

One Day in The Life of A Victim

by Sharon Hurwitz

The following article, submitted by the recipients of the VSTE 2002 Mini-Grant award, describes the activities of two teachers at Bethel High School (Hampton, Va.) as they engaged their students in an innovative project that helped them learn about prejudice and victimization. For more information about VSTE mini-grants, see: <http://www.vste.org/community/minigrants.html>

“Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me.”

As teachers and parents, we often teach this saying to our children, hoping to counteract the negative and hateful words they will encounter during school. But words can hurt when they are used to criticize a child for their physical appearance, their sexual orientation, or their racial background. It is because of this pervasive taunting in our urban high school of 2000 that the reading specialist and I, a former English teacher and now school-based technology specialist, decided to create a project that could be used by English teachers and/or social studies teachers. It had to be engaging, had to involve reading and technology, and had to help them become aware of another person’s values, experiences, and way of life. We chose the WebQuest.

The WebQuest is an inquiry-centered or problem-centered activity in which students interact with information they have obtained primarily from resources on the Internet. Bernie Dodge of San Diego State University is credited with being the “Father of the WebQuest.” The WebQuest gives students freedom to learn using multiple learning styles, thus keeping them actively engaged. Most WebQuests follow a pattern or template, giving teachers a useful and easy way to develop them.

They contain two major subdivisions – a student section, which takes the students through a series of interactive activities, and a teacher section, which gives teachers all they need to know in order to help their students. In the student section, students log onto the Internet (<http://www.sbo.hampton.k12.va.us/webquest/index.htm>), find the WebQuest site, and follow the directions. After reading an introduction, they are asked to do a series of activities, which usually include researching information on the Internet and developing a project, which can be shared with the class. There is often an evaluation component within the WebQuest so students know exactly what is expected of them.

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One Day, continued

In *One Day in The Life of A Victim*, students read an introduction about how prejudice leads to people being victimized. They are then directed to a page, which describes several young adult novels about young people being victimized because of their race, religion, physical or mental handicap, or sexual orientation. Students choose one novel to read, and everyone reading the same novel works together in a group to finish the activities. They conduct research about the group being victimized, which is then used to develop web pages.

The first time we did this project with 54 developmental reading students, they created a quilt with each square showing their feelings about respect of diversity. The second time, we had the students create iMovies showing their feelings. We were able to do this because VSTE provided us with the funds to purchase a digital movie camera.

Students loved doing this project because it gave them choices – which novel to read, which activities, and which culminating project. They were able to work in groups, which reduced their fear factor of using new technology (Like they were afraid! We were more afraid than they were – they just jumped right in!). And they learned from the experience. Students wrote with sensitivity and a newfound tolerance of differences in others.

After the Project

As happens with all good projects, every project has a life of its own. As we learned more about the use of iMovie and as we introduced it to students, they bragged about what they were doing to other students and teachers. We started getting requests from teachers on how they could use the program with their students and in their content. We were able to come up with the following activities.

- All About Me – The AVID class created an iMovie to tell about their program.
- Heroines from Herstory – After reading biographies about famous women in history, students created iMovie slide shows about their subjects.
- Interpretation of a Theme – Students in the video club were studying theme and chose to create an iMovie depicting Patriotism. They used scanned pictures from newspapers (9/11), video clips, and patriotic music to compose their movie.

What We Learned

iMovie is a versatile and exciting tool that will engage students in the analytic process. They spent more time on picking out the exact pictures and music to fit their theme or subject. They spent hours editing their features to make sure the timing was perfect. In a word, they loved iMovie.

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