

Teens in Crisis: ELA 9 Inquiry

Saskatchewan School Library Association

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As educators, we all believe that it is important for our students to acquire the abilities and competencies that aid them in “learning how to learn”. With the future demands for our students to be able to find solutions to problems, we are tasked with challenging and supporting our students in acquiring the essential skills and knowledge needed. Common to all renewed Saskatchewan curricula, Inquiry is viewed as a stance that “leads to deeper understanding of the world and human experience” (*Saskatchewan English Language Arts Curriculum 2009*). As a teacher librarian, I saw this as an opportunity to work with my fellow educators as they strove to adopt an inquiry-based mode of teaching and learning. I recognized it requires the collaborative skill of teacher librarians and teachers as each could provide unique expertise as needed.

With the goal of supporting teachers and creating an authentic example for others as to how inquiry could look in the classroom, I sought out opportunities to work with some of my fellow teachers. Working with a team of two ELA 9 teachers (1 rookie and 1 veteran), we embarked on a journey that brought us to a place that we would have never imagined. We agreed that the ELA 9 curricular theme of **Surviving and Conquering** (Building a Better Planet) would hold a lot of possibilities for student engagement and a basis for our inquiry. Reading the testimony of Ishmeal Beah, in his book “**A Long Way Gone**”, students were exposed to the story of a teen who endured some of the worst that the world can offer. Students were challenged to ask and make meaning of some of the most difficult questions about the ability of the soul to survive and conquer when met with the worst of human nature.

Early on, it was decided that we needed a place to archive our process so that others could learn from our experience. To help understand more of our process, please visit our site at <http://teensincrisisela9.wix.com/teens-in-crisis#>!

The Site provides all of our digital and print resources to serve as possible supports for a team of teacher librarians and teachers who want to replicate our template.

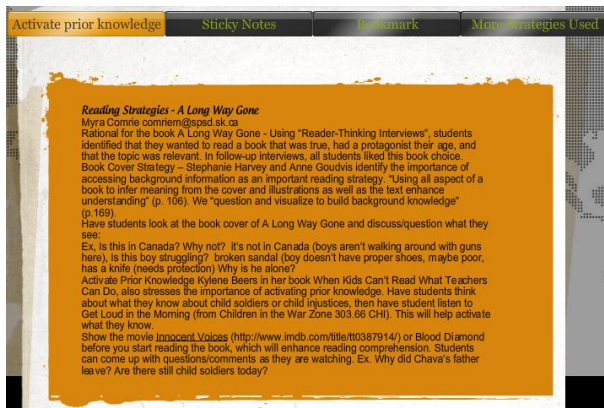


(I created the website for our team using the free web based [Wix](http://wix.com) program.)

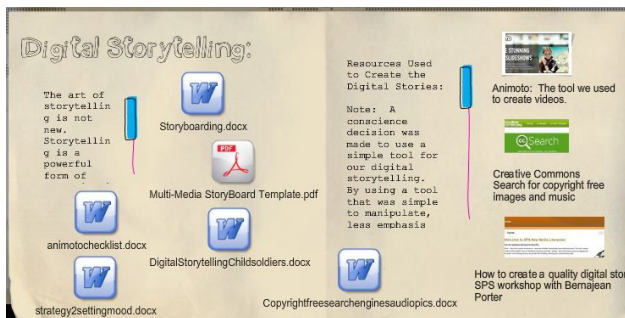
Pages/tabs provided will guide you through the process:



Students were supported with integrated “Reading Strategies”.



“Telling our stories” in digital form was an important component of the inquiry.



Summary of General Impact:

Students were provided with opportunities to ask big questions and to find the answers through thoughtful research within the inquiry process. Students reported they were engaged because the inquiry allowed them to:

- have an opportunity to investigate their own questions and then ultimately share their learning with others.
- learn about the challenges and struggles of other teens around the world.
- create products that allowed them to share their opinions and voice them in ways they never were able to before. i.e. videos, online blogs, online posters, social media tools.
- practice their reading strategies
- **put their new knowledge into action...**

After hearing the stories of the teens, the students were inspired to take action. The classroom broke off into teams (student choice) based on the charity they felt the classroom should support. They choose charities and organizations that they knew specifically supported children in crisis in some shape or form. They then created a brief five-minute presentation meant to persuade their classmates as to the merits of supporting their cause. Once they “voted” for the cause they would support, they started to brainstorm ways they could make a difference. In our school’s case, the students choose to contact the Open Door Society and asked the coordinator to assist in finding an immigrant family that would need our support. Students brought clothing, furniture, food, cleaning supplies, household goods etc. for the family that had recently arrived to Canada. (This family of five were living in a small apartment and had very few possessions.) After receiving the donations, the family was asked to share their story with the students. The students were not only impacted by the family’s story but also learned a lot about the struggles many families must endure to be safe. Their story inspired and engaged the students in ways we, as teachers, could never have imagined.



Note: After our success in first semester, two additional teachers joined us in the journey. We were then asked to share with other interested colleagues.

Considerations before beginning:

- Determine supports/resources needed to be successful (i.e. planning time, professional resources, access to computers, library/research time, instructional resources).
- Focus on curricular outcomes as the target for student learning rather than the traditional approach of “coverage of content” (quality not quantity)
- Recognize that inquiry is “messy”; it is not linear and it requires the teacher to guide students yet to provide student choice and freedom.
- Gain the support of the Administrator. They, like many teachers, want to see “living” samples of what inquiry can look like in the classroom.
- Provide enough supports for teachers yet allow for the individual way they approach it within their classroom.
- Recognize the role of formative assessment in being responsive to our students (i.e. baseline to know student understanding and skill sets).
- Use “Backwards by Design” planning by looking at the curriculum outcomes and identifying the outcomes the inquiry would encompass.

My role within the team:

Acting as team facilitator, I supported our team on several fronts:

- Facilitating collaborative meetings
- Contacting the external charity
- Obtaining Resource support i.e.
 - permissions for sub pay
 - money to purchase enough copies of the book “A Long Way Gone”
- Acting as co-planner/co-assessor
- Guiding teachers in understanding the inquiry process
- Co-teaching within the classroom using my specific skill sets i.e. introducing databases/researching credible sources, digital storytelling
- Building the website/finding resources for teachers/students
- Providing all technical support i.e. [Animoto](#) account set up, providing introduction to [Animoto](#)

Other Possible Resources:

[Critical Thinking Consortium](#)

[Sask Curriculum Guide](#)

[Techy Teacher](#)