

# Has the Dream Been Fulfilled?

## Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. & President Barack Hussein Obama

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### Introduction

*Dreaming*: everyone does it, but some have dared to dream world changing, life altering dreams and many have had the opportunity to watch them come true. Our forefathers fought so the American Dream could live on so that future generations could bear witness. They fought so that dreams could have a place to take root in America and Americans could dare to follow their dreams no matter how big or small and in doing so, dreamers will forever change and propel our country upward and forward...

One such dreamer was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He dreamt a dream so magnificent it became famous, and people across the nation and around the world took notice. Equality for all was his dream, and he knowingly laid the foundation for and inspired the first African-American President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, who too had the dream of “Change” for America. Not only did President Obama dream of “Change” for America, he successfully followed his dream into public service. In doing so he set a prime example of how, even today, dreams can come true, sometimes even twice, as in re-election as President.

These men exhibit how working together can make dreams become reality, and, for the past few years, educators across America are doing just that, working together toward a common curriculum

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goal—one that helps subjects such as social studies and language arts intertwine to provide students with a greater knowledge base to better equip themselves to follow their own dreams. This focus on personal dreams is definitely a way to address meaningful and powerful social studies lessons that include culturally responsive teaching and the common core curriculum concurrently.

### Theoretical Framework

#### **Powerful and Meaningful Social Studies**

What does it mean to have a meaningful and powerful social studies lesson? In the *Curriculum Standards for the Social Studies*, the National Council for Social Studies (1994b) outlines five principles for teaching and learning. These “five main principles tell us that social studies teaching and learning are powerful when they are (a) meaningful, (b) integrative, (c) value based (d) challenging, and (e) active” (Sunal & Haas, 2011, p. 53).

Meaningful social studies lessons activate students’ prior knowledge, which allows them to make meaningful connections between themselves and what they are learning. In order for this to take place, teachers must develop well-planned lessons for students that integrate across the curriculum (Sunal & Haas, 2011).

Integrative lessons not only integrate across the curriculum, but also weave the social studies content throughout the school day. An integrative social studies lesson follows a logical sequence, engages students in in-depth learning, and moves them forward in the content knowledge and skills. For example, students are taught civic ideas through their daily activities and routines, which naturally lead to addressing value-based social studies lessons. In addition, value-based social studies teaching and learning engages students in critical thinking and decision making about controversial topics.

#### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

According to Sunal and Haas (2011),

... every student brings to the classroom unique personal experiences, different perspectives on the world, and different ideas about how to act in social situations. The diversity found in every classroom is huge, even when that classroom is in a tiny rural community or takes place in a close-knit ethnic community in a large city. Such diversity serves as a deep and broad resource for meaningful social studies experiences. When teachers build on diversity found among their students, social studies is personal, relevant, and important. (p. 9)

Sunal and Haas’ description of using students’ diversity to create meaningful, personal and relevant social studies experiences, clearly connects to Gay’s (2002) definition of culturally responsive teaching. According to Gay (2002), culturally responsive teaching involves

... using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students to make learning more appropriate and effective for them; it teaches through and to the strengths of these students. (p. 619)

Through this approach teachers must have more than a simple awareness of different groups. They must understand the cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups. By creating meaningful and powerful social studies lessons, teachers naturally address diversity and culturally responsive teaching. Finally, not only do meaningful and powerful social studies lessons naturally address culturally responsive teaching, these lessons are a natural fit when addressing English/language arts common core standards.

#### **Common Core State Standards**

By integrating social studies topics/themes teachers can examine the Common Core State Standards for English/

Language Arts. Students are required to perform many skills that naturally address diversity through the use of diverse literature and informational texts. Of particular interest are the following standards for fourth grade:

CCSS.4.RI.3. Explain event, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

CCSS.4.L.9. Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) patterns of events (e.g., the quest in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures).

CCSS.4.L.6. Compare and contrast the point-of-view from which different stories are narrated, including the difference between first-and third-person narrations.

CCSS.4.W.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Students are able to understand and employ a variety of skills when examining these standards. They can use key ideas and details to integrate the knowledge and ideas, and then undertake research to build and present knowledge. Through an in-depth study involving integration of a social studies theme/topic and utilizing informational texts and diverse literature stories students can come to deeply understand connections between social studies content and reading and language arts skills and strategies.

The dream investigation includes all of the following themes: (1) powerful and meaningful social studies lessons, (2) culturally responsive teaching, and (3) Common Core State Standards. The integration across the disciplines allows students to understand that learning is an all-encompassing experience taking place every moment of the school day. Additionally, it explores concepts that respect individuals' rights and dignity.

When students are engaged in value-based decision-making, they are also challenged. This type of investigation not only incorporates the elements that make social studies lessons purposeful and powerful, but also allows teachers to naturally integrate culturally responsive teaching while addressing Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts.

### Methodology

In order to determine the impact of

personal dreams in general as well as to determine if Dr. King's dream has been fulfilled by President Obama's election and re-election, fourth grade teachers create carefully selected active learning experiences. Teachers engage students in as many dream activities as possible that spread throughout the school day to reflect the theme. Teachers implement the learning cycle strategy in order to guide the dream investigation.

The learning cycle strategy (Sunal, McCormick, Sunal, & Shweny, 2005; Sunal & Sunal, 1999) is a research-based teaching strategy. Learning cycle "is effective in planning social studies lessons that promote conceptual change and increase students' powerful and meaningful learning" (Sunal, McCormick, Sunal, & Shweny, 2005; Sunal & Sunal, 1999).

In small groups, teachers discuss the dream learning sequence which consist of the three phases: (a) exploratory introduction, (b) lesson development and, (c) expansion (Sunal, McCormick, Sunal, & Shweny, 2005; Sunal & Sunal, 1999). The key elements stated by (Sunal & Haas, 2011, p. 33) incorporate the constructivist learning theory and include that *all students*:

- Become aware of their prior knowledge
- Confront their prior knowledge as they encounter a new social studies idea
- Resolve their conformation by constructing their "new" social studies idea
- Connect the new social studies ideas to what they already know
- Apply and transfer the new social studies idea in novel situations (Appleton & Asoko, 1996; Atherton, 2005)

While planning the exploratory introduction, teachers develop lessons to challenge the fourth graders in a variety of ways and to help them examine prior knowledge by presenting the information in unique ways using various materials and artifacts. During lesson development, teachers determine when the lesson was teacher-directed, student led, or when students became facilitators of learning.

In addition, teachers decide when and how to challenge students. The lessons are hands-on and minds-on rather than just busy work for the students. During the expansion phase, teachers want students to form a deep knowledge and understanding of the topic and apply and transfer their new knowledge to novel situations.

### Dream Exploratory Introduction

Sharing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech and introducing pictures of Dr. King open the idea of dreams. After the speech, students think more about "What Dr. King Meant" by reading the "I Have a Dream" speech in groups by taking turns sharing their thoughts and feelings about equality. Quotations from the speech are placed on posters. In small groups, students use context and critical thinking to fully determine the meaning behind Dr. King's famous words.

Views from the Lincoln Memorial toward the Washington Monument on August 28, 1963, are displayed on the Smartboard and other clips are shown to place students' back-in-time through use of media presented in black and white. Students think about quotes from the speech and about the struggles for equality and justice for America. Students think about King's famous words such as:

In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our Republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.

These quotes provide many conversations that enhance the discussions about this era. Teachers also express how President Obama uses many of King's quotes in his speeches today. The students are "hooked" and want more information about the intriguing man in our American history and how he connects to all us today.

### Dream Lesson Development

President Obama's "Forward" speech from the presidential election of 2008 and video of television coverage from 2012 are presented to the students. Discussions with the students involve how everyone is commitment to the promise of positive change and active citizenship. Teachers engage students in a brainstorming activity in small groups where three different webs are created.

First, students web everything they know about Dr. King and follow with a second web that illustrates everything they know about President Obama. Lastly, they web everything they know about "dreams." Afterwards in a large group, the teachers complete three whole group webs on each topic by combining the information from the small group information into large merged webs.

To build factual knowledge about both men, teachers plan a variety of learning activities to help them understand more about the lives and ideas of King and Obama. Many books overflow the classroom library where students read biographies, newspaper clippings, and view pictures about both men (see Appendix).

Students leave post-it notes on pictures and facts to share during morning meeting times. Students decide to create a timeline entitled "Perfect Timing." Important dates and events of both men are placed on a large timeline and students hang them around the room making a timeline that spreads from the 1960s through the 2000s. The dates help the students visually see how each one of these men continuously strive throughout their lives.

### **Dream Expansion**

After learning about these two men a comparative analysis between King and Obama is constructed on a large display board. The large board is divided into halves. Students find information regarding each man and sections are made to include hobbies, children, education, wives, etc. They include magazine pictures to include around the display board. Information is included on index cards to hang in the appropriate half.

Next, students are so intrigued that in small groups they research information about other prominent figures in our history. They are introduced to Shirley Chisholm, Sojourner Truth, and Willie Lawrence, among others, and compile facts to create PowerPoints as well as compare-and-contrast diagrams for classmates. Some students dress up as these prominent figures and present information from the person's point of view using the "I" voice. These presentations are very powerful and the students are engaged in meaningful discourse by discovering that many Americans have struggled in the past, but they never lost sight of dreams and aspirations for the future.

In addition, students write cooperative biographies on each person using a writing process. Teachers create writing rubrics and checklists with specific criteria to guide them through the writing process. After presentations students peer evaluate each other and engage in self-evaluation. As a culminating activity students develop interview questions and interview someone about dreams that might have come true for them or how it made them feel.

Using this personal information students are able to analyze and reflect

through writing short stories, poems, or rap songs stating if they believed that Dr. King's dream has been fulfilled with the election of President Obama.

### **Conclusions**

When discussing the Dream Unit lesson activities with the 29 teachers who participated in the study at the conclusion of the study, interesting observations were shared. Most of the teachers agreed that social studies content is often dull and boring when using only the social studies textbook information during class investigations.

The teachers realized that reading/language arts dominated the curriculum. Additionally, they realized that by combining social studies content with skills/strategies from all subject areas, their students are better able to make connections between information sources as well as the different content areas. Students can see how events and people have shaped our world and they see how they could make a positive difference in society. What students learn in social studies becomes useful to their everyday lives and they realize that they have potential in and out of school.

The same teachers who participated in the follow-up discussion at the end of the unit were also asked the following three open-ended questions after the dream investigation:

#### **1. How do you feel about unit plans such as the "Dream Lesson"?**

Twenty of the teachers responded that the units are needed so that social studies curriculum is included as well as stating that the plan engages students in expressing themselves through writing, projects, and class discussions.

#### **2. How does this investigation integrate language arts and social studies?**

All of teachers noted that students are involved in reading and writing throughout the unit as well as being able to make text-to-self, world, and text connections through this unit, which adds meaning to what is being learned.

#### **3. Would more investigations like this one change your view of social studies instruction through using the learning cycle?**

All of the teachers noted that their delivery of instruction for social studies changed as well as state

that integrated units improved their students' classroom test scores in reading, science, and math.

### **Recommendations**

The researchers of this study analyze and synthesize this experience and make the following recommendations:

1. This type of study should be conducted with a larger group;
2. Further research should include the collection of actual student grades to enhance the study; and
3. Survey teachers involved in further research to collect their views about Social Studies instruction and how to make a connection to Reading/Language Arts.

Implementing these recommendations will enhance the study in order to find multiple ways to examine if the dreams of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and President Barack Obama have been fulfilled.

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## Appendix

### Lesson Plan:

#### *Has The Dream Been Fulfilled: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. & President Barack Hussein Obama*

**BRAINSTORMING ACTIVITIES:** Students web everything that they know about Dr. King, President Obama, and dreams (these should be 3 different webs). They will complete the webbing activities in small groups first, then the teacher will complete whole group webs on the board/overhead as small groups share their ideas. Have pictures of each person to begin this activity.

**ASSESSMENT SUGGESTION:** Check each group's web for accuracy of information and record as a daily grade.

Teacher provides background knowledge about Dr. King, President Obama and dreams through a variety of materials and resources such as: books, poems, DVDs, magazine articles, and websites.

The teacher will engage students in a shared reading and writing activities as they read books about Dr. King, President Obama, and dreams. They will engage students in prediction activities by developing a DRTA sheet for students to complete as books are read. TSW also identify unfamiliar vocabulary and record it on their personal word walls (will provide this form for teachers).

**ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS:** (1) Mark participation points for choral, echo, partner reading activities; (2) Check DRTA for accuracy of information and record as a daily grade; (3) Have students complete a four-square map on unknown vocabulary word(s) with a group and check maps.

The teacher will construct a note sheet using post-it notes that students will complete as they view videos about President Obama and Dr. King (*Our Friend Martin* DVD). The teacher will also engage students in discussion throughout the viewing of videos by stopping at different points during the video.

**ASSESSMENT SUGGESTION:** Check note sheets and record as participation grade for viewing the movies.

After completion of introductory activities, The teacher will have students complete a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting President Obama and Dr. King.

**ASSESSMENT SUGGESTION:** Check Venn Diagram for accuracy and record as a daily grade.

The teacher will engage students in the writing process by having them complete cooperative biographies on each person in small groups (will provide format for this activity and sample biographies).

**ASSESSMENT SUGGESTION:** Create a rubric or checklist with specific criteria that you would like to see in each group's final product (cooperative biography). Check each stage of writing process as groups complete them and record as daily grade or participation points. Have students peer evaluate each other.

The students will use the writing process to write about their own dreams that they want fulfilled one day or that have already been fulfilled.

**ASSESSMENT SUGGESTION:** Create a checklist with specific criteria that you would like each student to include in their dream papers. Check each stage of the writing process. Engage students in self-evaluation.

The students will develop interview questions and interview someone that they know about a dream that came true for them and how it made them feel. (Check questions for accuracy as well as check completed interview summary.)

The students will debate in teams (for/against) whether Dr. King's dream has been fulfilled with the election of President Obama.

**ASSESSMENT SUGGESTION:** Observation. Could give them extra credit points for this activity.

The students will write a creative short story, poem, rap etc. (use the writing process) stating if they believe Dr. King's dream has been fulfilled with the election of President Obama and why.

**ASSESSMENT SUGGESTION:** Rubric or checklist; Engage students in self-evaluation.

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**Lesson Plan:**  
***Has The Dream Been Fulfilled: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. & President Barack Hussein Obama***

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The students will create a poster which illustrates their view and present to class.

**ASSESSMENT SUGGESTION:** Rubric or checklist; would also use peer evaluation for this activity.

The teacher will hold mock elections for class officers to simulate voting and to introduce students to the voting process and elections. This can also involve an associated lesson.

**CULMINATING ACTIVITY:** The students will share their cooperative biographies with Pre-K and 1st grade classrooms.

Suggested materials and resources for teachers to use in this lesson:

Songs

Poems

Trade books

Magazine articles

Picture books