brainstorming magic like characteristics for speculative or visionary characters:

- Nature of existence
- Examines the power of the mind over matter
- Students will select rich characters from their own culture

Focus Task Card

<i>Genre or name of book</i>	<i>Elements</i>	<i>Characters</i>	<i>Gender specific</i>	<i>plot</i>
<i>The Fifth</i>	<i>Characters</i>	<i>Essaun</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Characters</i>

<i>Season by NK Jemisin</i>	<i>are tied to the earth that allow them to shape and manipulate</i>	<i>Lerna Rask Syenite Damaya</i>	<i>non specific and gender identified</i>	<i>use their powers to stop cruelty to the earth. Damaya is an Orogene. She has the ability to stop quakes and volcanoes.</i>
<i>Summary:</i>	<i>This book</i>	<i>Is one of</i>	<i>Trilogy called</i>	<i>, The Broken Earth Trilogy</i>

100 Book Challenge Research Model by the American Reading Company.

Explanation:

What is the 100 BOOK Challenge Research Lab ?

100 BOOK Challenge Research Lab is an independent reading program designed to maximize the effectiveness of a school's reading curriculum. ... The program's high standards require a minimum of 30 minutes of independent reading a day in school and an additional 30 minutes of reading at home.

The books inside the basket range from second to seventh grade One such book used as an interactive read aloud is entitled , “The Undefeated” by Kwame Alexander and illustrated by Kadir Nelson.

There are several components of the 100 book challenge research lab.

- *Classroom libraries*
- *Reading Assessments : IRLA , K-12 Assessment of Reading Behaviors*
- *Reading Logs*
- *Vocabulary cards for specific content areas*
- *FPO Final Project Organizer Folder*

Classroom libraries consist of 100 content books for student research use. Several books are set aside for intentional read alouds.

Basket : African History

From the first Africans to step foot on the North American continent to the fight for emancipation, this collection covers the major topics of African American history through Reconstruction. Topics covered include the Middle Passage, the experiences of free African Americans, the history of slavery, Abolition, the Civil War, and Reconstruction.

prior to 1880.



This chart shows the reading levels for this research lab. The really cool thing is that you receive fifty titles as e - books and fifty books for the leveled baskets.

The research basket provides a historical account using literature and informational text. The leveled baskets range from one Yellow to Silver. Basically kindergarten to 9th grade. It covers a large reading range,

The student research lab contains the following:

- The front of each card has content standards-based questions to guide individual and collective learning
- The back of each card has academic vocabulary essential to the study of this subject

After determining all reading levels for your students now you can model note-taking skills.

Children can use a graphic organizer to record key events that they research.

As you read the interactive text stop and point out an event and record it on the smartboard.

The opening of the book , The Undefeated shows Jessie Owens performing the long jump.

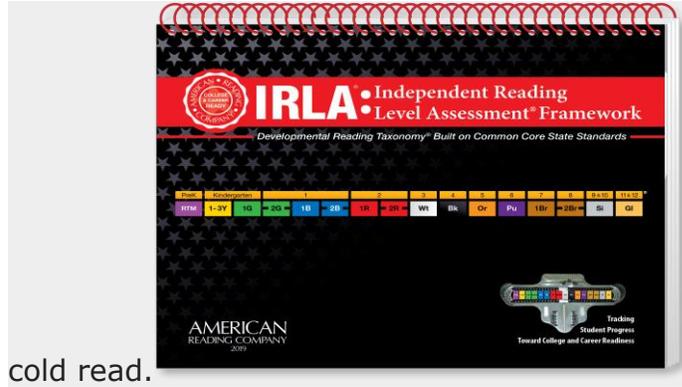
On a segmented timeline mark the year 1936. Write a small blurb underneath the date to make sure students see what information they need to put down to help them remember the information. Make sure they label the name and page number.

Keep this example on the smartboard until the entire book is read.

The next step is to encourage students to shop for their own book(s) . Introduce them to the T-Chart with three drawn keys on it. Encourage students to read for at least fifteen minutes .

During the second reading guide students through the note-taking phase.

or down depending upon the child's mastery of that particular



could read.

Modeling research protocol

Bibliography

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4. Kincaid, Paul. "On the Origins of Genre." In *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction*. Edited by James Gunn and Matthew Candelaria, 41–53. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2005.

5. Rabkin, Eric S. *The Fantastic in Literature*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976.

6. Murdoch, JIm Inside Stories: Mystical Dragons , December 14, 2014 Blg , Metaphysics ,Pursuit Writing

Resources for Parents and Teachers:

1. Agape Senior Center

Call (215) 667-1531 or visit 229 N. 63rd Street, Philadelphia, PA 19139

1. Head, Body, Legs: A Story from Liberia

by Won-Ldy Paye, Margaret H. Lippert, Julie Paschkis (Illustrator)

2. The American Reading Company

Address

201 S. Gulph Rd.

King of Prussia, PA 19406 [Map & Directions](#)

3. Bookrags.com

4. <https://www.goodreads.com/>

5. <https://www.sketchpad.com>

