

LITERATURE CIRCLES AND INQUIRY PROJECTS

Diane Titcher's Fifth-Grade Class

Murray Lake Elementary School

January—June 2008

As she conducted a Literature Circle inquiry with her class, Diane kept an informal email journal which she shared with Smokey weekly. Along the way, she shared not just her planning, lessons, and the kids' responses, but also reflected on the doubts, problems, and rewards she experienced along the way.

January 26

My kids were extremely interested in hearing about my experiences at the conference in Santa Fe, and so of course I used that as an opportunity to build their anticipation for what's coming. They are very excited, although a little nervous, about the idea of participating in literature circles without assigned roles and where their thinking will guide their discussions. I have promised them I won't just hand them their books and let them loose, they will have plenty of guidance when they need it. I also explained to them about inquiry projects and Assessment Live—they are definitely excited about the possibilities there! So, I think we're headed in the right direction and I can't wait to see where this takes us!

February 7

We've been experiencing an unusual influx of winter storms and as a result have had four snow days and one two hour delay in the last two and half weeks. On top of that, we've had the flu raging through the school and I've had a couple days where 25% of my class was absent. Needless to say, that has made teaching with any continuity a bit of a challenge, and since I typically only have time three days a week to teach reading, it's put me a little behind schedule. However, I am being as creative as possible with the time I do have. We're moving ahead, although at much slower pace than I like!

Yesterday we began a strategy study on questioning, working with the book, "Cheyenne Again." The book proved to be a great choice for generating questions among the kids and was an important eye-opener for me as well. The vast majority of my kids have virtually NO schema about Native Americans (trust me, I'm not exaggerating here)! I realized that I have my work cut out for me in terms of building background knowledge before

beginning the lit. circle work with the kids. So, after reading the story to the kids while they recorded questions in their reading journals (some of them had 7 or 8 pages of questions!), I had them sit down with a partner and look through their questions together. Then I had each student write one before reading question, two during reading questions, and one after reading question on post-it notes and put them on my white board. (Looking over their questions confirmed for me just how little they know about Native Americans.) We gathered as a whole group and I explained to the kids about thin, thick, and profound questions, giving them examples of each type. Then we began looking at the before reading questions, and as a group the kids decided if each question was thin, thick, or profound. They did a really nice job with this. We were also able to answer a few of the questions based on information that was in the text (which gave me an opportunity to point out that finding answers in the text is only one of many good ways readers answer their questions). Then we ran out of time. That was yesterday—today is another snow day (sigh).

February 18

We had yet another snow day and a two-hour delay last week, so I am still struggling to keep up with my plans. However, we did have two very productive days in between all the days off. We started by reviewing what we did with “Cheyenne Again” and then the kids worked with a partner to decide if they thought the during reading and after reading questions they posted on the board were thin, thick, or profound (there were some of each in the group). Then we gathered as a whole class again and discussed how they arrived at their decisions and whether their classmates had a different opinion about any of the questions. We also discussed their questions that were answered in the text.

To help give the kids some background knowledge and begin to make sense of the story (most of them are still thoroughly confused as to what the story is really about), I edited an article about the Carlisle Indian School (to make it a little more 5th grade accessible) and printed copies for each of them. I read the first part of the article together with them, modeling making annotations of our thinking on the overhead. (We’ve practiced this skill a couple of times before, but it is still new to them. After modeling, I made annotations of their thinking on the overhead, as well as mine if I thought they needed to see some higher level thinking than they provided.) Then I had them finish the article with a partner (pairing lower readers with those who could support them). Overall, it went great. The kids were excited to

annotate the article I gave them, and I could see light bulbs going on all over the room as they made various connections to the story, “Cheyenne Again.” When they finished annotating, I asked them to discuss the article with a partner, comparing their notes, discussing their questions, and sharing their thoughts in general.

When they were done, I launched us into the beginning of our first write around. I was really interested to see how they would do with this as I love the idea for launching conversation when they begin their lit. circles. I began by asking them to write a paragraph in their reading journals about their thoughts and feelings relating to the article, the story, or both. It actually caught me off guard that several of my kids were stumped by that assignment. They couldn’t figure out what I wanted them to write, because I specifically told them NOT to summarize the article or story, but rather to share their thinking. After clarifying it several times, in many different ways, even the most reluctant student decided to trust that I really did want her thoughts and opinions, not just what the text said. Of course just as she got to work, the class period ended.

The next day (which was actually 5 days later due to snow days, delays, and a weekend), I asked the kids to review their annotations of the article, and reread their paragraph. A few kids chose to add some new thoughts to their paragraph. Then I put them in groups of 4 (one group of 5) and had them do a silent write around. Their response to this activity was quite positive and the thinking they did on paper was pretty good for a first attempt. My principal looked at a few and thought they were great, but I am actually hoping their thinking will get even more profound as we continue to use this strategy.

After the write around, I planned to let the kids discuss the article and its relationship to “Cheyenne Again” for as long as I felt the conversations were productive. (Yes, I’m admitting that I truly had no idea how long that would be . . . 5 minutes? 30 minutes? My kids are capable of carrying on some pretty hefty conversations without constant supervision, but at the same time, they can easily mislead each other with misinformation, so I knew I would face a challenge in monitoring the conversations and keeping them on the right track.) I was prepared to give them ideas of things to discuss if they were at a loss, including their reactions to their written conversation, their thoughts and feelings about the Carlisle Indian School, and of course, revisiting their questions from “Cheyenne Again”; seeing how many they could answer, as well as evaluating how their overall understanding of the story improved (which it should have, dramatically).

So, following my plans, I had the kids begin an open discussion with their group mates. Most of the groups launched right into productive discussions (yes!) but a couple were looking for more direction . . . “What do you want us to talk about?” In general the groups that asked for more guidance had the less profound written discussion, essentially just agreeing with what everyone wrote before them. However, I was able to point out some differences in their initial paragraphs as a launching point. After probably 5–10 minutes, I went around to each group and asked a couple of more profound questions for them to think about. First, “Do you think Native Americans were ‘civilized’ before the English came to North America?” (They all agreed they were, although in a way different from the English.) Second, “If the Native Americans were civilized (in their own way), why would Richard Pratt start the Carlisle School, take children away from their families, and ‘train’ them to be civilized?” That got some very lively discussions going in all the groups. I let the kids go at it for another 10 minutes or so, and then brought the whole class together to share their thinking with each other in an open conversation. I’m really proud of how good my kids have gotten at carrying on a whole class conversation, without raising their hands, and without looking to me to guide them. I interjected only if there were major misconceptions that needed fixing or they drifted off topic for too long. They had a really good discussion about the article and the last question I posed to them, as well as some of their new thinking and understanding about the book. My next question to them was, “What do you think about what the white settlers did to “help” the Indians adjust to the settlers’ way of life?” asking them to think about the perspectives given in both “Cheyenne Again” and the Carlisle School article. Most of the kids thought it was unfair, although a few argued that the white men were just trying to help make the Indians’ lives better.

Near the end of class, I asked the kids how many of them would be surprised if I told them similar types of things still happen in our world today. About half of them raised their hand. I briefly told them about tribal groups in Africa who still live in “traditional” ways and explained that there are people who believe these tribal people should be brought into “modern society” and “civilized” even if they don’t want to be. I did my best to explain both points of view—that some people believe bringing them into modern society is a gift for them, because they don’t understand how much better their lives can be, while others believe we should leave them alone to live as they choose. I also emphasized that neither point of view is necessarily right or wrong, and they are each entitled to carry their own beliefs and

opinions about the issue. They discussed that for a few minutes before the end of class.

I feel terrible that this process is going so much slower than anticipated. I keep debating whether to speed up my lessons and leave out some things to help compensate for the snow days, but then I remind myself that taking the time to build their background knowledge and get comfortable with the various processes we'll use in the lit. circles will go a long way in helping the lit. circles be productive and worthwhile.

February 18–29

Following the write around and ensuing discussions, we went back to the kids questions from Cheyenne again. I had the original partnerships reclaim their questions from my white board to see how many of them they could answer after having read the Carlisle School article. As I suspected, they were able to answer several of them. We came back together as a whole class and I chose some of the questions to discuss. We looked at how the kids were able to answer their questions, and in some cases, they expanded on each others' answers. We also discussed different possible outcomes to their questions:

1. Answered in the text.
2. Inferred an answer.
3. Answered with the help of an outside source.
4. Answered through closer examination of pictures in the text (they felt that should be distinguished from "answered in the text").
5. Unanswered at this point.

We also discussed how thinking about their questions, even the unanswered ones, helped them to better understand the text.

A note of my own thinking here:

As we have continued through this process, I have been both very pleased and somewhat frustrated. I've been pleased because I've surprised myself at how many different objectives/standards I have been able to simultaneously cover through these lessons (including the study of questioning as a comprehension strategy, strategies for reading nonfiction text, study of historical fiction, and several social studies standards, including studying early American history and examining primary source documents). I'm a little frustrated because I feel like I'm shortchanging some of those objectives in the interest of keeping the whole process moving (particularly given all the time lost to snow days and special events). In particular, right now I feel

like I'm shortchanging the questioning strategy study. I would have liked to devote much more time to examining their questions, the processes they went through to answer them, and how more of them could have been answered by collaborating with their classmates had we had more time. More importantly, I feel like I barely touched on how and why asking questions improves their comprehension, and how their more profound questions can lead to some great thinking about our history and/or world beyond the text. Given that I want them to really be asking those profound questions as they read their lit circle books, and building their inquiry projects off those questions, I'm a little worried that I'm not giving that enough time and focus. I keep thinking, "I'll hit it again, more deeply, with the next round of lessons," and have been planning for that, but I keep hitting the same time constraints.

Back to the Lessons

Last week we moved on to the lessons on Jamestown. Since they briefly studied Jamestown in Social studies earlier this year, I began by having them do a KWL chart in their reading journals. Individually they each came up with a few things they knew, but when we shared them as a class, they assembled a pretty impressive list. Then we made a list of things they wanted to know.

I gave them a packet of materials I had assembled with an article about John Smith, an article with a very brief history of Jamestown, and a primary source document with directions from the Virginia Company to the settlers. I had them read and annotate the two articles on their own. This is the first time I asked them to annotate an entire article individually, having given them several opportunities in the past to do it with various support systems in place (whole class on the overhead, with a small group, with a partner, etc.). I have a few kids who still seem to struggle with getting their thoughts down on paper, so I held an invitational group to help them while the rest of the class worked. I was fortunate to have a couple students who are doing quite well with annotating opt into my group, so they were able to share some of their thinking as a model for their classmates, in addition to my own modeling. Then I had the kids meet with a partner to share their notes and discuss their thinking. I don't think I allowed enough time for this, but once again was faced with the end of the day and wanted to keep things moving the next day.

The next day I asked the kids to write on the back of their packets three new things they learned from reading the two articles and then make a list of questions they had, thinking about things they didn't understand

in the articles, things they wondered about that may not have been fully explained, and questions beyond the articles that arose (thinking I would use these to continue our questioning strategy study). We then gathered as a whole class. Students shared what they learned, and then I had each student tell me one of their questions and I compiled a class list. As always, a few interesting discussions took place as students shared.

We then began to tackle the primary source document. I talked to them first about the important role that primary source documents play in helping us understand history and why they would even want to try to understand something that seems like it's written in a foreign language. My kids are somewhat used to me giving them extremely challenging tasks . . . earlier this year I gave them a poem from an 11th grade AP English book and had them tackle that as part of our Monitoring Comprehension strategy study. Of course they didn't know where the poem came from until they had sweated through the process of figuring it out, which they did quite successfully. F

I don't know if I am just blessed to have a large number of kids who love a challenge, or if I have somehow created and/or nurtured the love for a challenge in them, but I was thrilled with how hard the kids worked to decipher the document. Of course I had those students who got stuck with the first thought of, "This is too hard," but they were definitely the minority, and I will share more good news about that in a minute. I started by putting the document on the overhead and reading the first paragraph to the class. There was a loud, collective, "Huh?" when I finished, so I asked if there were any words, phrases or ideas they recognized or thought they could make sense of within that paragraph. I had about half a dozen kids who went right to work, sharing their thoughts on what different parts might mean. The rest of the kids (with one or two exceptions) stayed engaged and watched the main players have at it, occasionally adding their own glimmers of insight. Interestingly enough, after they had pretty much interpreted all the parts they would need to understand the whole paragraph, they were still unable to tell me what the paragraph said. So, I read through the paragraph again, this time substituting their "translations" and guided them to an overall understanding of the paragraph. We repeated this process with the second paragraph, which seemed every so slightly less difficult for them.

At that point, I could tell the kids who weren't the main contributors were getting bored, so I split the class up into groups of four and put one of each the "leading" kids in a group. My instructions were to continue "decoding" the document in their groups, but the "lead" person in each group was not allowed to do all the thinking. That person needed to work with their classmates to

bring out their thinking and then fill in if/when they were really stuck. I was positively thrilled with what took place for the remaining ten minutes of that class period, and probably about 25 minutes of the next. I had really expected some initial whining and comments of, “This is too hard,” or “We don’t get it.” However, with the exception of one group (poorly assembled on my part), they all went right to work, and they really worked to help the kids who were lost in our whole class discussion. I even got lucky with the group that initially balked. When I sat down to work with them, one of the girls in the group (who had said nothing during our whole class discussion) immediately pulled out a couple of phrases she could make sense of. Another student (also a quiet one) added to her thinking, and within a minute or two, they had pieced together the essence of the next few sentences. Of course I made a big deal of how I couldn’t believe how easy that was for them, and shortly after felt confident they could continue on their own. I walked around and watched kids debating their ideas, pouring over dictionaries, and having great revelations. I had also put a map of the Chesapeake Bay in 1607 on the overhead, which resulted in many kids running up to the screen to point out to their group various aspects of their thinking. After observing each group for a few minutes, I briefly interrupted them to gush with praise. We recently added the word “fervent” to our class vocabulary list and I commented to them how pleased I was to see them all working so fervently on figuring out just what this document had to say.

When I felt they were beginning to get weary from the sometimes Herculean efforts they were putting forth, I gathered them back together as a whole class. I put the document up on the overhead again and one paragraph at a time, asked for what they came up with. I made sure that each group contributed something to the discussion and we plowed through the rest of the document, figuring out just what the Virginia Company wanted the settlers to do, and why. The last sentence of the document included instructions about not letting Natives settle along the river between Jamestown and the ocean as they would need easy passage to the ocean, and the Natives would be unhappy if they were constantly traveling through their settlements. We talked about how important that one sentence was, as it was really the very beginning of the philosophy that it was okay to tell the Native Americans where they could and couldn’t live. It was the beginning of what became many years of forcing Indians to give up their lands to white settlers.

At this point, I took a break from the literacy part of their work and asked them to think about how they felt things were going when they worked

in small groups. I started by asking them what was working well. The first response was, “We figured out what the document meant.” I asked how and the student said, “By working together and sharing our thinking.” (YES!!!!😊) They also said there were no big conflicts in their groups and they were able to get their work done. When I asked what things were not going well, they were a little reluctant to share, I think because they were worried they might get in trouble. (Of course it hadn’t occurred to them that I had been watching them and pretty much already knew what was working and what wasn’t.) So I reminded them of previous discussions we’d had about what their responsibilities would be when they were working in their lit. circle groups, and that by discussing problems they were encountering now, we could hopefully solve them and avoid having them once their lit. circle work begins. I rephrased the question to, “What things might go wrong in a small group?” and a good discussion ensued. Here’s what they came up with, and their ideas for solving these problems:

1. “A group member tunes out and then falls behind in our discussion or work. Then we have to stop to bring them up to date before we can go on.” What I loved about this one (and of course called attention to) was the inclusion of the fact that they actually do stop to help that group member catch up instead of just dismissing them and moving on. Ideas for solving the problem: 1) Understand that it happens to everyone sometimes and just be patient. 2) If it keeps happening with the same person, everyone else keep a closer eye on them and bring them back to attention as soon as you see them tuning out. (This led to a discussion of how you know when someone is tuning out. I LOVED what they came up with.) 3) Actively ask that group member to contribute to the discussion more often.
2. “A group member doesn’t get what we’re saying or doing, and even though we tried to explain it, they still don’t get it.” Ideas for solving the problem: 1) Everyone work together to think of different ways to explain the concept(s) or idea(s). 2) Draw sketches or pictures to help them understand. 3) (my personal favorite) Ask the student to explain what they DO understand. That way you can figure out exactly what part they don’t get and make it clearer for them. Also, they might realize they understand more than they thought.
3. “The group gets off task.” (Can you guess which group that came from?) Ideas for solving the problem: 1) As soon as someone realizes you’re off task, remind the group to get back on task. 2) Try to pay

attention to what things make you get off task. Then when those things come up, shut them down right away.

4. “One group member thinks they have all the right answers and won’t listen when others think their answers are wrong.” Wow—I loved what they came up with for this one. 1) Remind the group member that they are supposed to listen to everyone’s thinking. 2) Ask that group member to support their thinking with evidence from the text or other materials they are using. This could lead to two possible outcomes—the student realizes they can’t really support their thinking and becomes more open to what others have to say; or the other students realize that he/she may have some valid points. 3) Make sure the other group members are supporting their thinking with evidence from the text, which may help the “stubborn” student revise their thinking. Ultimately, they realized (with a little input from me) that having everyone support their thinking could result in totally new thinking somewhere in the middle of the original “opposing” ideas.

Okay, forgive me for gushing here, but isn’t that AWESOME?! Hearing these conversations and watching them work together so well on the primary source document, has me feeling very pumped up about starting the lit. circles and very optimistic about how they will go. I have to add that at the beginning of this year, I was very concerned about the various personalities and “issues” in my class and wondered if I would ever be able to get them to collaborate productively. So hopefully that gives you some insight into my need to pause here and celebrate!

After that discussion, I took out a couple of books I borrowed from our community library on the Powhatan Indians, and shared a few pages I had marked. I explained that while it’s important for them to understand what the settlers did and why, they would also be encountering a lot of unfamiliar Native American concepts in the novels they would be reading, and that I wanted to give them some background information to help with that. I began with a brief story about Pocahontas and John Smith, then went on to briefly discuss the important roles John Smith, Pocahontas, and Chief Powhatan played in the initial peace the settlers had with the Powhatan Indians, and how things quickly deteriorated after all three of them were out of the picture. We then talked about the spiritual beliefs of Native Americans. Last Friday, our school had a Science Expo and my class spent a little time in a star lab. Part of the presentation included a look at some of the Native American constellations, so my kids could immediately

connect what I was sharing about Native American spiritual beliefs to what they learned about the constellations. We also read and talked about the Native American “vision quests.” The kids were fascinated by this, which is good because it shows up in several of the novels they have to choose from.

I ended our lesson by looking at a National Geographic interactive website about Jamestown and Werowocomoco. We have computer lab on Friday afternoons, so I showed them the sight and told them they would be exploring it in the lab to learn more about Jamestown and the Powhatan village. I was a little concerned that they would spend a few minutes clicking around and then ask if they could play educational games (a persistent issue in the lab), but once again I was pleasantly surprised. I only had one kid (one of those two who easily gets off task) say he had looked at everything after about 10 minutes and wanted to know what to do. I countered with the fact that it took me over an hour to click on and briefly glance at everything on the sight, and I wanted him to take another look. Then he started hearing the others kids comments about the “cool” things they were finding and got back into it. Other than that, ALL the kids spent over 35 minutes exploring the sight and sharing their findings with each other. Sigh—I love these kids. 😊

March 3–7

We’re making good progress, and with no more snow days in sight, we should actually be choosing books for the lit. circles this Wednesday. (Hurray!) While it feels like all this background knowledge building has taken a painfully long time, the upside is that the kids are really hungry for these books now, and I think our lit. circles are going to get off to a great start.

Here’s what we accomplished this past week:

I need to begin with the fact that last weekend I was doing some additional reading about Jamestown and realized that I had made an incorrect inference when helping the kids “translate” the primary source document and as a result, gave them a HUGE piece of gross misinformation. YIKES! I spent the next several hours pondering how I could have made such a big mistake (especially since my high school daughter made a point of telling me she couldn’t imagine how I arrived at my inference and she never would have thought such a stupid thing) and what I was going to do to fix it. So here’s what happened on Monday:

I began by telling the kids exactly what I just told you above—I made a bad inference and had taught them something that was REALLY wrong. I asked them if they remembered the inference I shared with them as were finishing working with the primary source document, and of course they

did because it was a HUGE inference with lots of historical implications. (It was the part of the Jamestown Charter that advised the settlers to be sure that no Indians lived between them and the ocean. I had told them that I thought that was the beginning of the English settlers believing they could force the Indians to move from their lands. I explained to them that I had done some additional reading about Jamestown and wanted to share with them the text that made me realize my error. I read them a paragraph from a National Geographic article where I found “the truth” and asked them if they understood what it was saying. It was not difficult text, so most of them did understand it. I asked for a volunteer to explain my mistake, and one of the students explained it very clearly. Then, of course wanting to save face and have something good come from my ignorance, I asked them what we could learn from my mistake, other than the correct interpretation of the primary source document. The first response was, “We shouldn’t make inferences,” upon which I choked and tried hard not to go into panic mode! I regrouped and explained that, as we have been learning all year, making inferences is really important in helping us understand and make sense of what we read. Then I asked, “Does making an inference to understand something mean that our inferences are always right or that we have learned all we need to about that topic?” They agreed that it does not (phew!) and I explained from there that what we could all learn from my mistake is that sometimes we make incorrect inferences and we need to always be open to new information and ideas that might change how/what we think about something. I reminded them of a story we had read earlier in the year (*An Angel for Solomon Singer*) in which they had made a few different inferences about the situation in which the main character was living and had a hard time revising their thinking as new ideas surfaced. (Their first two inferences were incorrect, and yet they were able to use those inferences to work on understanding the rest of the story. On the third day of working in that story one student finally came up with the “correct” inference, but some of the kids were reluctant to accept it, thinking they had already “figured out” that part of the story. I guided the kids to look for evidence in the text to support both the new and earlier inferences, and filled in some information they were missing in their schemas. After some discussion, they came to consensus that the new inference made the most sense.) I used both that example, and my error, to point out how important it is to keep learning and allowing new information to expand on and sometimes revise our thinking about a topic. At that point, I thought it was safe to move on.

We revisited the questions they had given me the previous week from the Jamestown article and began labeling them as thin, thick, or profound, as well as determining if we could answer them, and if so, how. The initial result—more confusion (proof to me that I really was trying to cover too many different objectives in these lessons). One of my students was trying to explain to another student that a question couldn't be profound because the answer was in the text, which would make it thin. I also had several students say they really weren't sure what profound questions were, and there were debates about whether one question was thin or profound. So, we slowed down and went back over the three types of questions and examples of each from the book, "Cheyenne Again." We also went over the four possible outcomes to their questions, emphasizing that these were separate and independent concepts from the type of question. We went through some more questions from the Jamestown articles, and I tried my best to delineate the differences with each question. I think at that point they understood the outcomes, but unfortunately we ran out of time and I was not at all confident they understood the differences between the types of questions. So, while I don't have time to teach reading on Tuesdays (gasp!) I took about 20 minutes and created a chart on the overhead to more closely examine the three types of questions. I asked the kids to give me examples of each type of question from books we had read together in class, and explain why they thought each question was either thick, thin, or profound. They had a hard time coming up with profound questions initially, but after I gave them a couple of examples, they were more successful. Since that time I also created and hung a chart in my room about questioning that explains the types of questions and the possible outcomes. I'm feeling better about it, but know that I need to continue working on this for the kids to really get it.

We spent Wednesday and Thursday reading some articles that would provide background knowledge for two more of the books. I planned this as a jigsaw activity—their first time doing it. I took a fair amount of time explaining how it would work, emphasizing that each student would have sole responsibility for teaching some of their classmates about their article. I had five articles:

American History Timeline: 1760-1769

A Brief History of Maine

Penobscot Tribe

The Ohio Country before the Revolutionary War

Seneca Indians

My thinking was that they were really beginning to get a clearer picture of the conflicts between Native Americans and white settlers, and at this point, really just needed to understand what was happening in history in these two stories, and who the Native Americans were in each story. They are also currently studying this period in history in Social studies (which I don't teach) so I felt comfortable not spending as much time on it.

I split the kids into groups of four based on their choice of article and had them read, annotate, and work through the articles together. Then I asked them to pull out what they thought were the most important details to share with their classmates. Since they knew they would be responsible for sharing this article with others and without the help of their groupmates, they all took this pretty seriously and worked hard to organize their thinking and come to consensus on what they should share. This took all of our remaining time on Wednesday, and the first twenty minutes of Thursday.

After they had worked through their articles and I checked with each group to be sure they had the important concepts down, I jig sawed their groups so they were now in groups of five, with each person having read one of the articles. Each person shared what they learned with the rest of their group, and when all the groups were done, we reconvened as a class. That's when I realized I had skipped an important step in preparing them for this activity. When I asked for students to tell me what they learned from a classmate about an article they hadn't read, there were almost no responses. One of my students, John, blurted out, "Come on! I know I shared this stuff with you guys!" I knew then that I hadn't talked to them about the importance of paying attention to each other in their second groups and learning what they hadn't read about. We discussed why I had them do this and why they weren't able to tell me about articles besides for their own. We then spent some time reviewing the important ideas in each article and I explained why it was important for them to understand those ideas in terms of the novels they would be reading in their lit. circles. They gave me mixed reviews on this activity—I think for two reasons: One, it doesn't allow for anyone to slack since everyone is responsible for teaching others in their second group. Second, the fact that they really didn't pay attention to each other in their second group was frustrating for them. I told them we'd be doing this again in the future and while they all did very well at preparing for their presentation to their second group, we would need to use what we learned that day to do better in the second group the next time.

March 10–14

Monday was our final day of doing background knowledge building for the lit. circle books. Rather than give the kids some more articles, materials, and/or websites to pour over and discuss, which usually ends up taking at least two class periods, I decided in the interest of getting them their books (which they were now STARVING for), I would just give them what they needed to know. I was concerned that doing that might bore them and they might tune me out, but we ended up having some pretty lively discussions despite my mundane methods.

I began by sharing some information about what had happened in American and Ohio history between 1760 and 1812. The kids knew a lot of the American history information because they are currently studying that in social studies. They really didn't know much though about the Northwest Territory or the Ohio Indian Wars.

Then I moved on to sharing parts of a nonfiction picture book about the Anishinabe Indians ("Life in an Anishinabe Camp" by Niki Walker), focusing on the Ojibwe Indians that lived around Lake Superior in the 1800s. The kids were very interested in the customs and traditions I shared, and they also did a great job of connecting the information to what they had learned in fourth grade about Michigan's Native Americans. We ran out of time before I got through everything, but I felt I had covered the most important concepts for the book, so I let the rest go.

Tuesday was a field trip to see a play, so no reading.

Wednesday was our March Is Reading Month assembly, so no reading then either. (Kind of ironic isn't it?)

Thursday—the kids were chomping at the bit to pick their books. We have reading at the end of the day, and they kept putting "On Strike" signs on their desks anytime we started another subject during the day. F The way our schedule is structured, it really was best to keep reading at the end of the day, so I coaxed, bribed, and cajoled them back to work with each transition.

Reading time finally arrived and I had 22 of the most attentive kids I think I've had all year, sitting at their desks with looks of great anticipation on their faces. (Pause here to appreciate the moment –;-)) I handed out the book ballots I made up for them and explained the process we would be following to choose books. I strongly emphasized that this was not about choosing the same book as a friend. I explained that it was definitely in their best interest to choose the books they most wanted to read, rather than what their friends wanted, since they would be spending the next several weeks working in these books and wouldn't want to be struggling in a book

they didn't like. I also told them there were no guarantees they would get their first choice, so even if they tried to get in a group with a friend, it likely wouldn't work. Then, (keeping reality in focus) I told them we were going to go through the whole process without talking, signing, or passing notes.

I went through all of the book talks, holding up each book as I talked about it. I closely watched the kids' faces, trying to read in their expressions whether these books captured their interest, or if after all that anticipation, they weren't all that interesting after all. Fortunately for me, even after just two books, kids were squirming with excitement and beginning to whine that it was going to be too hard to choose. When I finished the book talks, I asked the kids to list their top three choices on the left side of the book titles on the ballot.

After the book talks, I explained how they would preview the books. I split the kids into groups of three, with one group of four. Their current seating arrangement actually worked very well for this, since I could divide most of the desks into sets of three and not have close friends together in a group. I gave each student in each group a different book and told them they had two minutes to look it over—going over all the things they like/need to consider when choosing a book. During this time, the kids were reading the covers, paging through looking at text size, chapter length, etc., reading a random page or two, reading the first page or two, and deciding if they felt they could handle the book. Then every two minutes, the kids passed the books. After the kids had previewed all three books they started with, I swapped their books and repeated the process. The whole process went extremely smoothly except for in two groups. In one group, they glanced over the books for probably thirty seconds or so and then passed them. So at the end of the first two minutes, they said they had already previewed all their books. Needless to say, I had them go back through the books and take a closer look. The other group that had some problems was the group of four. They didn't pass their books all in one direction, so when we got to the last two minutes, there were a couple of kids who hadn't seen the same book. That was an easy fix—I just gave them another copy.

After they previewed all six books, I asked them to write their final choices in the blanks to the right of the book titles, and told them that if they felt VERY strongly about one book, they could put the number one by it and circle it. It was interesting to see that several kids did change their picks from the ones they chose after the book talks. (I should also note here that a few kids wrote down choices on both sides of their sheets before I even

did the book talks! I encouraged them to erase them and think carefully about their choices after they learned more about the books, since prior to receiving their ballots, they had never even heard the titles. I think one or two kids kept those first choices, despite my advice. You know those kids—they squirm in their seat, cover their papers, turn them over, or drop them every time you walk by their desk so you can't see that they worked ahead.)

Fortunately the end of the day had arrived, so I didn't have to hear their pleas and see their sad, "puppy dog" eyes because I couldn't tell them which book they got right there on the spot. I took home their ballots and sorted through them, grouping and regrouping, trying to anticipate which kids would be best at supporting my lower readers, which kids would be best at keeping my "wanderers" focused, which kids would have plenty of patience with those who can be overeager (and overbearing), and for my low readers, which books I thought they could reasonably handle with a little bit of support. Of course every time I thought I had it all worked out, I would see a group that practically screamed, "Oh no—you don't want to put us together!" and have to regroup again. That being said, now that the kids are grouped, I feel pretty confident that they will work well together.

Friday morning the kids came in wanting to know if I had their book groups set up. I said yes, but I couldn't tell them right away because our visiting police officer was coming in to do their next D.A.R.E. lesson. The "On Strike" signs appeared again. I laughed and told them they could be on strike if they wanted, but that I couldn't tell them their books until after their D.A.R.E. and math lessons were done, so if they stayed on strike for too long, it would be Monday before they knew. I've never seen my kids put things away and get ready for the next activity so quickly! 😊

Before I told them their books, I explained that once they knew what book they were in, they needed to get together with their group and establish some ground rules for their meetings. We brainstormed possible topics to be covered in the ground rules and I wrote them on the overhead. I read off the groups, with a wonderful chorus of sounds playing in the background ("YES!", "All right!", etc.) and had the groups get together in meeting spots scattered around our room. They used the rest of our time on Friday morning to come up with their rules, as well as consequences for not following them. In walking around and listening in, I noticed that several groups had decided to charge our "class bucks" for violating their rules. However, they were getting a little carried away and charging bucks for every infraction, such as every time someone interrupts someone else. I cautioned them about this, pointing out that they didn't want to spend

all their meeting time keeping track of how many bucks they each owed, and we talked about the fact that sometimes we are just so excited that we interrupt unintentionally, or sometimes we think the other speaker is done and didn't intend to interrupt at all. After that brief discussion, the groups modified their rules, however, after looking them over this weekend, we may still have some work to do on this.

I gave the kids their books and many were saying, "I'm going to read the whole book this weekend—I so want to know what happens!" One student, Hannah, said, "Yeah, I'm going to read the first fifteen pages we agreed to and keep my thinknotes for those pages, and then read the rest of the book." I was so glad she said that because I hadn't thought about how much their thinking would change after they've read the whole book. So I gave them two VERY important things to remember:

1. Even if you read ahead, you need to keep your think notes all the way through (and we discussed why).
2. Don't give away the ending to your classmates!

The kids are really very, very excited to read these books, which makes me feel great. I don't think I've ever seen any of my students, in any class, as excited as these kids were on Friday. And that brings me to my own feelings at this point. First, I'm thinking that while it took an eternity to build all their background knowledge because of snow days, field trips, assemblies, etc., it has all worked out great now that we're done. Second, I'm thrilled to see my kids so excited and am pretty much pinching myself to make sure I'm not dreaming. I marvel that I could have somehow led them to this level of emotional investment in reading. Third, now that they FINALLY have their books and our book clubs are getting off the ground (Oh yeah, I forgot to mention that they specifically asked if we could call them book clubs—they thought that sounded so much better than literature circles. I happily agreed, since they really are book clubs), I am TERRIFIED! Remember I told you I felt like I was about to leap off a cliff when I started all this—well, I've jumped and I'm not sure if I know how to use a parachute!

I left on Friday with doubts and questions racing through my mind. What do I do now? What if they don't know what to talk about when they meet? What if they really don't understand the books? What if they don't do their reading, can't stay focused in their meetings, make all the wrong inferences, etc, etc. etc.? How am I going to monitor and keep up with all five groups? Enter this weekend and the MRA conference . . . after listening to Debbie Miller twice, Chryse Hutchins, and Smokey Daniels, I was reminded that I

do know what to do, and I trust that my kids do too. But, I also know I will have many more questions going forward, and possibly a few moments of breathless panic sprinkled in here and there.

One final note about this week—Along with giving my kids their books on Friday, I also sent home a note to their parents. In the note I explained the book clubs and offered suggestions for how they could support their kids as they read these books. Along with the note, I sent a signature slip to be returned to me, so I will know that all parents at least saw the note (and hopefully read it).

March 17–27

Monday, March 17: Since I was at the MRA conference in Detroit and we were just getting started in the books, I left instructions for my sub to have the kids read their book club books during our reading time. I told her they could sit with their group members, so if they had any trouble they could work through the problems together. Her report was good overall—she said most of the kids spent the whole time absorbed in their books and there were a few quiet conversations within groups to work through reading problems. However, I did have four kids who forgot to bring their books to school (this after really stressing on Friday that they need to bring their book club books to school EVERY DAY, and especially on Monday, since they would have their reading class time to read). I wasn't really surprised, but I was disappointed. I had called my sub during reading time because I forgot to leave out some homework sheets for her, so when she told me about the four kids, I told her that each student who forgot their book needed to pay her 50 class bucks. Fortunately, three of the four kids kept busy with other work. Definitely something I have to figure out how to address going forward if I give them more class time to read. Otherwise, the sub said the kids seemed truly interested and engaged in their books.

Wednesday, March 19: I spent the first part of reading time discussing some issues they needed to consider before their first meeting on Thursday. First, I talked to them about the ground rules each group came up with last week. We reviewed the potential problem of charging class bucks for EVERY infraction, even if minor, and how much time they would end up spending trying to keep track of how many bucks each kid owed. They agreed that might be a problem and decided that they would charge only if there were repeated problems and they reminded their classmate about the rule.

I asked them if they thought it was okay to have disagreements within

their group. They didn't hesitate to say yes. Then I asked them how they would handle it if two or more group members were stuck in a disagreement. One of the kids offered right away that they could look in their book to find evidence to support their thinking. (YES!) Of course not wanting to let them off that easily, I asked, "What if you are basing your opinion on inferential thinking and you can't find enough evidence to convince your classmate that your view is correct, and you still disagree?" The response was a deafening quiet, as if they were all saying, "Huh. We hadn't thought about that." So, I threw out, "Is it ever okay to agree to disagree?" They breathed a collective sigh of relief and said yes, they could do that and then move on in their discussion.

I also talked to them about the fact that they would need to be thinking about the questions they have while reading and sharing them with their groupmates to begin the process of deciding on an inquiry question. I asked them if they had any ideas for how they could keep track of the group's questions in a way that was accessible to everyone in the group. Hannah L. asked, "Why can't we just keep all our own questions in our reading journals and just tell our groupmates what they are?" I explained that if they did that, then each time the group wanted to review their questions, answer them, or expand upon them, they would have to go back through each person's journal. She agreed then that it would be easier to keep track in one place for the whole group. I showed them the four-column chart idea and they really liked that. I asked them what types of questions they thought they should write on the chart. They said thick and profound, and I agreed with them, but asked them to think about which type of question would most likely lead to a topic they would want to investigate further after they finished the book. A few of the kids right away said profound questions. I asked the rest of the class what they thought and they agreed, so I emphasized that they should definitely write down any questions they felt might be profound. I asked them what they would do if their group members couldn't agree on whether a question was thin, thick, or profound. They decided it would be best to write that question down, knowing they could always cross it off later if they decided it was a thin question. I gave them the remaining class time to read their books. They were quiet and engaged. At this point, I had two students who had finished their books (from different groups). However, one realized he forgot to keep track of his thinking, so even though he knew his thinking would change the second time through, he was rereading his book. I was of course encouraged by the fact that he liked the book enough to turn around and reread it again right away! I had the other student who had finished her book, go back through her thinknotes and work on trying

to answer some of the questions she had while she was reading. That kept her busy until the end of class. (Phew!)

Thursday, March 20: Our first official meeting day. There was definitely an air of excitement in the room as reading time approached and the kids were anxious to get in their groups and get going. I wanted to be sure they had some foundation for starting their discussions, so I had them begin by doing a write around. I explained that their first paragraph could be about any thoughts they had about the book so far and gave them some options to consider if they weren't sure where to start. The options included:

- Writing about the main character—what was their impression of the character so far?
- Writing about the events in the book so far—what did they think about what had happened?
- Sharing their predictions about what they thought would happen next and why.
- Challenges they encountered while reading (thinking about themselves as readers)

They did a nice job with this. This was only their second write-around, but you would have thought they'd been doing it all year. They set right to work, and wrote for about three to four minutes before I told them to pass. We passed the journals three times, so the two groups of five didn't see all the notebooks, but that was okay. I felt that the write around brought up some pretty good issues for them to discuss.

Some highlights from the write around (exactly as written):

Crooked River

Logan (first paragraph): "First of all, their dad is so mean he thinks those two girls can't take care of themselves, they do almost everything."

Hannah (fourth paragraph on Logan's page): "It is so mean that the girls have to be like slaves! Why couldn't the boys bring food up to the indian some times. The girls would be in more danger than the boys."

Michelle (first paragraph): "I think that Amik (indian) is innocent. Is the jury going to say he is innocent?"

Hannah (in response to Michelle): "I agree that Amik is innocent. But I think that the jury is going to say he is guilty just because he is an indian. Why did white people used to not like indians?"

Emily (in response to Hannah): “And I think white people hate indians so much because they are different color or something! And what jury?”

Logan (in response to Emily): “I agree Emily they probably hate them because they are different color.”

Kyle (first paragraph): “I feel sad for the girl her dad treats her like a slave and the girl is thinking about killing herself to be with her mom. so her dad is mean and evil but her mom was nice.”

Michelle (in response to Kyle): “It did not say that the girl was going to kill herself to be with her mom. But it did say she missed her mom she wanted to be with her. But it did not say that she wanted to kill herself.”

Hannah (in response to Kyle and Michelle): “Yeah she didn’t want to die. It said that right in the book. And it didn’t say that her mom was nice, but I know that she is better than her dad. I would be really mad if my dad put a murderer in our house, wouldn’t you?” But I don’t think that he is actually a murderer. Why would a dad be so mean to his kids? I think that maybe he is just mad that his wife died. Either that or he needs help (serious help!)

Emily (in response to Kyle and Hannah): “Kyle, how do you know her mom is nice! Yeah I agree with Hannah that her dad need’s serious help!”

Sign of the Beaver

Landon (first paragraph): “That really stinks that that Ben guy just stole Matt’s gun, and that a bear broke into his cabin. He’s been having really bad luck, especially with the bees. But it’s good that the Indians found him. Although, I think that the younger Indian is to angry all the time!”

Gavin (in response to Landon): “I agree that he has had some bad luck, but I think he likes the Indian and is happy about that. I agree that the Indian is angry all the time. I don’t really understand when the Indian talks SOMETIMES.”

Nick (in response to Gavin): “The Indian does not know full English language so he can’t talk that well. I also agree that he has been running into a lot of bad luck. I always think why the book is called the Sighn of the Bever.”

Landon (in response to Nick): “ I think it’s called “the sign of The Beaver” because the name of the tribe in the book is the Beaver.”

Blood on the River

Mitchell (first paragraph): “I think it was mean of the Indians to trick the settlers so they could attack them. But the settlers did not do anything to the Indians.”

John (in response to Mitchell): “I agree and I think that Samuel is very MEAN because he steals things, he beats up kids, he has a short temper, and those aren’t exactly what you would call good traits.”

Kailee (In response to Mitchell and John): “I agree with Mitchell that it was mean what the Indians did. Also, I would be very mad on having to be a servant to a person you don’t know! Like the boy had to do with John Smith.”

Dylan (In response to all): “They did do something. The river they called the James River was actually called the Powhatan River. And I was mad that they first . . .” (end of writing)

Indian Captive

Abbey (first paragraph): “I LOVE the story so far. I think that the cross/mean woman is mean. I bet that Molly won’t go back to her old home but I think she will like the Indians more and more everyday. I think the little boy is very nice. He helps Molly learn the indian language. Since the mean woman kicks Molly I think that mean woman is terrible.”

Rachael (in response to Hannah): “I didn’t know that the Indian boy teachers her the language. I thought he just took her back to the village. I also think that the boy will become great friends with Molly. I also think Molly will become great friends with the dog she layed with.”

Nikki (in response to Abbey and Rachael): “I actually think Molly will try to escape. I made a prediction and it was that she is learning indian more every day because she knows ‘wood’ in Indian . . . wait . . . what I didn’t know, . . . the Indian boy started teaching her Indian.”

Francesca (final paragraph): “I’m confused. I mean how did her parents get seprated. In the book, it didn’t say how her parents got seprated.”

My Heart Is on the Ground

Anna O. (first paragraph): “Why is nany little Rose mad at her brother? is it because he doesn’t get along with the whites and she gets along with them pretty well? is it because she happy and he isn’t?”

Anna N. (in response to Anna O.): “I think she is mad at her brother because she isn’t happy with the way he is acting. I think your right about Nannie Little Rose being happy and her brother isn’t. She does get along well with the whites, unlike her brother. She treats them with respect.”

Jessi (in response to both Annas): “I think that Nannie likes it at her school and not so much at home. Her brother is weird and mean to her. I agree that she gets along with the whites but not her brother.

Jordan (in response to Jessi): “I don’t agree that she likes the school better. I think she likes her house better.”

Kenzie (first paragraph): “I really like this book so far. Really the only questions that I had were that some of the language was hard to understand. (the Indian language) Like 1 example was when she said “he looses his face” on page 23.”

Interestingly, Kenzie brought this up in each paragraph she wrote, sometimes asking if that was meant literally, but none of her group members acknowledged it. She didn’t let it go though . . . it came up in their discussion. They are still working on figuring that one out.

When they finished the write around, I reminded them that they would decide what aspect(s) of their story they wanted to talk about and they could use their write around and/or think notes to help guide their discussions.

I have to be honest here. I’m really not sure how well that first day of discussions went. I’ve been trying to plan all of our meeting days for days when I have one of my parent helpers in. I had a parent scheduled for our reading time that day, but fell victim to a change in our schedule to make up a D.A.R.E. lesson that we missed on one of our many snow days. As a result, I had to change our reading time and the mom who was supposed to come in couldn’t leave work early enough to help at the new time. So I was on my own. I intended to wander from group to group, initially spending just a few minutes with each group to be sure they were off to a good start (and on task of course), and then go back and spend more time with each group. However, when I got to the first group (Indian Captive), they seemed unsure of exactly how to get started. I asked them if their write around had made them think of any aspects of the story they hadn’t thought about before, and they said not really. So, I asked them to tell me what they thought about Mary Jemison, the main character. Their responses were ordinary and lackluster: “She is nice,” “She loved her family a lot,” etc. Unsure of whether they really understood the story (this is the most difficult of the five books), I asked them to tell me why they thought she was nice and what made them think she loved her family a

lot. Their answers were sufficient for me to know they understood the story, so I asked them to talk about how they would feel if they were Mary and to be sure to share their reasons why. I was hoping they would see and share what an incredibly strong character Mary is, but at that point, they hadn't come to that realization. However, after I threw out a few more, "Why?" questions they got into a pretty good discussion. At this point I thought they would be okay for at least a little while, so I moved onto another group.

As I left the Indian Captive group, I could overhear Michelle, in the Crooked River group reminding her group members to stay on topic. "Well," I thought, "hopefully that means they've at least spent some of the time discussing the book." The second group I visited (Blood on the River) was having a good discussion about the events in the book, but one student was doing his best to derail the group. He was stuck on *how* a question came up that the rest of the group was discussing, and was intent on not letting them actually discuss the question until they could piece together how the question came up in the first place. I asked him why he felt it was so important to know how the question came up and he responded that he was just curious because it had nothing to do with what they had been discussing. I asked him if he thought the question was a good one, and he said yes, so I suggested that he let go of worrying about how it came up and work with his group to see if they could answer the question. John grabbed his book and began looking for passages in the text to help them. I asked the others what they thought John was doing, and they each picked up their book and began looking along with John. Time for me to move on.

I was fast running out of time (about 5 minutes remaining) so I did a quick check on each of the remaining three groups. The Sign of the Beaver group had two of its four members looking through their books. When I asked why, they explained they were looking for evidence in the text to support their thinking and trying to clarify a point they were uncertain about. (They were discussing who had raided Matt's cabin, unsure of whether it was a man or a bear). "Good enough," I thought, and I left them, not wanting to let the day end without at least touching base with each group.

Next I briefly visited with the My Heart Is on the Ground group. They were confused about an incident in the story. One student took over, saying she was going to find the page where the confusing incident happened so they could clear it up. The whole group grabbed their books and started searching.

Finally I made it around to the last group (Crooked River), with only a minute or two of class time left. The kids were having a disagreement about the book. "Yes!" I thought with relief. "Finally, a group that's really getting into

discussing the meat of their book.” However, I was quickly brought back to earth when I realized they were arguing over whether an event in the story happened before or after the point one of their group members had read up to (everyone else had read at least a few pages past their agreed upon minimum reading). On the positive side, another student in the group, Logan, said, “Guys, we have to help her understand what we’re talking about.” However, at this point they were already in the heat of the argument and two of the other group members couldn’t get past the fact that the girl must have read it. I suggested they look in the book to find the event and solve the problem. Logan took the suggestion and repeated it to his groupmates, and so they agreed to look for it. After finding the event, they realized that it had happened after the last page their group mate had read, and so that ended the argument . . . and our class time. The student who was behind had a “Hah, I told you so!” smile on her face, and the two group members who had insisted she must have read it apologized to her. So, at least I felt like they had learned a valuable lesson.

I left that day feeling both overwhelmed and discouraged. I wasn’t sure if their discussions were productive or not, if they had used their discussion time well or wasted it, and if maybe I had expected too much from them. While I had tried using the three column overhead (+, quotes, -) to keep notes, I was so focused on trying to make sure they were focused that I only managed to get down five comments, all of which I shared above.

March 24–28

Monday, March 24: I had to take the afternoon off to deal with a family issue. I left the sub with instructions to have the kids work on their questions charts, writing down their thick and profound questions and any answers they had to them. If they had time left after that, they could read. In her notes to me, she commented that the Blood on the River group had so many questions they couldn’t reach consensus, and the Sign of the Beaver group had a hard time coming up with “big” questions, but had lots of little questions. I thought that was interesting, since the Blood on the River group only had one question written on their chart, and the Sign of the Beaver group had several, some of which were definitely not little questions. So on Tuesday, I asked the kids about the substitute’s comments. They decided she must have gotten the two groups mixed up, although the Blood on the River group said they really didn’t have very many questions and only wrote down the one because it was the only one they thought was profound. On another note, the sub said the kids were “blissfully silent” during their reading time, fully engaged in their books. Funny—I like the fact that they were engaged

in their books, but I no longer define silence in my room as “blissful.” I love the kids’ discussions and I love to push and probe their thinking!

Here is a sampling of each group’s initial questions:

Blood on the River

Why did the Indians trick the settlers?

Indian Captive

Why did Indians take white people captive?

Why were the Frenchmen with the Indians?

What happened to the rest of the family and Davy?

Are the places in the book real?

Why is Turkey Feather (Little Turtle) the only kid who is nice to her?

Sign of the Beaver

Why did Ben steal the gun?

Is Matt going to join the Beaver tribe?

Where is Matt’s family?

Why does the Indian show Matt how to do all the things like hunting and fishing and trapping?

Why does the grandfather of the Indian want Attean (grandson) to know how to read English?

Crooked River

Why is their dad so mean?

Why did they accuse Amik of murdering the trapper if they didn’t see him?

Is Amik innocent or guilty?

Why is there lightning on the cover?

Did their dad kill the trapper?

Why were people so mean to Indians?

My Heart Is on the Ground

He loses his face. What does that mean?

What do “winters, suns, and moons” mean?

Where did Nannie’s brother get the war suit and props?

Did the girls have the same rights as boys at that time?

Nannie and her brother do not get along at the school. Did they at home?

The girls at the school got their hair cut off short. Why? We are white and we sometimes have long hair.

Wednesday, March 26: Our 2nd meeting day. Each group had read just over half of their book at a minimum. Before getting into their groups to meet, I asked the kids to each write me a letter, using some of the suggestions I had given them the previous week as a prompt:

- What kind of person do you think the main character is? Why?
- What do you think/feel about what's happened in your story so far? Why?
- Thinking about yourself as a reader, what challenges have you faced when reading your book?

I told the kids when they finished their letter to quietly take it to their meeting area, along with their book and wait for the rest of their group members. While they were waiting they could read. There were now three kids who had finished their book, so I reminded them to go back through the last chapter their group had agreed to read so they would know what events were okay to discuss, and which events had not yet happened for the rest of their group members. Some of the kids took the letter writing very seriously, so it took about 10 minutes for all the groups to have everyone together. I told the class they had a few options:

- Use their letters as the basis for beginning a discussion
- Use any burning questions they had to begin a discussion
- Discuss difficult/confusing parts of the book
- Discuss big ideas they had while reading—using their thinknotes as a reference.
- Continue a discussion they had started previously but not finished.

The discussions today went so much better! I had a parent helper in, so I felt more confident that between the two of us, we could provide support where needed and be sure the groups were all on task. (I have three parents who have been helping during my reading time for several months. They have spent many of their days sitting and observing strategy lessons, and helping the kids learn to be aware of and track their thinking. Now the payoff has come, as they can jump right in with the book club groups, understand

where their thinking is coming from, and probe them to think deeper, using the strategies we've learned. What a gift that's been for me and the kids!)

All groups were engaged in on-task discussion. I found as I visited the groups that I needed to throw out fewer questions for them and could be more of an observer. The Indian Captive group seemed most hesitant when I stopped by, but Rachael made a very thoughtful comment about Molly learning the Indian language, but things getting harder for her as a result. I asked her why she said that and she thought for a minute and said she wasn't really sure. I asked the girls to think about that, go back into the text if they needed to and see if they could figure it out. When I wasn't with them, they were still talking and I could hear that were on task when I listened in. They also came up with some good thoughts about the issue Rachael raised, primarily that it made her more like the Indians and she didn't want to be like them. Both my parent helper and I had an overhead transparency on a clipboard with +, quotes, - columns. Here are the notes we made:

In the + column:

- Abbey (Indian Captive) and Jessi (My Heart Is on the Ground) were both looking back in the text for evidence to support their thinking while they were writing their letters to me.
- The Crooked River group had a great conversation going about who killed Ten Claws. There were different opinions and they allowed each group member to express their thinking. Ultimately they went back to the text to resolve the issue.
- My Heart Is on the Ground group—Individual raised a question and the group members helped her understand character's traits by finding text in the book. This type of group cooperation and using the text happened several times.

In the Quotes column:

- Dylan (Blood on the River): "John was right at our last meeting. They are trespassing 'cuz they're in the Powhatan Empire."
- Rachael (Indian Captive): "When she learned to speak their language, things got worse for her."
- Logan (Crooked River): "It's like black people—they don't like them because of their skin color." Then Hannah L. added, "or because their culture is different."
- Gavin (Sign of the Beaver): "Does anyone have any new questions?"

In the – column:

- One group spent too much time worrying about someone paying bucks they owed for breaking a group rule. (I intervened with this group and reminded them that they didn't want to waste their discussion time worrying about that. They all knew he owed the bucks and could make sure he paid them at the end of the discussion time. They readily agreed to that and got back to discussing their book.)
- Note passing not related the Book Club discussion. (Even after trying to harness that desire to pass notes, it still goes on! 😊)

At the end of the day I asked kids how they felt it went today—they responded enthusiastically with, “Good!” “Great!” “I like this!” I asked if they felt they were learning new things about their book by talking about it with their classmates and almost all of the kids said yes, some resoundingly so. The best part of all—the bell rang and no one noticed—every group was engaged in discussion about their book and no one even looked up when the bell rang! (This included my kids who are the “clock watchers” for the last four or five minutes of class everyday—reminding me that the bell is about to ring.) I was on cloud nine! Unlike last week when I went home wondering if I had any clue at all about what I was doing, today became one of those, “This is why I teach!” days. 😊

Note: I took their letters home and wrote a response to each of them over the next few days. I asked them to respond back to me on Monday, March 31, and then I responded back to them again. On April 2, I gave them my responses and let them decide whether to respond to me or not. About half a dozen kids did write me back, (I made a point of somewhat loudly thanking them as they turned their letters into me) and I will give them my responses when we return from break. I can't wait to share these with you—I LOVE not only the exchanges we've had, but the fantastic thinking the kids are able to put into writing to share with me.

Thursday, March 27: I wanted to begin by using the overhead notes I had from the first two meetings. I had chosen not to do this after the first meeting because I wanted the debriefing to really focus on the positive, and I wasn't sure I was feeling positive enough myself or knew enough about what really happened in the first meeting to do that. But after the second meeting, I was ready to really help the kids see what was working and what wasn't. However, before I showed the kids my notes (and those of my parent helper), I wanted to get their thoughts about how things

went. I started by putting up a blank overhead divided into two columns: + and -. I tried dividing it into two rows, by meeting day, as well, but that ended up being futile because we couldn't always remember what happened in the first meeting and what happened in the second. I asked the kids to share with me what they thought went well and what didn't go well in their first two meetings. They were very quick to come up with the positives:

- When someone misunderstands something, we can help them.
- We get to learn the way other people think.
- Having the question charts helped give us focus.
- We were really “into it!”
- Group members help us understand.
- It makes the book more fun because you get to know what everybody else thinks about it.
- The book is less confusing when we share our thinking.

I had a more difficult time getting them to share even a single negative, until I reminded them that when we had our very first discussion about Book Clubs, we agreed that it was perfectly normal to have problems. Asking them to share those problems was not the same as asking them to “rat” on their friends. Rather it was a way to look at things that get in their way of good, productive discussions and figure out how to solve those problems. After I said that, hands went up. Here is what they shared, and the discussions that followed each point about how to resolve the issue:

- People off task—it is the responsibility of everyone in the group to gently remind those who aren't on task to get their focus back. The first person who notices the problem should always speak up. After that, the consequences the group agreed to should be applied.
- Someone from another group came over during our first meeting and got us off task. (They couldn't remember why someone from another group came over to them.)—We should nicely tell that person that we are discussing our book and they should be with their group discussing their book.
- “Sometimes I get confused when there are too many different ways to look at one thing. It can be frustrating.” (Interestingly, this student (Jessi) couldn't decide whether that should go in the + or - column. She felt it was some of both and the rest of the class agreed.) We really didn't come up with a solution to this problem, other than to have the

group members try to help each other sort through all the thinking when they get confused.

- We spent too much time arguing.—I asked the kids if they could remember our previous discussion about what to do if group members couldn't agree. Nick right away said to look in the text for evidence to support your thinking. I told him that was great, but asked again what would happen if their thinking was inferential and they couldn't agree whose inference was "right." Rachael immediately raised her hand and said, "It's okay to agree to disagree, and maybe they'll be able to end their argument after reading more." I asked if it was possible that they might finish the book and still disagree. Several of the kids said yes. "Is that okay?" I asked. Some of the kids seemed unsure, but a few said yes. I asked them why they thought it was okay and they responded that different kids could have different feelings about the book or make different inferences and they aren't necessarily right or wrong. (Aren't these just the smartest kids ever? 😊)
- Too much time spent trying to figure out one part of the book—We had a brief, but good discussion about this one. The kids decided that if they thought the part of the book they were discussing was really important to the overall story, that it was okay to spend a lot of time discussing it. However, if the majority of the group thought that part of the book was not so important, it was probably best to move on, and come back to it later if they found out something that made it more important.
- Not getting a chance to talk—this was an easy fix for the kids . . . they quickly realized that if this was a problem in their groups, they were forgetting to use the rules of polite discussion that our class regularly follows. They agreed to try to remind each other when the conversations became too dominated by one or two group members.

After that discussion, I showed the kids the overhead with my notes from the first two meetings. They loved seeing all the positives and quotes and were quite surprised that I had only one negative for each meeting. As I went through the positives and quotes, I asked the kids why they thought I wrote down each comment (wanting to be sure they understood exactly what was positive about it). They were right on in their responses. I really probed them on the quotes. In particular, I asked them why they thought I was excited about Dylan's comment to John. (I let them in on the fact that Dylan was referring to something John had said in their first meeting, and this was said in the second meeting. I also told them that he had stuck

a post-it note on the page where he realized John was right that said just that . . . “John was right!”) Of course their first response was that it was good that Dylan was willing to admit that John was right (implying that Dylan knew he was wrong). They also picked up on the fact that Dylan supported his comment with specific information from the text. It took a little more probing to get them to realize that I was also pleased with his comment because it showed that Dylan was not only paying attention to what was said in their first meeting, but remembered it while he was at home reading and took responsibility for getting back to John about his comment. Of course I told them how absolutely awesome I thought that was! We had equally good discussions about each of the other quotes. We also addressed the negatives and the kids were able to provide solutions based on our earlier discussions.

At this point we had about fourteen minutes left of class time, but the kids really wanted to get with their groups again. I suggested they focus on their question charts today, since they didn’t have a lot of time, and I was sure that many new questions had come up in their latest reading. I had a parent helper in again, so both of us observed and kept notes on an overhead. The best (and most endearing) part of their meetings today was how many kids were “copying” the positive behaviors we discussed during our debriefing. A couple even went so far as to seek me out and point out something to me that I’m certain they thought I would make note of. One example, which of course I did write down, was Abbey came up to me when I was between groups to tell me that when she was reading, she had some trouble keeping track of all the Indian characters. As a solution, she put a post-it note on the front cover of her book with all the Indian names and their relationships. While she was talking, she led me back to where her group was meeting, and then pointed out to me that she had made a duplicate post-it note for her group mate because she was having the same trouble. When I arrived, the whole group agreed that Hannah’s strategy was helpful, especially because the Indians changed names as they grew up.

Another deliberate behavior—once again the bell rang and no one noticed (although this time, I was watching . . . a few kids did notice, but wanted me to think they didn’t so they dug right back in with their groups. Nothing wrong with that!)

Here are the notes my parent helper and I made from our observations that afternoon:

In the + column:

- Abbey—Indian names are confusing, especially when they change. She made a post-it note for herself and a group member to keep track of them.
- Indian Captive group—everyone worked to help a group member understand how a baby who looks older could just be learning to walk. Their explanation was thorough and right on.
- Blood on the River group—They were disagreeing about how many walls the fort had after it was rebuilt following a fire. They immediately went to their books to clarify the issue.
- Sign of the Beaver group—Gavin worked to keep everyone involved in the discussion.
- Anna O. (*My Heart Is on the Ground*)—Shared the page number and exact text to help answer a group member’s question.
- *My Heart Is on the Ground* group—Anna N. raised a question just as class was ending. Rather than dismiss the question, the group agreed that they should all think about the question and start their next meeting by sharing their possible answers.

In the quotes column:

- Dylan (looking in text to support his thinking and realizing he was wrong)—“Oh, I must’ve read it wrong. I thought it said four walls.”
- Gavin (to a group member who had moved away from the group and was disengaging)—“We need you to participate with the group.”

In the – column:

- Whole group was off task for a few minutes (they assured me it was only a few minutes and my parent helper confirmed it).
- Someone was sitting away from the rest of their group (which was addressed by Gavin above).

Overall, I once again felt the meetings went very well. Except for the few minutes that the one group was off task, everyone got right in their groups and engaged in on task and appropriate discussions until we ran out of time. Some of the groups focused on their question charts, but others had some burning issues they wanted to discuss. (How great is that?!) Everyone continues to feel very positive about the Book Clubs!

Monday, March 31

Today I worked on modeling how to develop an inquiry question from the questions they had about their book. I used the story “An Angel for Solomon Singer” as a model. The whole class read this story earlier this year and had many questions both during and after reading it. I went back through their reading journals and found several good questions to work with as a base. I ended up using three of them. I put the questions into the four-column chart that the kids are using in their Book Club groups. I began just by listing the initial questions and letting the kids help me fill in the remaining columns. Since this exercise is a little off the topic of their actual inquiry questions, I’m going to take a shortcut here and just include the final chart for you. I will note that I learned one valuable lesson here . . . I really needed to use a book or article that the kids had read more recently, as some of them had a hard time remembering their thinking from the Solomon Singer book. I really had to push them to get them to remember that ultimately they decided Solomon Singer was probably homeless and that loneliness was his biggest problem. Here’s the chart:

Question	Answer(s)	New Questions	New/Revised Answer(s)
Why would Solomon live in a house he doesn't like?	He had nowhere else to go.	Why did he have nowhere else to go?	He's poor and has no job.
		Why did he pick that place?	Maybe it's the only place.
		Where else would he want to go?	He's homeless.
Why does he live in a hotel (for men)?	It's the only place he can afford. The hotel is a homeless shelter.	Why disguise a homeless shelter as a hotel? (I thought this question was so innocent!)	Maybe it was a hotel first.
Why can't he make himself happy?	He's living somewhere he doesn't want to live.	How long has he been sad?	Don't know.
	He's depressed.	Why is he depressed?	He doesn't like where he lives. He can't have what he wants.
	His name is Solomon so he's solemn.		He's lonely.

After completing the chart, I asked the kids to think about some BIG issues that are reflected in their questions and answers. They decided they wanted to focus on the issue of homeless people. I asked them what kinds of questions they had about homeless people that they might want to investigate further. Here's what they came up with:

- What do homeless people do?
- Where do homeless people stay?
- How do homeless people get food?
- Where do homeless people get money?
- Why are there so many homeless people in big cities?

We discussed that these questions were all good launching points for a good inquiry project. I asked the kids if they understood the process we had just completed and asked someone if they could summarize what we did. Logan summarized it quite well and the kids were eager to get in their groups and work on their question charts some more. We only had a few minutes left, but I let them take their charts and review the questions they had so far. That's about all the time we had for that day.

One final note—when the idea came up that Solomon was solemn due to his name, I thought, “Wow—now we could launch into a really interesting inquiry question there, such as ‘What’s in a name?’” However, I knew that about six of my kids would have relished commandeering class for the next week or more to explore that question, while another six or so would have been lost at the outset, with the rest going along for the ride. So, since this was really getting away from the object of the lesson—developing an inquiry question based on their reading, I somewhat reluctantly decided it was best to let that one go. I’m thinking I may revisit it on Monday and just use it to demonstrate how a totally unanticipated inquiry question can develop.

Tuesday, April 1

March Is Reading Month concluding assembly—no reading time. (Maybe now that March is Reading month is over we'll be able to regain some of our reading time. 😊) However, I do want to note that my class led the school throughout the month in time spent reading outside of school. My principal attributes it to my level of competitiveness. I told him it was due to the book clubs and the fact that the kids were devouring their books!)

Wednesday, April 2

I took just a few minutes to show the kids the comments the parent helper and I made during their previous meeting. They loved to see all the positives and knew right away how to handle the negatives. I gave them the rest of the class time to meet in their groups and work on their question charts. My parent helper and I both went right to work observing and assisting where necessary. Unfortunately, I forgot to give us both overheads to keep track of events. However, I have transcribed their charts below as they were at the end of class that day, and beneath each chart, added comments about things we noticed during their meetings.

Blood on the River (Chart was only two columns when we left off)

Questions	Answers
Why did the Indians trick the settlers?	Because they were going into the Powhatan empire.
Why did the English send women to Jamestown if all the men were dying?	
Are they allies or are they still enemies? (Powhatan and Colonists)	
Why would the gentlemen sign the contract if they didn't want to go?	
How would stealing a baby be out of love?	To make the mother come to the safer fort.
Why would King James make Jamestown crown Chief Powhatan as an English prince?	

Comments: This is the group that only had one question after the first day of working with their charts. I think the questions they have here are intriguing and I just need to get them thinking about the answers to help them develop some good possible inquiry questions. When I visited this group, which was toward the end of class, they were thinking about “big” issues and had come up with two: “Why do men and women have different jobs?” which I believe came out of the question about England sending women to Jamestown, and “Why do people try to be better than other people?” which came from the question about King James wanting to crown Chief Powhatan. In both cases, I think they need to clarify their questions more, and I think there may be other possibilities they’re not thinking about since they haven’t attempted to answer their remaining questions. For

example, the question about the gentlemen signing the contract really has to do with the issue of greed. That's where I'll be heading with this group next week. My parent helper did mention to me that the group was struggling with the one student who likes to distract and be off task, but were still managing to get their work done. I'll pull that student aside on Monday and remind him of the importance of taking an active and productive role in the group. Generally a reminder is all takes to keep him on track.

Indian Captive

Question	Answer(s)	New Questions	New/Revised Answer(s)
Why did the Indians take white people captive?	Indians think white people are pushing them out of their land.	Why were the white settlers pushing the Indians out of their land?	
Why were the Frenchmen with the Indians?	French and Indians fought with each other in the French and Indian war.		
What happened to the rest of the family and Davy?	Not answered yet.		
Are the places in the book real?			
Why is Turkey Feather (Little Turtle) the only kid one nice to her?	He's not the only person nice to her.		
Are the Indians in the book real people from a long time ago?			
Why do they have hunting parties for food during the winter?	Because food is scarce.		
Will Molly ever get to go home?			

Why do Indian people have to be strong?	The great spirit tells them to be strong.		
Why do the male captives have to run the gauntlet?		How long is the gauntlet?	
What happens to the people who don't survive the gauntlet?		What do they do with the dead captives bodies?	Inference: Burn them

My parent helper worked with this group and commented only that they had a lot of good questions. In looking over their chart, I see that there are some misconceptions that need to be cleared up (in particular, the reason why the Indians took white people captive), and some questions that will be answered next time they meet, now that they have finished the book. This group also needs to work on extending the answers and then I think they'll have some good possibilities for an inquiry question. Several of the questions they have center around Native American traditions and customs, so that may be something they want to look into further. Also, understanding the reason(s) Native Americans took white people captive is something they may want to investigate, although that is much more limited in scope. An extension of that might be looking into the lives of other white captives, their decisions to stay with their tribes or leave them, and gaining a greater understanding of the whole issue beyond just Mary's story. It will be interesting to see where their next meeting takes them.

The Sign of the Beaver

Question	Answer(s)	New Questions	New/Revised Answer(s)
Why did Ben steal the gun?	He didn't have one and he was jealous.		
Is Matt going to join the Beaver tribe?	NO!		
Where is Matt's family?	Came back!	Did the dad get the rest of the family?	Yes!

Why does the Indian show Matt how to do all the things like hunting and fishing and trapping?	They became friends.		
Why does the grandfather of the Indian want Attean to know how to read English?	So he can talk English. So he can learn the white man's way.	Why does he have to learn the white man's ways?	When they trade, they might want to be able to communicate.
Why would the Indian use a white man's weapon?	They were better.	Do they want to use an Indian's weapon?	
Is Attean's tribe going to come back?	No! L		
Did the dad get mad when Attean and Matt became friends?	Was not real happy/surprised	Why was the dad not happy when Attean and Matt became friends?	

I think this group is going to face the greatest challenge in coming up with an inquiry question. So far they are really limiting their thinking to literal events and ideas in the book. Although some of the answers to their questions are inferences, they mostly arrived at these with some coaching from me. They just don't seem to be pushing themselves to think deeper. Hindsight being 20/20, this may not have been the best combination of students. Of the four boys in this group, one is pretty good at delving deeper into ideas and questions. One is still struggling to really be metacognitive when he reads, although he's shown some growth with this book. One is an avid reader, but seems to limit himself when it comes to probing for deeper meaning, as if he just doesn't want to make the effort. My plan is to spend a little more time with this group on Monday and push them to the next level. In particular, I see some areas where a little guidance might help. First, I want to help them remember (from our background building lessons) that the real reason the grandfather wanted his grandson to learn English was so that the English couldn't continue to take advantage of the Native Americans with treaties they couldn't understand. That could combine with their knowledge about the Indians being forced out of their land to form a good inquiry question.

Second, I'd like to see them think deeper about the delay in Matt's family returning. I'm surprised they didn't ask, "What delayed the family?" The answer was illness, which could lead to another good inquiry question. The question about Indians using white men's weapons could also lead to an inquiry question relating the advantages and disadvantages of both groups' weapons. Was one really better than the other? Third, an extension of Attean's tribe not coming back would be "Why?" The answer is that they were worried about the white men growing in numbers and threatening their livelihood. While this relates to the question of land, it could also lead to a question regarding the issues that kept Native Americans and white people from living together successfully. Finally, the question they ask about Matt's dad accepting the friendship between Matt and Attean is one that they are struggling with because it's not answered in the book—it requires some fairly high-level inferential thinking. They were able to make the inference, but haven't been able to tell me why yet. I'm going to push them further on that too, which could ultimately lead them to same question about prejudice that the Crooked River group is looking at, which is fine.

Crooked River

Question	Answers
Why is their dad so mean?	Maybe he was raised wrong.
Why did they accuse Amik of murdering the trapper if they didn't see him?	Because he's an Indian.
Is Amik innocent or guilty?	Prediction: Innocent. Actual:
Why is there lightning on the cover?	Prediction: Amik saves them, Amik gets away
Did their dad kill the trapper?	!!NO!!
Why were people so mean to Indians?	Because they thought they were different.
Who really killed the trapper?	Prediction: Ten Claws Actual: Don't find out/Ten Claws
Why didn't they think that the other Indians were guilty?	Prediction: Amik is the only available one.
Why did the Nichols guy leave during questioning? Is it because he is guilty?	Prediction: Peter was proving him wrong. He was getting annoyed.
Why did they shoot Ten Claws?	Prediction: They were aiming for Amik.

This is the group that had already narrowed themselves down to the two questions about prejudice. Here are the notes they had when I observed them discussing their question:

- Do people treat Indians differently today?
- If they do, how so?
- Why did the people treat the Indians differently?
- What causes hatred and prejudice against one group of people?
 - Native Americans:
 - Different cultures
 - not like them
 - not “civilized”
 - don’t live in houses (live in teepees, longhouses, wigwams, etc.)
 - African Americans:
 - skin is different
 - families come from Africa

I had a very interesting conversation with this group when I asked them about their notes (which were only completed through the questions when I was observing them). I asked them their thoughts about whether people still treat Native Americans differently today. Hannah L. and Emily responded with comments like, “Well, I don’t think they do all that weird stuff anymore,” and “Do they still have all those strange beliefs and weird ways of doing things?” I asked them to stop for a minute and think about their own language in describing the Native Americans. They asked what I meant, and I said, “Well, you’re using words like ‘weird’ and ‘strange’ to describe them. Do you think they think they’re weird and strange?” At that point, Logan immediately jumped in and said, “I didn’t say that, I said ‘different.’” I was pretty sure at that point I could let the group wrestle with that question without further input from me, so I asked Logan why he thought his comment was different from Emily’s and Hannah’s and moved on to the next group.

A little while later, two members of the group (Logan and Kyle) were on a computer searching the Internet. I asked them what they were looking for and they said they were searching Google for “prejudice against Native Americans.” I gave a quick look over their shoulders to be sure that really was what they were doing and went to see what the other members of their group were up to. They were continuing to work on their notes, and had added the points above about Native Americans. A little while later, when I

was with another group, Hannah L. approached me and asked if all African Americans came from Africa. I had to clarify the question, asking, “Do you mean were all African Americans born in Africa?” She said no, but wanted to know if African Americans came from the Indies. I told her I thought that African Americans from the Indies had the same heritage as other African Americans, meaning someone from their past came from Africa, but I wasn’t positive and they might want to look into that further. I wasn’t aware at that point that they had added to their notes, “families come from Africa” as a reason why people might be prejudiced against African Americans. I’m going to push them on that thinking next week—asking them about the heritage of everyone in America, including Native Americans and their own families. It will be interesting to see where that takes them. I think that might combine well with what Logan told me at the end of class about what they were coming up with in their Internet search. He said, “We’re searching for prejudice against Native Americans, but it keeps bringing up stuff about other people, like the Jews and the Irish.” I responded, “That’s a good start.” Logan went to pack up his backpack, with a look his face that was a cross between questioning and thinking, “Mrs. Titcher really needs a break!”

My Heart Is on the Ground

Question	Answers
He loses his face. What does that mean? (23)	He lost his Indian past.
What do “winters, suns, and moons” mean?	Winters = years, moons = months, suns = days
Where did Nanny’s brother get the war suit and props? (37)	Inference: snuck in and got them from wherever they kept them.
Did the girls have the same rights as boys at that time?	No.
Nannie and her brother do not get along at the school. Did they at home?	Could be either.
The girls at the school got their hair cut off short. Why? We are white and we sometimes have long hair?	They would still have their only Indian past.
Why did Nannie Little Rose have to go with Pretty Eagle when she faints?	For comfort.
What is the sun dance?	Ceremony practiced by different Indian tribes.

Why didn't Nannie Little Rose's dad come with the other chiefs?

When Indians at that school die, they do not bury them in with the white people. Why do they bury them somewhere else if they want them to be like the whites?

What does it mean when it says, "His eyes are closed?"

Why would Pretty Eagle wear her best dress if she is getting it taken away?

She wanted to look here best for the last time she will wear wear her Indian clothes

When I got to this group, they were all gathered around a computer. I asked what they were looking for and they said information on the cemetery at the Carlisle Indian School. They explained their question to me from their chart and said they were looking to see if there really was a separate cemetery for the Indians. I told them I thought their question was a great one and definitely worth looking into. They came across the full-text article that I had edited for them and had them read after we read "Cheyenne Again." They looked at the first couple of pages and then decided they should go back to their search results. I encouraged them to scan the headings in the article to make sure there was nothing there that could help them. They scanned through several pages and came to the heading, "Carlisle Indian School Cemetery." I left them to read that part of the article and didn't have a chance to check back with them before the end of class.

Like the Indian Captive group, I think this group has the foundation for some good inquiry questions, but needs to extend their thinking beyond their initial questions and answers to get there. Many of their questions touch on the issue of the Native Americans losing their culture, which would be a great issue to explore. There is also the issue of the "double standard"—the people at the school wanted to make the Indians just like white people, but they still weren't willing to treat them like white people. There's a great question in that. Of course there's also the issue of girls and boys (men and women) not having the same rights. The kids also know from our discussions about "Cheyenne Again" that there were several schools around the country like the Carlisle Indian School. They might want to know more about those schools, the movement in general, and/or the results of those schools. What happened to the Native Americans

who went there? What happened to the schools? Lots of possibilities, and I'm not worried that this group will get there with just a little guidance in extending their thinking.

Thursday, April 3

Last day before Spring Break—we had several “all 5th grade” activities planned and there was no opportunity for reading. It was probably okay that day—there was almost no focus among the kids (and possibly me as well)! However, I do want to note that all of the kids have finished their books—even the Indian Captive group (300 pages, and the most difficult)! I really pushed them to do it, and they came through. (My “pushing” was in the form of making some strong suggestions when they set their reading goals, but allowing them to say, “Let’s see how we do over the weekend, and then if we need to revise our goal on Monday, we can do that.” No group needed to revise their goals, although there were one or two kids who came right down to the last night and weren’t sure they’d be able to do it. I also monitored their progress every couple of days by asking each student to report to me what page they were on. If they were ahead, I encouraged them to keep going. If they were behind, I asked if they still felt they could do it. I think seeing that everyone around them was making it work, they didn’t want to give in, so they said yes. I don’t know if those were the best methods to use, but it worked.

So, I/we have our work cut out for us when we return to school. I remembered that in addition to our assembly on Tuesday, we also have our end-of-the-year district testing on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday next week. It’s only about an hour each day, but enough to really disrupt our schedule. I’m going to try to negotiate with my fellow teachers for less “switch time” those days, but if it doesn’t happen, I likely won’t have reading time any of those days. 😊

I also promised to share with you some of my thoughts about the letter writing the kids did with me, as well as some excerpts from their letters. Here are the notes I made to myself when I was responding to their letters:

- These letters are providing me with some great insight into each individual’s thinking. Responding to them allows me to tailor my remarks to each individual student’s needs and successes.
- I probably invested way too much time in answering the letters (about three or four hours the first time alone), but if I had to do it over, I wouldn’t pass up the opportunity to extend their thinking and

build their confidence. Doing this was like having a conference with each kid, only in writing. The only bad part was that it took me from Wednesday, when they first wrote to me, until Monday to get them their responses, and I think it would have been more effective sooner.

- The day I gave them back their responses, I asked them to write back to me. I gave them the following options:
 - Answer the questions I asked in my response to them.
 - Share any new or revised thinking now that they've read more of their book
 - As a reader, share new problems and strategies.
- My first reaction when I read through their second letters—Gavin wrote more in his letter than he has written since he joined my class in mid-November, and included more thinking than he's shared all year as well! 😊 He also thanked me for writing him back. The combination of those two things spoke volumes to me about the value of these letters.
- The kids letters made me smile, encouraged me, made me think about issues/perspectives I hadn't thought of, and taught me more about this whole process than I ever could have learned in our discussions in class alone.

Here are just a few highlights (exactly as written by the kids). (I obviously need to teach them that “Indians” is a proper noun!):

- This first set of letters is the complete exchange between Francesca and me so far—I thought it would be good for you to see at least one complete exchange.
- First letter from Francesca (reading Indian Captive):

Dear Mrs. Titcher,

I kinda feel sad about the events that are happening in the story so far. I'm sad because I felt sorry at the beginning when I read that the Indians were planning to capture Molly's family. But later in the story, I started to feel happy because Molly had made new friends at Fort Duquesne. I just hope Molly makes it home again at the end of the story because then it would make me happy that she saw her folks again.

Sincerely,

Francesca Robinson

My first response to Francesca:

Dear Francesca,

I agree that what happens to Molly and her family is very sad. Did you think (like me) that the white people at Fort Duquesne were going to rescue her? I felt so sad when they didn't.

How do you think you would feel if you were Molly? Do you think Molly is changing as the story goes on? If so, how?

How are you doing with this story as a reader? Is it hard for you? Why or why not? I think you are doing a great job!

Sincerely,

Mrs. Titche

Francesca's second letter:

Dear Mrs. Titche,

I am following the story very well so far. I'm not having trouble with the story at all. I'm following the story good because it's easy to understand. It's not too confusing. Molly is changing a lot in each chapter. The reason she's changing is because at the beginning of the book, she was terribly sad because she missed her family a lot. In the middle of the book, she was becoming happy by making new friends and of the Indians teaching her new skills.

Sincerely,

Francesca Robinson

My second response to Francesca:

Dear Francesca,

I'm so glad you're not having trouble reading the story! When I read this book the first time, I thought some parts of it were challenging. Are you using a post-it note to help keep track of the characters like Abbey suggested? I think that would have helped me a lot.

I agree that Molly is changing a lot. Do you think she will ever be able to be really happy with the Indians or do you think she'll always feel sad and want to go to back to her family? Do you think she is becoming more like the Indians as the story continues?

Sincerely,

Mrs. Titche

Francesca's (voluntary) response to me:

Dear Mrs. Titcher,

I usually write my thinknotes and/or questions in my reading journal. I usually ask my group members, "Who's Red Bird?" "Who's Fallenash?" "Who's Shagbark?" etc. In the book, I'm wondering what has happened to Davy. The little boy Molly was looking after. I'm also wondering why Squirrel woman (the mean sister) is being so hard on her. I can't wait till I reach the end of the book. Then I can find out if Molly makes it home in time.

Sincerely,
Francesca Robinson

My response to Francesca (which she will get on Monday):

Dear Francesca,

You are so smart for keeping track of your thinking with thinknotes and then using them to help you with the hard parts of the book! You're also very smart to ask your group members for help when you're confused.

I also wondered what happened to Davy. I felt sad when Molly and Davy were separated. I wondered too why Squirrel Woman was so mean to Molly. Do you think maybe it was because she didn't like white people? That's just one idea I had.

I'm excited for you to finish the book! Let me know what you think when you're done!

Sincerely,
Mrs. Titcher

P.S. Thank you very much for writing me back, even though you didn't have to!

Excerpt of first letter from Abbey (reading *Indian Captive*):

"The events in the story are sometimes sad and happy. I felt excited when Fallenash came to the village because I thought that he was there to help Molly but he was just trading with the Indians. When Molly was in the forest with the younger Indians and the mother bear came I thought that at least one person [would die] and I just had to keep reading to see what was going to happen."

Excerpt of first letter from Nikki L. (reading *Indian Captive*):

“Everytime I pick up my *Indian Captive* book I feel suspense for Molly. What will the book say next is also very suspenseful, the book is also creepy because the Indians scalped white people, it makes me shiver.”

Excerpt of second letter from John (reading *Blood on the River*):

“I think the biggest thing that happened to Jamestown was when King George ordered them to put an English crown on Chief Powhatan because when they did, the Powhatans became their enemies.

“If the English hadn’t ordered Jamestown to do such dramatic things, Jamestown would be friends with almost every tribe in the area Jamestown was in. Because, if there’s an emperor, you don’t turn him into a prince!”

Excerpt of first letter from Mitchell (reading *Blood on the River*):

“Samuel is stubborn and thinks he can live in Virginia by himself. Captain Smith teaches him better. Captain Smith is a good role model.”

Excerpt of second letter from Nick (reading *Sign of the Beaver*):

“I think when Attean had to leave, he [Matt] was lucky that Attean showed him how to trap animals and fish.

“I thought it was really sad that the Baby died on the way back to the cabin. I wonder how late the dad was?” (Both of these thoughts were new—they were not in response to an earlier letter.)

Landon’s second letter (reading *Sign of the Beaver*):

Dear Mrs. Titcher,

Thanks for writing back.

In the book, I think that Matt must have had to be very brave and loyal to watch the cabin for seven whole weeks, waiting for his father to come back! I also think that when his family returns they will be good friends with the Indians. Although I don’t think Matt’s Dad will support it at first!

Your friend,

Landon Nethercott

Excerpt of first letter from Hannah L. (reading *Crooked River*):

“The only challenges I have had are understanding the Indian completely and putting the book down because the book is SOOO good!”

Excerpt of second letter from Hannah L. in response to my asking why she thought people treated the Indians so poorly in *Crooked River*:

“I think the Indians were treated poorly because they had different cultures and languages. They also had different skin color. That question won’t be answered though because it’s just like African Americans. Did one person just wake up one day and say I am going to be mean to blacks or Indians today? I think that it’s mean that people do that stuff. I think that being different is better!”

Excerpts of an exchange between Logan and me (*Crooked River*):

From Logan’s first letter:

“My main character Rebecca is not super strong, but strong. She has lots of guts to think something different than her father.”

Excerpt from my response:

“I think it’s very interesting that you say Rebecca is not super strong, but strong. I like that thinking. You told me why you think she’s strong (and I agree) . . . why do you think she isn’t strong?”

Excerpt from Logan’s second letter:

“Rebecca isn’t strong because she won’t stand up for herself. Like she won’t stand up to her father.”

My response to Logan:

“Wow—you really got me thinking! I was feeling like Rebecca was very strong for going against her Pa’s wishes, but you made me realize that if she really were as strong as I thought, she would stand up to her Pa. Thank you for helping me to think more about that!”

Excerpts of second letter from Jessi (reading *My Heart Is on the Ground*):

“I think Nannie Little Rose likes going to her school because she learns and makes friends. I think she would change Pretty Eagle dying. I would feel very sad and mad that my friend died and that my spirit helper died because they were special to me.

“ . . . This is a very interesting story for me. I’m going to read more books about the Carlisle school like this one.”

Excerpt of first letter from Anna N. (reading *My Heart Is on the Ground*):

“I think that Nannie Little Rose is a wonderful character who has a lot of courageousness and proudness. I think that she is courageous for example, when she slashed her arms and cut her hair when Pretty Eagle dies is very courageous, even though it was scary. I think she is very strong being able to stand up to Belle Rain Water.

“I think that so far in the story, I am almost able to feel how much Nannie Little Rose dislikes the Carlisle Indian School, but also how much she also enjoys it.”

(In my response to Anna, I asked Anna why she thought Nannie Little Rose disliked the school, but yet was still happy sometimes. Her response was right on):

“I also think that she is happy to be at the school because she knows she should be there for a reason. But she has a right to be unhappy at being there because she is treated disrespectfully there. She gets bullied, and ordered around by some of the teachers.”

The following exchange between Nikki (same Nikki as above) and me is my personal favorite:

From Nikki:

“The book is moving along really well. Sometimes it’s confusing. Did you ever feel it’s confusing in parts? I want to do another book club after this but I’ve never read a 300 page book in 3 weeks.”

(I love the fact that she felt comfortable enough to ask me a question about my reading experience!)

My response to the above excerpt:

“The first time I read this book, I got confused in different parts. Usually if I slowed down and read the confusing parts again, it got better.

“How do you feel about reading a 300 page book in 3 weeks? Did you think you could do it 3 weeks ago? I thought you could and I’m very proud of you for rising to meet the challenge! Don’t worry though, I won’t ask you to do that again . . . at least not for a while, but doesn’t it feel great to know you could?” 😊

Nikki's response to me:

"I feel really strong about 6 feet tall reading a 300 page book in 3 weeks. I had no idea that I could read a book in 3 weeks till I did. It was amazing. Now during summer vacation I'm going to read all of the books on my shelf that I haven't already read."

(Okay, after reading that, I figured that even if nothing else good came out of our Book Clubs, that in and of itself would make it all worthwhile! Of course, many other good things have happened, but to me, this one takes the cake!)

Monday, April 14

In my last e-mail to you, I mentioned that I was debating letting the kids have a jigsaw meeting to share their books a little. I decided to leave it up to the kids. So, today I began by explaining my thinking to the kids . . . that I thought it might be nice for them to share some of what they learned from each of their books with each other, and that doing so might help them see some of the "big" issues that the books have in common. Dylan said he thought he knew at least some of what the books have in common, and that started a discussion with several of the kids piping in their ideas. Here's the list they came up with, before even discussing the books with each other:

Things our books have in common:

Native Americans

Take place in the New World

Historical Fiction

All good books—everyone liked their book a lot (no exceptions!) (This led to a brief aside in which Kailee and I shared that after she'd read the first section of her book, *Blood on the River*, she didn't really think she liked it that much. But she stuck with it and ended up REALLY liking the book.)

All have main characters who are living somewhere other than their original/primary home

As you can see, the kids were not really thinking "themes" and "big ideas," which is exactly what I suspected after going over their question charts. So, I explained what we would do if we decided to have a jigsaw meeting:

1. Meet in original book club groups and answer a few questions from me.

2. Meet in jigsaw groups and share a brief overview of each book, and the answers to the questions from me.
3. Go back to their original groups and discuss what they learned about each of the other books and all the books together.

I asked if they were interested in doing that. Although a few kids said, “sure,” overall, they were pretty quiet. I asked if we needed to take a vote, and they said no, they thought everyone wanted to do it. To be sure, I asked if anyone was opposed to doing it, and no one spoke up (In general, the kids will speak up in my class when they are given a choice about doing something that they don’t want to do). So, I had them get some paper and a pencil and go to their Book Club group meeting areas. I put the following four questions up on the overhead:

1. What did you learn about the period of history in your book?
2. What was the relationship between Native Americans and whites in your book:
 - in general
 - with the main characters
3. What Native American customs/traditions did you learn about?
4. What do you think the author’s purpose or message was (big ideas)?

I told the kids they each needed to write down their groups’ answers because they would need to share them in the jigsaw groups. I also told them I would be collecting them when we were all done. Here are the notes I took while observing the groups at work:

+ comments:

- The girls in the Indian Captive group were waiting to make sure everyone in their group had their notes completed before moving on to the next question.
- Each person shared what they learned in the Blood on the River group.
- John helped a group member remember/understand an event in the book.
- Dylan looked in his book for clarification of an issue they were discussing.

Quotes:

- “White people were mean to Indians because they didn’t think they were civilized.”—Logan/group

- “It was hard for the Indians to get what they wanted.”—Kenzie
- (I asked, “Why?”) “Because the whites kind of took advantage of them.”—Jessi

- I asked the My Heart Is on the Ground group what they thought the author wanted to leave them thinking about:
 - “We’re free.”—Kenzie
 - “We can go home at night.”—Jordan
 - “The school was both good and bad.” —Jordan
 - (I asked her to clarify that for me.) “It’s good because they learned the language and new skills. It’s bad because they were taking away their Native American ways. It’s also good because it helped whites and Indians have a better relationship.”

– **comments:**

- 2 groups were completely off-topic and off task for a period of time.

Here’s a sampling of each group’s answers (since these were notes for their jigsaw discussion, I did not specify to write in full sentences):

Blood on the River

1. History:

Jamestown burned down.

Samuel Collier was a real person—Captain John Smith had a page.

They [the English] sent supplies to Jamestown.

It was a hard trip from England to Jamestown.

2. Relationships:

In general—not really good (off, on, off, on, off), angry

Main Characters—Better than in general, they had friends in the Indian tribes)

3. Traditions/customs:

The Indians had feasts for guests

4. Author’s message:

When you try something new, it’s not easy.

Don’t give up.

Respect others.

Sign of the Beaver

1. History:

We learned that white men got 100 acre lots in Maine for free.

Indians and white people tried to avoid each other.

The Indians had to keep moving north and west.

2. Relationships:

In general—both tried to avoid each other.

Main Characters—At first they tried to avoid each other, then they became friends.

3. Traditions/customs:

When an Indian kills a bear, they have a ceremony, but the Indian who killed the bear would not be allowed to have any bear meat.

Indians had their own hunting grounds that only they could hunt on. Other tribes had their own land.

When an Indian is old enough, he/she goes into the woods with no food to find his manitou (spirit helper).

4. Author's message:

Things are easier when you have friends.

Indians helped whites and whites helped Indians.

Indians taught white men how to do a lot of stuff.

Crooked River

1. History:

The white people were mean to the Indians because they were different.

Indians were not supposed to cross the river.

2. Relationships:

In general—the whites and Indians were mean to each other.

Main Characters—Rebecca was scared of Amik in the beginning, they became friends at the end.

3. Traditions/customs:

Indians believed in many different gods.

If someone gave the Indians something, they had to give something back.

4. Author's message:

Don't hate someone before you actually know them.

Whites hate Indians!

Whites weren't very nice to Indians.

Indian Captive

1. History:

White people didn't like Indians and Indians didn't like white people.

White people got captured by the Indians regularly.

2. Relationships:

In general—Indians and white people hated each other in the beginning.

Main Characters—Molly didn't like the Indians and the Indians didn't like Molly. In the end they liked each other. The Indians taught Molly all kinds of things.

3. Traditions/customs:

Male captives had to run the gauntlet.

They used to make clay pots/pans for trading.

They got sap during fallish.

4. Author's message:

Author wanted to teach people about the Indian Ways.

Author wanted to tell what Mary Jemison's life was like.

My Heart Is on the Ground

1. History:

It was hard for the Indians to get what they wanted because the whites kind of took advantage of them.

2. Relationships:

In general—They did not have a good relationship and they didn't respect each other.

Main Characters—The whites wanted the Indians to be like them.

3. Traditions/customs:

The sun dance

When a relative died, they cut their hair and left food by the grave for their spirit.

4. Author's message:

The author wanted to teach us what it was like at the Carlisle Indian School.

Generating the answers to these questions in their groups took the remainder of the class period.

Wednesday, April 16

The kids asked for ten minutes to work with their Book Club groups to finish answering the questions from Monday. Then I put them into jigsaw groups with one person from each book in a group (two groups had two people from a book, due to our two 5-person groups).

I instructed the kids to each share a little bit about their book (since it had been awhile since they heard about them in my book talks), but to be careful not to give away too much. Then I asked them to share their answers to the four questions I gave them on Monday. After each person had shared, I wanted them to discuss what they thought all five books had in common. The kids started out a little slow in these groups. It was pretty much just reading their notes to each other and when they got done, they weren't really sure how to figure out what all the books had in common because they hadn't really presented their own books in a thoughtful way and hadn't really paid attention to what others shared about their books (mostly my fault, I know—I need to learn how to better prepare the kids for these jigsaw groups). So, I had a quick impromptu meeting with my parent helper to give her some guidance as to how to get the kids thinking at the next level and add some meat to their discussions. Then I put the following question up on the overhead and instructed the kids to work together to try to answer the question (noting that they should add their answer to their notes, and reminding them I would be collecting those notes):

What ideas, themes, or messages do all (or most) of your books have in common?

That got them started, but they still seemed to struggle. Their initial answers were things such as:

“White people and Indians were treated unfairly because they were different.”

“Someone died in every story.”

“There is a mean Indian in every story.”

“In all of the books, Indians were not given the same rights as white men.”

“All the books took place between 1607 and 1880.”

“All the stories have at least one main character under 15 years old.”

“Most people were treated unfairly through the 1700s and 1800s because they were different and the whites were pushing the Indians out of the land.”

“In all of our books it has something about white people hating Indians.”

“Indians and white men traded in every story.”

So, my parent helper and I went to each group and chose a comment of theirs to get them to expand upon. For the most part, it was asking them why they thought there was so much conflict between the Indians and whites. They came up with the following ideas (this is combining all the groups' ideas):

- “They were different.”
- “They didn’t trust each other.”
- “Indians didn’t trust the whites either. The whites were bringing disease and invading their land.”
- “There were no laws for the two groups to live together.”

Then I put another question up on the overhead and encouraged them to use their ideas in answering that question to help answer the first question. The second question was:

What would you have changed or what would have needed to be different for the Indians and white people to have trusted and liked each other so they could live together?

Now I started to hear some more lively discussions. Most of the groups began with things like, “They needed to trust each other,” which of course led me to ask something along the lines of, “Why didn’t they trust each other?” or “What would have needed to be different for them to trust each other?” Jessi said she thought they needed to have laws for living together in one community. Hannah L. commented that she thought the Indians and whites should have compromised to change things, and another student (I think it was John) said that the white people should not have intruded on the Indians land without asking. Of course, just as I felt they were hinting at some really good thinking, the bell rang. Looking over their notes after class I found some additional ideas:

Emily wrote that the white people and Indians needed to be around each other long enough to learn about each other, and that the Indians should have given the white people stuff to make the whites know they were not so bad.

Rachael wrote, “Each group only knew themselves and thought they did everything right- don’t hate people before you get to know them.” She also wrote, “The Indians and whites could have shared land.”

Thursday, April 17

I decided, based on the bits and pieces of discussion I picked up on in each group on Wednesday, that rather than have the kids meet in their groups today to continue/finish what we started yesterday, that it was time to get them together as a whole class and let them build on each other’s thinking. We got in a big circle on the floor, notes in hand from the previous two days of meetings. I told the kids I wanted to see if we could work together to figure out if the authors of all their books had any messages in common. At that point, I got called away for a minute, so I told the kids to begin their conversation. When I returned, they told me they had come up with, “It’s a mystery.” At first, I wasn’t clear what they meant by that, so I asked, “You mean, there is a mystery of some kind in each book?” They responded, “No, we think the message of the books is a mystery.” F Then John added, “The authors want us to infer the message, they don’t just tell us what it is.” I said that was exactly right, and that most of the time we have to infer authors’ messages. Hannah L. said sometimes authors come right out and tell the message, and I agreed, offering the example of fables, but also emphasized that usually, the message is there, but not openly stated. I referred back to “An Angel for Solomon Singer” and all the work the kids did with that book to infer the author’s message. Then I asked, “What do we know from your books about the relationship between Indians and whites during the 100+ years of American history covered in your novels?”

I let them run their own discussion for a few minutes to respond to that question. Some of their comments included:

“People didn’t like Indians because they were weird.” (Hannah L.)

“People didn’t like Indians because they were different, and the Indians didn’t like the white people because they were stealing their land.”
(Abbey)

“The white people hated the Indians because they believed in a lot of different gods.” (Kyle)

“Whites wanted the Indians to be like them. If they were different, that wasn’t good.” (Jessi)

“White people only wanted there to be one type of person.” (Kenzie)

“White people couldn’t understand Indians because they were different. It was more than just language, it was that they didn’t/ couldn’t understand each others’ ways. The white people didn’t know how the Indians did things.” (Rachael)

“The Indians and white men mistrusted each other. They thought that their way was the only way and weren’t used to each other.”

“Yeah, but some people did believe that the Indians were weird, because of the clothes they wore and stuff.” (Hannah L.)

At that point, I asked the kids to think about whether people thought the Indians were weird, the things they did were weird, or both. We talked about the difference between thinking the people were weird versus thinking they behaved weirdly. Most of the kids agreed that the white people probably thought that what they did was weird, because they really didn’t know the Indians well enough to know if they were weird. They also all agreed that the Indians probably thought the white people behaved weirdly as well.

“White people are judging a book by its cover when they think Indians are weird by the way they dress.” (John)

“I want to respond to what Kenzie said earlier and the white people wanting there to be one type of person. People have different personalities. Technically they can’t all be exactly the same. Making them the same would . . . (stuck)” (Abbey)

“Maybe the white people wanted the Indians to be like them because maybe they were jealous.”

“Yeah, because they all needed the same things, but the Indians were better at surviving than the whites.” (Dylan)

There was some more discussion regarding Hannah’s comment about people having different personalities, and not everyone can be the same. I attempted to clarify for the kids the difference between trying to change someone’s personality, and trying to change the way they do things. Then I asked which they thought the white people were trying to do when they tried to make the Indians more like them. Abbey said she thought some of both, because changing the way they lived would also change their

personalities. At that point, Nikki added, “If everyone was the same, the world would be boring.”

Then the kids started talking about the attacks between the Indians and whites, making comments like, “The Indians attacked the settlers—the settlers were just defending themselves.”

Mitchell commented that in Jamestown, the Indians welcomed the settlers with food and gifts, and helped them. I told Mitchell that was true at first, but then asked him if he was the one who put the question on their chart about why the Indians would trick the settlers by being nice to them and then attacking them. He said yes, and then took a thoughtful pause before saying, “I guess the Indians did attack the white people.” Hannah L. added, “I think the Indians didn’t think the whites were bad, I think they were just scared of them.”

I asked the kids to think about their books and share any attempts that were made between the Indians and whites to try to understand each other (we ended up referring to this as “building bridges”).

John brought up that in the Jamestown Charter (the primary source document we read), the settlers were advised not to anger the Indians. I asked John what he was basing that on, and he responded that he inferred it because the document told the settlers to settle away from the Indians so they wouldn’t get mad at them. Other comments that were added included:

“In *Blood on the River*, John Smith tried to establish a relationship with the Indians.” (Dylan)

“In *Crooked River*, Rebecca tried to get to know Amik, but the rest of the people didn’t want the Indians anywhere near them.” (Hannah L.)

“Nannie Little Rose, in *My Heart Is on the Ground*, didn’t want to go home to her tribe, even when she could.” (Kenzie)

“In *Sign of the Beaver*, the grandfather wanted the Indian boy to learn English.” (Nick)

“This kind of reminds of what we learned about in social studies with the African Americans counting as 2/3 of a person. The whites didn’t really think of the Indians as people in the same way they thought of themselves.” (Landon)

I asked the kids what they thought about Landon’s comment and they agreed that he was probably right. Then, going back to Nick’s comment, I asked the kids why they thought the Indians felt it was so important to learn English.

“They needed to learn English so they could read letters.” (Emily)

“So if the whites were planning an attack, and they got a hold of their plans, they could read them.” (Dylan)

“So they could trade with the white people.” (Nick)

“So they could understand the white people’s treaties.” (Anna N.)

After Anna’s comment I stopped them and asked Anna to repeat her comment again. Then I asked them why that would be important. John said it was because the treaties were like trick contracts—the white people could tell the Indians one thing, but put something different in the treaty that the Indians signed. It was a way of stealing their land. I asked the kids if they agreed with that thinking, and they did.

Since the clock was relentlessly pushing toward the end of the day, I went back to our original question, saying, “So, now that we have talked about all those things, what do you think the authors of all of these books want you to understand?” Among the answers:

“Don’t judge people before you get to know them.” (Hannah L.)

“Yeah, you have to try to get to know people.” (Jessi)

“The Indians and whites didn’t trust each other.” (Logan)

“It makes you afraid to be around people you don’t trust. The whites and Indians didn’t trust each other, so they were afraid of each other and acted out of fear.” (Mitchell)

“Both the Indians and the whites were treated unfairly in our history.” (Dylan)

“They should have compromised and changed something about both of their ways to live together.” (Anna N.)

Then, you guessed it, the bell rang. (Although the kids really didn’t seem to notice—no one attempted to get up and leave the conversation.) I asked the kids if they all felt they had some ideas now of what the authors might have wanted us to understand from their books, and they all said they did.

Looking back over the kids notes after the groups met on Wednesday, I felt that maybe I had shortchanged them again—not giving them enough time to really process and dig deeper into their thinking. But as we went through the conversation today and I looked back over my notes of what the kids shared, I feel better. While I still would have liked more time for this whole activity, I think all the kids did benefit from the discussions of

the last couple days and hope it will help them in thinking through their own question charts and developing their inquiry questions.

Monday, April 21

I began today by talking to the whole class about extending their question charts, looking for “big issues” and developing a big question that they all agreed they wanted to investigate. I put up the Solomon Singer example we had worked through and briefly went over it as a reminder. Then I briefly addressed each group individually, but still in front of the whole class, thinking that if they got a glimpse of what the other groups were thinking, it might help those groups that were struggling a little. I used my notes about their question charts from last week to guide this discussion.

Then I let them work, attempting to visit each group for brief periods of time. However, I spent most of my time with the Sign of the Beaver and Heart on the Ground groups (see notes below).

One side note here: I realized fairly quickly today that I forgot to include one very important person in my plans. Fortunately, our library paraprofessional is both a saint and very quick on her feet. So, when she was swarmed with two groups from my class asking questions and looking for resources, it didn't phase her in the least. However, I did apologize for forgetting to warn her ahead of time and let her know that she could expect several more visits from my kids!

All of the groups made good progress today, some more than others:

Blood on the River

They didn't work on extending their question chart at all because they decided fairly quickly that they wanted to look at the equal rights issue. I asked them what aspect(s) of equal rights they wanted to learn about—the history of equal rights or the status today? They decided they wanted to see what they find and where it takes them. They all went to the library and found several books and a couple of Internet sites to investigate. They went over the materials they found and split up who would do what.

Crooked River

This group also did not revisit their question chart since they already began pursuing the prejudice question. They visited the library and checked out several books. The librarian told them she did not have any books directly related to prejudice toward Native Americans, but they were welcome to the

books she had that addressed the issue in relation to African Americans. One of the books they came back to class with was book on Colin Powell. Since it was a low reading level book, they read through it quite quickly. Hannah L. came up to me and said, “We already read this book and it has nothing at all to do with our topic. It doesn’t even mention the word prejudice in it. I have no idea why Mrs. Harreld (librarian) gave it to us, so I’m taking it back to the library.” I reminded Hannah to consider the fact that he was black and asked her if she thought he could he have done what he did fifty years ago in our country? She was already on her way out the door when I asked her this and since class was ending, I let her go, reminding myself to discuss this with the class on Wednesday.

Indian Captive

This group began by looking at their question chart and decided they wanted to try to find out what happened to Davy Wheelock. They were searching on-line when I approached them and they told me they couldn’t find anything. I discussed with them that they really were raising the larger question of what happened to white captives in general, and maybe they would like to look at that for their inquiry question. We talked about questions related to that, such as how many white captives decided to stay with the Indians and how many returned to the whites when given the opportunity? What factors went into those decisions? We also discussed the possibility of looking into the outcome for other specific white captives, like Mary Jemison. Finally we looked over their chart again and talked about how the majority of questions on their chart had to do with Seneca customs and traditions and maybe that was something to investigate. At that point, I summarized for them the options they had so far and left them to discuss it. At the end of class, told me they were going to look at Seneca customs and traditions, and maybe what happened to the Seneca Indians after the time period covered in their book.

Sign of the Beaver

This continues to be the most difficult group to keep moving ahead. I went to this group first, concerned that they might not do anything without some further direction. When I got to them, they had their question chart and were beginning to go back over their questions. The kids were painfully silent as I tried to prod their thinking and get a discussion going. I began by trying to work through parts of their chart with them. We looked at their question about whether or not the dad got the family. They had

answered it simply, “Yes.” I asked if that brought up any new questions for them. Silence. I asked them if the dad came back with the family in the seven weeks time frame he told Matt he would. They said no. I asked if that made them wonder about anything. Silence. Finally I said, “You know, I wonder why it took him so much longer than expected?” That got them talking, since the book said the family had been sick and couldn’t travel. After they shared that with me, I asked if they knew what type of sickness the family had. Landon looked up it in his book and said it was Typhus. I asked if any of them knew what Typhus was and they all said no. So I pointed out that they did have a new question after all and that was, “What is Typhus, and why did it keep the family from traveling?” I reminded them that in both reading and social studies they had learned that the white men brought lots of new diseases to the Native Americans and as a result many Native Americans died. I asked them if reading about a white family having a disease called Typhus, brought up any bigger questions for them. More silence. So I shared that I was inferring that it could mean different illness were a big problem for everyone in the New World, and that might be something they’d like to investigate as a group. They all shook their heads and mumbled some, “Yeahs,” so I wrote under “Big Issues” on their chart, “Diseases that affected our history.” Then we looked at the question about why it was so important to the Native American grandfather that his grandson learn English. They remembered from our whole class discussion that it was so he could help them understand the treaties the white men asked them to sign. The boys had written on their chart the new question of “Why would they do that?” referring to the white men taking advantage of the Indians. I asked them what they thought and of course there was more silence. I asked them if the white men thought the Indians were civilized in general and they said no. When I asked them what they thought the white men believed about the Indians, they answered that they thought they were savages. I asked them what issue(s) that raised in their minds, and again there was silence. It felt like they were afraid to speak up. I reminded them that there were no right answers here, that it was about sharing their thoughts. I thought maybe my presence was inhibiting them, so I told them exactly that and asked them to continue the discussion without me, then keep working on extending their chart and looking for big issues they could explore. Since I went from them to the group working next to them, I could keep an eye on them. They spent the remaining time working on their chart.

My Heart Is on the Ground

This group began where they left off—looking at the cemetery issue. They looked up the Carlisle Indian School article again (which this time I printed for them), and confirmed the cemetery was real. I asked them to think about two of their questions from their chart: Why were Indians buried in a separate cemetery if they wanted them to be like whites? and Why cut the Indian girls' hair when white girls often have long hair? Jessi said she thought it was because the white people treated the Indians as less important than whites. I asked the rest of the girls what they thought and they all agreed. I explained the expression “double standard” to them and told them they could look at the issue of why Indians were treated as less important than whites or why there was a double standard for them. Then we revisited their question about why her brother came back to the school after running away. They had all looked in their book and decided it was because of his dad's new wife. I told them I thought there was probably more to it than that. I had the girls look in their books and find the part where he explained why he came back. I told them to read over that part and see if they could figure out what other reason(s) he had for returning to the school. At that point, the bell rang. I suggested the girls look at that passage at home and begin their next meeting by seeing if they could answer the question.

Wednesday, April 23

Our schedule was a mess today because of meetings with the kids to get them ready to leave for 5th grade camp in the morning. However, I managed to arrange things so that I would have two chunks of time for reading—about 30 minutes in the morning, and our normal 45 minutes in the afternoon.

I used a little over half the time in the morning to give the kids a little more direction once they started working on their question. In particular, I talked to the kids about spending some time figuring out how they could go about researching their question. I suggested they work as a group to brainstorm all the different terms and phrases they might use to find information on the Internet, and also how they were going to explain to Mrs. Harreld what they were looking for. I also discussed “dividing and conquering.” They knew exactly what I meant by that, but just to be sure, I asked them how that applied to what they were doing. They responded with comments such as, “We don't have to be working together on one Internet search. We can each search for something different.” “We don't all have to read everything we find. We can split up the reading, then tell

the rest of our group what we read about.” That was enough to tell me they understood the concept.

I also talked to the kids about evaluating the information they find and determining its relevance to their question. I gave them the example of the Colin Powell book that the Crooked River group had read. Hannah L. allowed me to share our brief discussion with the class when she told me she was returning the book because it had nothing to do with their topic. As expected, she couldn’t remember what I said to her on the way out the door, as she was intent on getting the book back to the library. So, I shared with her and the class that just because a resource they have doesn’t explicitly mention their topic, doesn’t mean it’s not important to them. I explained who Colin Powell was, and the fact that he was the first black (Jamaican/American) man to reach a position of such authority in our government. I asked them what they thought that had to do with the group’s topic of prejudice. It took them a few tries, but they eventually realized that it had to do with the progress we’ve made in our country in overcoming prejudice and believing that people of color are just as capable as white people. Then we talked about the inferences needed to come to that realization, and how they could work together as a group to determine if information they find that is not clearly related to their topic might still be important to them.

Finally, I talked to the kids about the time frame for their inquiry projects. I told them I thought that our reading time this afternoon and next week would be devoted to finding and going over their research and putting together an answer to their question. Then the next week they would need to work on their Assessment Live presentation, and we would begin doing the presentations at the end of that week. I asked them if they thought that sounded like a lot, and they said yes, but I reassured them they could do it by reminding them that they all read and discussed their books in three weeks time. The kids were left with about ten minutes to meet in their groups. I spent the time with the two groups that hadn’t finalized their question yet—*Sign of the Beaver* and *My Heart Is on the Ground*.

Sign of the Beaver

I looked over their chart and saw they had indeed added to it after my last discussion with them. In response to the question about why the white men would take advantage of the Indians in their treaties, they wrote, “They thought they were savages, so they thought it would be good for them if they moved them.” They had added, then crossed out and revised an answer to the question, “Why was the dad not happy when Attean and Matt became friends?” Their

initial answer that was crossed out said, “Maybe he was a mean white man.” The new answer said, “Maybe he thought the Indians were savages.” Then at the bottom of their chart, Landon had written under Big Issues, “Where did the white men get the idea that the Indians were savages?” Finally, they had written in response to their question about why the Indians were not going to return to their home after the hunting season, “They knew more white men’s houses were going to be built, so they did not want to be run over.” I asked them to think about that in terms of our history with the Native Americans and what issues that might raise for them. Then I told them to look at their big issues and decide which one they were most interested in investigating as a group. I told them they could come get me anytime if they got stuck. A short time later they came to me and said they had decided on their question. Looking at their chart, they hadn’t added any other issues to consider (at least in writing), but decided they wanted to look into the question, “Where did white men get the idea that Indians were savages?” I told them that was fine, although I know they are going to have to do a LOT of inferring and deeper thinking to really arrive at an answer to this question. It will be interesting to see how they go about looking for information and what they find.

My Heart Is on the Ground

When I got to this group, they were talking about why the brother returned to the school after running away. They still thought it was because of the new stepmother. I asked if any of them had gone back and reread the part of the book where he explained why he came back, and Kenzie said yes, but she didn’t find any other reasons. I asked the girls if they thought he was just unhappy at the school before he ran away, or really miserable. They all responded that he was truly miserable. When I asked why, they said because he felt he didn’t belong there and didn’t fit in. Then I told them that I thought if he ran away because he was truly miserable and felt he didn’t belong at the school, then once he was back home with his tribe, it would take a lot to make him want to go back to the school. They agreed, but weren’t sure what other factor(s) made him return. So I borrowed a book and looked up the passage in the book where it explains the reasons he returned in addition to his step-mother. I read this to them slowly, stopping to ask at various points what they thought he was saying. After reading the whole passage, they realized that he returned because he didn’t fit in with his tribe anymore either. I asked them how they thought he felt now, and they said he must have felt pretty bad because there was really no place for him. So we talked about how that is another issue they might want to investigate . . . What

was the outcome for most of the students who attended the Indian schools? Jordan asked, “If the Indian parents knew that the schools were going to teach their kids all these skills they couldn’t use at home, why would they send them to the school in the first place?” I told Jordan that was a great question and asked if they remembered the main reason the Indians wanted their kids to go to the schools. Kenzie said, “So they could learn English and help their tribes understand what the white people were saying and writing in their treaties.” Kenzie also explained to Jordan that the parents probably didn’t know that the white people were going to have their kids learn all the other skills and try to take away all their Native American ways. I told Kenzie I thought that was very good thinking, but Jordan’s question was also one they could investigate further. Finally, we talked about how there were many other schools like the Carlisle school, and they might want to look into those. I left them to decide which issue they wanted to investigate. They came to me about five minutes later and said they wanted to find out about other schools like the Carlisle school and also the question of why Indian parents chose to send their kids to these schools.

The Blood on the River Group and the Indian Captive groups, in the few minutes of time they had, met to work on search terms they could use. The Blood on the River Group had come up with two, so I offered a couple of suggestions to expand their thinking. The Crooked River group was mostly looking over the materials they had gotten from the library on Monday. Then it was time for our camp meeting.

In the afternoon, all the groups got right to work on investigating their question. To be sure the groups were clear on exactly what question they were working on, I went to each group and asked them to give me the exact phrasing of their question. Here they are:

Blood on the River: What is the history of equal rights in our country?

Sign of the Beaver: Where did white men get the idea that Indians were savages?

Crooked River: What causes hatred and prejudice against one certain group of people?

Indian Captive: What were/are the customs and traditions of the Seneca Indians?

My Heart Is on the Ground: What is the history of the Indian schools run by white people, and why did Indian parents choose to send their kids to these schools?

I spent the rest of my time going from group to group; looking at their progress, making sure they weren't stuck, and checking that they were on task. Here are my notes:

At the beginning of our work time, we had to wait about 10 minutes for the librarian to return from her lunch (our reading time was moved up from the end of the day due to a band and orchestra meeting for the 5th graders to explore those options in middle school), so I encouraged the kids to work with the materials they had and continue brainstorming search terms. Things were a little dicey for that ten minutes, but once the librarian arrived, the kids were more on task.

Sign of the Beaver

They spent most of their time looking for books in the library. When I walked in and they saw me walking toward them, their behavior visibly changed. I talked to them about using their time wisely and not wanting to lose my trust in them that they could work independently. They apologized and got back to work. They found a book about Native Americans that they checked out and brought back to the classroom.

My Heart Is on the Ground

Jessi and Anna N. went on-line to search for information and printed out three separate articles. Earlier, I had pointed out to the group that there were several links at the end of the Carlisle Indian School article they might want to look into. So Jordan went to a computer in the library and spent her time looking at the links. She printed out a list of the different tribes that sent kids to the Carlisle school, thinking that might help them with finding out why parents chose to send their kids there. Anna O. and Kenzie went to the encyclopedias in the library to see what they could find there. The librarian offered to let us take a cart with two sets of older encyclopedias to our classroom, so we did that and Anna and Kenzie began looking through those.

Crooked River

The five kids worked together on two side-by-side computers. They printed out an article about the roots of prejudice (although I had to point out to them that "roots" meant causes or beginnings). Then Michelle and Hannah L. started to work through the article. They came across several words they didn't know, so Michelle and Logan began looking them up on Dictionary.com. Among the words they looked up were: scapegoat, prejudice, sociological, and ethnic. They needed some help making sense out of a

couple of the definitions, particularly for sociological. I reminded them to take what they could understand of the various definitions and see what made the most sense in the context of the article. They got as far as figuring out that there are both economic and social causes for prejudice. Hannah L. was keeping track of their thinking by making notes in her reading journal.

One interesting thing happened with this group. The computers they were working on are right next to our classroom door. At one point, I left the room to go check on the kids in the library. Just after I walked out, I heard one of them say, "Mrs. Titche is gone. She'll probably be gone for awhile." I decided to stop and listen to see where the conversation went. Then the same student said, "We should lock her out." Another student said, "That would be funny." The first one said, "Yeah, but we'd probably get in trouble." At that point, I walked back into the room and her face went a little pale. I stopped and said to the group, "You might be interested to know that I just heard everything you said," and repeated back the essence of the conversation to them. The student who made the initial comment looked at the floor and the second student looked at me with eyes as big as quarters and said he was sorry. A third student immediately said, "I didn't say anything," followed by the fourth saying, "I didn't either." I told them I knew exactly who said what. I reminded them that as a group they needed to show me they could handle the responsibility of working independently on this project. I told them I believed they could and was trusting them to work together to make sure everyone stayed on task. I left the room again, but hung out around the corner for a minute until I was sure they were getting back to work. Logan right away gave the group direction for what they should look for next and I heard the other kids agree.

Indian Captive

This group was also working side-by-side on two computers in our room. When I checked on them, Abbey was standing behind, and a little bit away from the group. I asked what she was working on and she picked up some papers from the bookshelf in front of her and said they had printed out three articles about the Seneca Indians and she was starting to read over those. When I brought the encyclopedias back to the room, Francesca began looking through those. Rachael and Nikki continued searching for information on the computers.

For the last five to ten minutes of class, everyone was back in the room and either on a computer, looking through the encyclopedias, or looking over materials they had printed out or brought back from the library. I felt like

all the groups were making progress, at least in terms of having materials to read for information. Next week I'll see whether they are actually getting anything from those materials!

Monday, April 28 and Tuesday, April 29

The entire day on Monday was spent on 5th Grade Camp debriefing activities. Tuesday I had a sub for an all day meeting at our district office, and any time we might have been able to carve out on Friday was devoted to instrument fittings for the Middle School. (Deep sigh.) I'm starting to feel a little panicky about getting everything done ... Nikki tells me everyday how many days of school we have left. We're down to 23, and of those, at least 6 have half a day or more occupied by something other than normal teaching. YIKES!

Wednesday, April 30

I taught the kids about Song Parodies as an Assessment Live option. I had chosen Disney's "Under the Sea" for the tune, and written new words based on the articles we read on Jamestown before we started the book clubs. However, I only wrote words for about 2/3 of the song, and then let the kids work in their groups to try to finish the song. Things didn't go so well that day. I forgot the CD with the music on it, so I tried singing it for the kids. That was a complete joke, as my voice had been coming and going all day, and the best I could do was squeak out some awful, out-of-tune noises. I know I have kids in the class who know the song, but none of them were brave enough to be our song leader. Before having the kids work in their groups, I talked to them about keeping track of syllables, rhythm, and rhyme when they write their new lyrics. Most of the groups really struggled with it, coming up with one or two lines at most. The kids in the Sign of the Beaver group actually did the best with this, and wrote words for the whole next verse of the song. They weren't totally correct in terms of rhythm and rhyme, but they were close. We ran out of time, so I asked the kids to keep their work in the reading folders and we would continue to work on it.

Thursday, May 1

I had a parent helper in, so I had the kids go back to gathering/reading research materials. My parent helper and I visited with each group and made a list of what they've found so far, and what each person in the group is responsible for. Last week, I had encouraged the kids to try to get to the public library over the weekend, but I think that got lost in all the excitement

over 5th grade camp. So I reminded the kids again today that the public library would have many more resources than our school library, in addition to what they find on the Internet.

Here are the lists my parent helper and I compiled, as well as some notes about things I noticed happening with some of the groups:

Blood on the River

Kailee is reading an Internet article from Wikipedia on Women's Rights

Mitchell is reading an Internet article from Wikipedia on Men's Rights

Dylan is reading a book called *The Jamestown Colony*

John is reviewing three things: a book called *John Smith, English Explorer*, another book called *Vote*, and an Internet article called "Occupations of Jamestown"

The entire time the groups were working, I observed John and Dylan reading their books. Kailee was in the library looking for more on the Internet.

Indian Captive

They are discussing narrowing their question to just the Seneca customs and traditions that surround an Indian child growing up and becoming an adult member of the tribe.

Abbey is exploring the website www.rootsweb.ancestry, looking into religious traditions

Rachael is exploring the website www.indians.org, focusing on the Seneca Indian tribe

Nikki is continuing to search for more materials

Francesca is exploring the encyclopedias we have in the room

Sign of the Beaver

So far they have found only one resource, a book called *The First Americans*. They were a little overwhelmed with the idea of having to read the whole book, so I sat down with them and showed them how to use the table of contents to decide which sections of the book are even relevant, and then showed them how to skim through those sections to decide which parts are important to read.

Gavin, Nick, and Landon all went to the library to look for more resources. Chase was absent from class today. When I checked on the boys in the library, all three were on computers searching the Internet. Gavin found an abstract for an article that explores the question, “White Men or Native Americans—Who are the real savages? It sounded perfect; unfortunately we could not download the full text without paying a fee. I told Gavin I would look into some options for possibly getting the full text, but we printed out an excerpt of the article that was available.

My Heart Is on the Ground

Unfortunately, this group misplaced all the materials they had printed out from their previous meeting, so they spent most of today “regathering.” Anna N. went on-line to print out the full Carlisle School article again. Jordan went on-line to get the list of tribes that sent their kids to the school. Kenzie, Jessi, and Anna O. looked through the encyclopedias, but I don’t think they found anything. I’ve really encouraged this group to make a trip to the public library, as I know there are books available about the Indian schools.

Crooked River

Kyle is checking the encyclopedias for information

Emily and Hannah L. are working together on an Internet article about the roots of prejudice (a perfect resource, but very high level reading)

Logan is reading two books: *No Arm in Left Field* and *The Liberation of Gabriel King*

Michelle read two books, but took no notes on them (*The Gold Cadillac* and *Mariah’s Pond*). I asked her why she hadn’t taken any notes and she said because there was nothing relevant in the books. I asked her to briefly tell me what *The Gold Cadillac* was about. She said it was about a poor black family who had a gold Cadillac. They had to move, and when they drove their car through a white town, they were stopped and accused of stealing the car. I asked Michelle if she was sure that had nothing to do with their topic, and she smiled and said, “no.” I asked how she thought that it might relate to their topic and she said, “The family was stopped because of prejudice.” I smiled and said, “Exactly,” and told her to discuss that with her group and make some notes on the book.

The whole group read the Colin Powell book I mentioned to you in my last update.

Michelle found an Internet article called, “Can We Nourish One and Squelch the Other?” It’s a libertarian article (which might get me in a little trouble with parents in our very conservative community), written at an extremely high level, but I told her they could work with it and see if they could get anything valuable out of it.

One very interesting thing happened with this group. At one point Michelle came to tell me she was going to the library. I asked her why and she said to return a book she was holding. I asked if anyone in the group had read the book and she said no. I asked her why she was returning it and she said because no one wants to read it. I asked if they had at least taken a careful look at the book to decide if there might be good information in it. She said no and took the book back to her group. Within minutes the group was immersed in an argument over who was going to read the book. I walked over and asked what the problem was. Hannah L. said that no one wanted to read the book, even though they all agreed it was probably worth reading. I told them all that they didn’t necessarily need to read the whole book, that everyone needed to do their fair share of work in the group, and I trusted them to work it out without fighting. I left them and returned a few minutes later. Hannah L. said she was going to read the book “because no one else would and it might have important information for us.”

At this point I’m thinking that if I can find the time, I might intervene and do some Internet searching for each group. They all seem to be having trouble finding relevant articles. With five of them and only one of me, and time fast running out, I don’t really have the class time to work with each group on their searches. I’ve worked with the groups some on narrowing their search terms and trying different terms, but probably not enough to really help them find what they need. If I do run some searches for them, I will most likely give them the search terms I used and let them complete the search. I worry though that I might be taking too much away from them. I REALLY wish we had more time to devote to this, because at this point, I really believe that no matter what their final products look like, it’s really the process I want them to learn from and remember. They have come so far and done so much already, but there is still so much to be gained from what they’re doing. Time (or lack of it) is definitely a teacher’s greatest enemy!

Friday, May 2

I had a little bit of time in the morning so I used it to revisit the song parody. This time I was better prepared and had the CD with the original song on it.

We went through the song twice (it took two times to get the kids over their shyness and get them singing) and then we did the Jamestown version. Then I asked the Sign of the Beaver group to share the lyrics they had written to continue the song. I put them up on the overhead and we worked together as a class to try revising them to fit the rhythm and rhyme scheme of the original song. We started with the first four lines, which they revised to be the correct number of syllables, but they still don't quite have the rhyming scheme. However, as a class, with nearly all the kids contributing thoughts, they came up with another three lines that work perfectly. At this point, the kids and I all felt they had a much better idea of how to do a song parody and since we were out of time, I'm calling it good for the time being.

Monday, May 5

I gave the kids our whole reading time today to work with their groups on reading their articles and/or books and gathering information. I reminded the kids to take notes as they worked so they could keep track of what information they had, new questions that arose, and what they still needed/wanted to find. I had no parent helpers in today, so I spent the time doing my best to get to each group.

Blood on the River

The kids had decided they wanted to narrow their question to looking at the roles of men and women in Jamestown, but they were having a hard time finding information. I suggested they could keep looking, as they were really investigating the idea that different rights for men and women in the U.S. may have started in Jamestown, but also suggested they think about looking at some other aspect of equal rights in our history in case they can't find enough information on Jamestown. I mentioned some options, such as women's right to vote, the Equal Rights Amendment, or key women in history such as Susan B. Anthony. I gave them the Scholastic Encyclopedia of U.S. History and suggested they look up the ERA and some of the other potential topics I suggested in the index. A little while later, a couple of the kids wanted to go to the library and search for information on the ERA.

Crooked River

While this group has plenty of materials to read, they had the hardest time getting started. Largely they were socializing and messing around. As I was walking over to them, Hannah L. asked me if she could make a copy of the article she had about the roots of prejudice for Kyle, because he had nothing

to do. I sent her to do that. When I approached the rest of the group, I said, “It doesn’t seem like very much work is getting done here. Are we maybe messing around a little too much?” Logan said, “I’m trying to read, but the others are distracting me.” (He did have an article in his hands, but he seemed perfectly happy to be engaged in the others’ conversation.) Emily said, “I’m just talking because no one told me what to do.” Kyle said he had nothing to read. Michelle asked, “Are we all supposed to work on this article together, or each read it on our own?” “Wow!” I thought. “Looks like this group needs a session to visit what’s working, what’s not, and who’s responsible in their group meetings.” Michelle told Emily she was supposed to be reading the article, which Emily immediately pulled out of her folder, and said, “Oh.” At that point, Hannah returned with a copy of the article for Kyle and I could see that five kids had the same article, which was the one Michelle asked about. I suggested they each read and annotate the article on their own, then discuss it as a group, as we had done with previous articles in class. They all got to work reading, and since I had no parent helpers and wanted to get to the rest of the groups, I left them.

Sign of the Beaver

This group had a couple of articles they found at the end of our last class, as well as the book they got from the library, so at the beginning of our meeting time, I suggested they work on reviewing those materials. Gavin and Nick then got to work reading the article they had. During this whole time, Landon was on a computer in the room, searching for more information. I decided this was one group that needed a little intervention, so I did my own search for them, using the search terms “Indians as savages.” I pulled up three promising articles and printed them out for the boys to divide up and look over.

My Heart Is on the Ground

Anna N. and Anna O. were continuing to search for information on-line and in the encyclopedias. The group had previously printed out a few articles which Kenzie, Jordan, and Jessi were working on reading. At the end of class, they came to me and asked if they could change their question. I asked them why, and they said they were having a hard time finding information about the Indian schools and wanted to research the Sun Dance instead because they had already found some information on that. Since it was the end of class, I told them I would think about it and let them know on Wednesday. I have mixed emotions about letting them switch. First, I don’t think it should be all that difficult to find information about the other Indian schools,

because I came across several articles when I was gathering background information before we started the book clubs. Second, the question about the Sun Dance seems much more limited and much less issue based than the Indian Schools question. So I decided to do a search for this group as well, to see what I could find for them before deciding on an answer to their question. I did the search at home Monday night and found six relevant articles that were not too difficult to read. I printed them out to give to the group on Wednesday.

Indian Captive

This group was looking through the materials they had, and I pulled a couple of books from our classroom library about Native Americans for them. Nikki brought one back to me and said it didn't have any information about the Senecas in it. I told them that even though this book didn't mention specific tribes, I thought they could still read through the parts about Native American children and Native American ceremonies and rituals, because it might explain some things they know the Seneca did from their book. I showed them some sections in the book I thought might be useful, and Nikki took the book back to her group. One problem in this group is that they seem to have shifted their focus to just looking at what Seneca children did, and they weren't coming up with much information. I will meet with this group on Wednesday to discuss why they had this shift in focus, and encourage them to include looking at the customs and rituals surrounding becoming an adult in the Seneca tribe.

Wednesday, May 7

Monday night, when I was searching for articles for the My Heart Is on the Ground group, I decided to see what I could find for a couple of the other groups as well. I did a search for the Indian Captive group and found some very kid-friendly articles about the Seneca and Iroquois Indians. I also did a search for the Blood on the River group and found a timeline and an article about the Equal Rights Amendment. I began class on Wednesday by reviewing with each group what materials they had, and giving the groups I had found articles for those materials. Now that I was sure each group had plenty of materials to work with, I instructed the kids to divide up their newest materials and spend today just reading over and annotating what they had. I think that some of the kids have gotten so caught up in searching for information, they don't quite realize what they already have and don't really know what, if anything, they still need. I told the kids that if they

had difficult articles to read, they could work together on them. Once again I had no parent helper in, so I did my best to get check in with each group. Our whole reading time today was down to about 30 minutes because of schedule changes as a result of visiting the Middle School in the morning, and by the time I got done talking, we were down to less than 25 minutes.

Indian Captive

I started with this group because I was concerned about how much they had narrowed their question. I asked them why they decided to just look at what Indian children did, and Rachael responded, “We thought it would be good to see what Indian kids did, but we can’t find very much, so we’re thinking of changing our question to the Indian women. We’ve already found a lot of information on that.” I asked the other girls in the group if they were okay with that and they all said yes. The articles I printed out for them also included information on the women, so I suggested they go back through all their materials and see what they could find. They split up two and two. Nikki and Rachael. went back on-line to see if they could find information specifically about the Seneca women, and Francesca and Abbey started working through what they already had.

Crooked River

This group continues to struggle with staying on task. I sat down with this group and asked what information they had so far, since they had been working with the same materials for a few days now. Hannah L. took out her notebook and showed me ? of a page of notes. I started to read over the notes with the group, stopping here and there to ask if they knew what some of the terms Hannah had written down meant. Some they did and some they didn’t. As I worked to explain to them the gist of what Hannah had found, they all became more engaged. After about 5 minutes of leading the discussion, I asked if Hannah had shared any of this information with them before. They all said no. I asked if anyone in the group had shared what they found with the rest of the group and they all said no. So, I realized another shortfall in my instruction. I hadn’t really taught them how and when to report back to their group once they finished annotating their reading material. Now that we were sharing Hannah’s notes and they were all more engaged, I asked them if they thought they could continue reviewing their notes and discussing their findings without me. They all said yes, so I reminded them to stay on task and left the group. It wasn’t long though before I could hear that this group was again off task. I went back and asked

them if they had a problem. They said no and got back to work. I decided at that point that before we held next group meetings I would need to do a whole class debriefing session to address a variety of issues, including the ones this group was dealing with.

My Heart Is on the Ground

I asked the girls in this group if they had looked over the articles I had printed out for them. They said yes and they felt much better about sticking with their original question (Phew!). They said they were working on reading through what I gave them, and Anna N. was looking up a couple of the links at the end of the articles to see if she could find more. I noticed that Jessi, Jordan, Mackenzie, and Anna O. were highlighting some of the articles. I reminded them that when they highlight, they need to make sure they write next to it, why they thought that particular passage was important or what their reaction to the passage was. They all seemed to be on task, so I told them I was happy they decided to continue working on the question about the schools and left them to continue working.

Blood on the River

Just as I finished with the Heart on the Ground group, Dylan came up to me. He told me had gone over the timeline I had printed out for them about the ERA, but there was nothing helpful in it. I was really surprised by this, since the timeline was all about the people and process behind the ERA since the idea of equal rights for women first surfaced in the 1800s. I asked Dylan why he thought it wasn't helpful and he said it didn't have any information they could use. I asked him if they were looking for information on the ERA and he said, "Yes, but there's nothing in this article about that." I was really puzzled and I could tell that Dylan was getting frustrated because I wasn't letting him off the hook with that article. So I sat down with Dylan and the article and began reading over the timeline. My first thought as we began to go over it was that the Equal Rights Amendment was abbreviated ERA throughout the article. I asked him if that's why he was confused, and he said no—he knew what the abbreviation meant. So, I went through a couple of the time periods with him, and he seemed to understand what it was saying. I told Dylan that if his group was going to work on researching the Equal Rights Amendment, that this timeline could be immensely helpful to them. I suggested he take it back to his group and ask someone to help him work through it, making sure they made annotations as they went. He still seemed pretty frustrated, shrugged his shoulders, and returned to his

group. The rest of his group was working on the other article I had printed out for them. However, they were not totally on task.

Sign of the Beaver

I had to QUICKLY take care of end-of-the-day business so the kids could catch their buses. UGH! I definitely need two or three more of me! 😊

Thursday, May 8

Okay, I have a true confession to make here. As our reading time today approached, I felt a certain sense of dread overtaking me. So, when the kids asked if they could have extra read aloud time today, I welcomed the opportunity. I can't believe I did, since I've been so worried about running out of time, but I had spent so much time this week just "managing" with the groups that I welcomed the chance to shorten their reading time by just a little. That being said, I didn't completely eliminate the time, just shortened it to 35 minutes or so. I used the extra read aloud time to gather my thoughts and my wits. (You know how you can read page after page of a book and realize your mind was somewhere else and you have no idea what you read? Good thing I've read this book to kids a few times before!)

When we finally started our reading time, I was ready. I put a blank overhead transparency up and told the kids I thought we should have another discussion about what's working in our book club groups, what's not, and what we could do to fix what's not working. I started with the positives and listed the following things that I had noticed:

- The groups were all doing a good job of dividing up their resources
- Most people in most of the groups were working on researching or reading what they had
- Students in the Blood on the River group were using the dictionary to try to help them understand difficult text (although not entirely successfully).
- Several kids in different groups were using the strategies we'd learned in class to comprehend difficult text, such as looking at the larger context of difficult words or passages.
- Partners or small groups of kids were working together on difficult text.
- Many students were taking notes on their reading.

I asked the kids if they had anything else to add. The room was silent. I wasn't particularly surprised, but I was a little concerned.

Then I moved on to the negatives. I decided to let the kids start the list, figuring they'd probably come up with things I hadn't even noticed. Here's what they said:

- Lots of off-topic talking
- We're too easily distracted
- Many off-topic behaviors
- Some students are excluding others
- When we're searching on the Internet, we get distracted and search for off-topic items
- Sometimes we're fighting.
- Random insults are being tossed out.

Ouch! That last one was definitely something I had missed, and something I was very distressed to hear was going on in our classroom! We've spent so much time this year working on building respectful relationships, and we've done so well at it, that I was really distressed when that came up. I let the kids know that I was disappointed to hear that insults were being thrown around the room and then asked them what we could do to fix all these problems and keep our groups running smoothly. I started by pointing out that many of the problems had to do with being off-topic. I asked the kids why they thought they were getting off-topic so often and so easily. I wasn't at all surprised by their answers, as it was exactly what I had been thinking, but I was pleased that they were able to recognize the source of the problem. Hannah L. said, "Some of the stuff we're reading is really hard and it's hard to stay on task when you don't get it." John then added, "Maybe it's because we're bored." I asked John if he thought he was bored because the text wasn't interesting, or if it was because it was so hard to understand. He said he thought it probably some of both. We then talked about how hard it is to stay engaged with text that we don't understand. I asked if they had any ideas how they could solve that problem. Dylan said, "We could try to make the text more interesting." I asked him how he thought they could do that. He said he wasn't sure, but then John said, "We could think more about what we're learning." I told John that was a great idea, and that taking notes would help with that. I also reminded the kids they could work together through difficult text, which would also help. I asked what else they thought we could do solve our problems. Kailee reminded everyone that

each group had made rules at the start of our book clubs and that we could follow those rules and consequences. Everyone thought that was a good idea. I agreed with them and told them I thought it was a compliment to them that they hadn't needed those for awhile and had pretty much forgotten about them. John suggested that they spread out while reading so they aren't so easily distracted by classmates. I said that was also a good idea, as long as they didn't need help from their groupmates with what they were reading. As far as the fighting and random insults, we decided that it was best for everyone to think before speaking and remember to be considerate of everyone's feelings. I finished the discussion by reminding the groups that were having trouble staying focused on one topic for their question, that it was okay to rethink their question (in terms of either narrowing it or broadening it, depending on the problem).

I wrote the word "collaborating" on the overhead and we talked about what it meant. I told them that they had shown me they had great collaboration skills throughout the year and I had confidence they could continue that with these projects. Then I wrote three questions on the overhead:

1. Where are we? (What do have in terms of resources, notes, etc.)
2. What do we need? (What information do we still need to find?)
3. How are we going to solve our group's problems? (The things that get in our way)

I told the kids to get in their groups and discuss these three questions. I asked them to have one person write down their answers to turn in to me. They had about 10 minutes to get started on this before the end of class and all the groups got right to work. Of course they didn't finish before the bell rang, so I told them we would finish in the morning.

Friday, May 9

We normally don't have time for reading on Fridays but I was able to be a little creative with our time this morning (I won't bore you with the gory details) and carve out 35 minutes for us to work in our groups. I asked the kids to finish answering the questions I asked them yesterday. As the groups finished, I noticed they weren't quite sure what to do next. So, each time I noticed that with a group, I showed them what they wrote down for me under the "What do we need?" question and suggested that they be working on taking care of those things. That got them back on task. Here's what each group wrote in response to my questions:

Sign of the Beaver

1. We think we sort have a general idea of what the answer to our question is.
2. We think we need just a little bit more information before we have a good answer. We need to read Gavin's, Nick's, and Chase's articles from the Internet.
3. We think we should try to follow the rules more.

My Heart Is on the Ground

1. We don't need any more resources, we're all set.
2. We need to put all of our resource together and find an answer to our question.
3. Excluding people (this is obviously the group that experienced that problem): Talk about it and get one warning and if you do it again, you have to pay 50 Titché bucks.
4. Drawing on paper while we're trying to get work done: ask nicely to stop because it's distracting to others.
5. Off-topic talking: gentle reminder.

Crooked River

1. We're ? way done. (I asked how they knew they were half way done, so they added to this.) We have lots of good information and we have all the resources we need.
2. We need to find out what the third root of prejudice is. (One of their articles said there are three roots. They know two of them, but not the third.)
3. We need to learn more about each root of prejudice.
4. Follow our rules.
5. Try really hard to concentrate.
6. Don't bring anything to the meeting that can distract you.

Okay, so do you think this group has just a few problems? YIKES! It will be interesting to see if I can help them pull it together next week.

Indian Captive

1. We have enough for information for now, but it might not be enough. (I asked about this and they said they have plenty to read right now, but after they read it, might find they still need more information.)

2. We need to read our articles.
3. We might need to get more information.
4. Peeps (people in case you don't speak 5th gradese) need to not look for weird things on the Internet and tell each other when we're off topic. (Okay, the "weird things on the Internet" had me a little alarmed, but the combination of who is in this group, the incredibly tight security on our school computers, and their response that they were looking at some Indian sights made me feel a little better.)

Blood on the River

1. We're between answering and finding a question. (That's crystal clear, isn't it?)
2. We need a final answer and a final question.
3. We need to split up when we're reading. We need to make sure we stay on topic and don't talk about random things other than our book or question.

When I got to this group and saw what they had written for their answers to questions 1 and 2, I told them that they needed to decide on their question . . . right now . . . today. If they weren't happy with the ERA, they needed to decide among the other options they had considered. Shortly after that they came to me and said they decided they wanted to investigate how women got the right to vote. After that they, they wrote another answer to question number 2: We need more voting resources!

For the remainder of the class period (about 10 minutes), I went from group to group, just observing what they were doing. Here's what I noticed:

Sign of the Beaver

1. Nick was working on reading an article in the classroom. The other members of his group were in the library, looking on the Internet for more information. When I checked on them, Chase had an article pulled up on a computer and he asked me if I thought it would be useful. It was written in question and answer format and two of the questions dealt directly with the English view of the Indians as savages. GO CHASE! 😊 This was HUGE for him and I let him know how pleased I was. He was beaming. Gavin had another article pulled up that also looked like it had potential, so we printed them both. Landon was also on a computer but had not found anything new.

My Heart Is on the Ground

The group was working together in the classroom, making notes on all the information they had gathered so far. They were on task and working well together.

Crooked River

The whole group was working on discussing what they have so far, primarily working from Hannah's notes. When I approached them, there was some question about whether they were on task. They told me they were working and pointed out their seating chart to help the kids who distract each other stay on task.

Indian Captive

Francesca was reading an article on the Seneca Indians. The other three girls were talking about how the Indian women carried their babies on their backs on cradle boards. One problem I've noticed with this group is they find information that they think is helpful, but they don't write it down, so they virtually start over every time they meet. I reminded them that they needed to write down everything they found in relation to their question so they could keep track of their information and not end up repeating the same work over and over again. Abbey took a few minutes to look through our classroom nonfiction book collection and brought me a book on Susan B. Anthony that she thought might be helpful for the Blood on the River group. Way to go Hannah!

Blood on the River

Since this group just reworked the focus of their question, all four of them were in the library. Kailee and Mitchell were working together on a computer and had printed out two articles, one on civil disobedience and the other titled, "How Women Got to Vote." The second article came from a sight titled "Yogapeace.com" (which may be a legitimate site, but I wasn't familiar with it). I cautioned the kids about using information from sources they don't know for sure are reliable. I let them print out the article, but told them if there was anything questionable in it, they would need to verify it with another source before using it. John had checked out a book he looked at previously about the history of voting in our country. Dylan found a book on Ida B. Wells that he checked out. Hopefully this group will really get going now.

That's it for this week. PHEW! I have to admit there have been many moments this week when I've felt like I'm in over my head. I know what I

need (or maybe I should say needed) to do to help things run more smoothly, but I keep running into the wall called “time.” There is still so much to do to finish these projects and precious little time to do it. Every day that I spend teaching the kids skills they need to complete their inquiry is one less day for them to actually do it. Yet, without those skills, they can’t be successful. It’s been a very eye-opening learning experience for me. Needless to say, when I do this next year, (yes, I do mean when, not if) I will be much better prepared and will start much earlier. I do believe the whole experience has been a great learning experience for the kids, regardless of how their projects turn out, so I don’t feel like a total failure. I just feel I could have done a much better job than I have.

Week of May 12–16

We had another “interesting” week. It’s both fascinating and frustrating to watch the downhill slide with some 5th graders as the end of their elementary years approaches. I have a couple that I think we could do a whole study on! For the most part though, things are continuing to go well, and we are getting closer to actually doing the groups’ Assessment Live presentations! We only had two days with time for Reading this week . . . a combination of D.A.R.E. graduation, extra time in the computer lab (to complete another HUGE project I’m piloting with this class . . . but that’s a whole other story!), extra time in gym class to prepare for next week’s 5th grade golf outing, etc., etc., etc. However, we made the most of those two days.

Wednesday, May 14

I used our time today to teach the kids about the other Assessment Live options for their presentations. I think I probably looked and sounded like a movie on fast forward. I was working at supersonic speed to teach the kids all three options and give them opportunities to practice them—all within 45 minutes.

- Tableaux—this was by far the most popular and it appears that at least four of the five groups are going to do their presentations this way. I decided to use the Jamestown articles to create examples of all the presentation methods, so the kids could see how the same text could be interpreted and presented in a variety of ways. For tableaux, I made up eight different captions from the article, focusing on John Smith. I also made copies of Nancy’s “Tableaux Basics” sheet for the kids. I went over the general idea behind tableaux and reviewed the basics sheet with them. Then I split them up into groups of four to

six kids and gave each group one of the captions to work on creating a tableaux scene. My parent helper took the largest group out in the hall to work with them, and I worked with the remaining groups in the classroom. I gave them about 5–10 minutes to put something together. After each group presented their tableaux, we took a minute or two to discuss how well we could “see” the scene depicted in the caption and what, if anything, could be done to make the scene even better. The kids recognized the importance of facial expressions and body gestures, as well as the effect of “freezing motion” in their scenes. They also learned that it’s important to strike poses they can hold, as a couple of kids who were doing a great job of freezing motion, chose positions that were just a little too hard to maintain. The buzz in the room when we finished these was lively and positive. Comments I overheard included: “This is awesome!,” “We’re definitely doing this for our presentation,” “That was fun!,” and “I like these kinds of presentations.”

- Readers’ Theater—As with tableaux, I gave the kids a copy of Nancy’s Readers’ Theater Basics sheet and went over that with them. I also explained that this type of readers’ theater would look and sound a little different from readers’ theaters they may have done in the past. (I was surprised by how many of my kids said they had never done a readers’ theater before.) Then I gave them a copy of a script I made up, again from the Jamestown articles. I asked for four volunteers to come up and read the script. Before they read, we talked about how the parts were divided up, and how they knew which parts they were supposed to read. Then they read through the script. Considering it was a cold read, with no time to practice, they did an amazingly good job. (I did give the kids a heads up when choosing volunteers, telling them I needed people who felt confident reading unfamiliar material out loud and who weren’t tired because they would really need to pay attention to do this. I also weighed in my own experience with the kids when choosing the volunteers.) After the kids read, we talked a little about the “rhythm and flow” of the script. I asked the kids what they felt was missing from the read through. They immediately said, “expression” and I agreed (although I reminded them that it’s almost impossible to add expression the first time through because you don’t know what it says and it takes a lot of concentration just to know what parts you have to read). There is one line in the script that is written in all capital letters and is read by everyone. The group did a good job

reading that line with expression, and the rest of the kids recognized that. We also talked about how they could “act out” parts of the script through movement.

- Found Poetry—We were down to about twelve minutes left in class, and I was determined to get through an explanation of Found Poetry that the kids could understand. I managed to get through going over the Found Poetry Basics sheet (from Nancy again) and explain how it worked. Since I didn’t have any samples of the kids writing in response to the Jamestown articles, I decided to pull lines from their write around that we did after reading *Cheyenne Again* and the Carlisle school article. I pulled a total of twenty different lines from the kids writing. I split the class up into four groups and assigned each group a set of five of the twenty lines. I instructed them to work as a group and find the two lines they felt were the most important and/or meaningful. Initially they all went through the lines on their own, but once I reminded them to work together, they began discussing them. And that’s when the bell rang. (Insert mental explicative and a very deep sigh here! I was so close!) I told the kids I’d work on finding a time for us to finish this another day and we moved on to packing up for home.

Thursday, May 15

I asked the kids if they understood the different presentation options available to them and how they felt about them. They said they did understand them and liked that they got to make presentations that were different from the usual “make a poster or visual aid and then stand up and talk about it.” I asked them if they understood the basic idea behind Found Poetry even though we didn’t finish our poem yesterday. They said they did. I really didn’t want to let this whole week go by without time to work on their questions, so I told them they could have today to work on their research. I set the goal for them of having all their information compiled by the end of our next class period, which will be Monday. They all felt that was doable. I told them that once they had all their information together and they felt satisfied that it was enough to provide a good answer (or set of answers) to their question, they needed to decide which presentation method they were going to use and begin working on that. Since our last group meetings included a lot of off-task behavior, I also gave them some added incentive to stay on task by telling them I would be giving a participation grade for their

work today and would be watching to be sure everyone was contributing to their group's work. (I have to admit, I hated myself for doing that, but some of the kids are so on the edge right now that I thought it might help keep them focused. It actually seemed to work for all but two of the kids, which you'll read about soon.) Here's what my parent helper and I observed in each group:

Sign of the Beaver

They spent the first fifteen minutes of work time looking for one of their articles. Landon was almost frantic, as he and Chase were the only two to have a copy of it, and he couldn't find his. He said it was their most important article as it had a lot of good information in it. Chase had been called out of the room for some brief end-of-the-year testing (yes—yet another interruption to our schedule), so he couldn't help right away. When he returned, he had no idea where his copy of the article was. I asked them if they had compiled all the information they found from their other sources and they said no . . . they still had one or two they had to read. I encouraged them to continue working then, and do what they could without that article. In the meantime, I went on-line to see if I could find the article for them, but had no luck. When I checked on them again, they had a brief list going of information from the other articles and what Landon could recall from the missing article. They had also discussed their presentation method and agreed on tableaux.

My Heart Is on the Ground

This group was focused and working the whole time. Jessi took the lead and continued making a master list (which they started last week) of everything they had found in their various sources. They finished the list and voted on tableaux for their presentation method. At the end of class, they were working on putting together ideas for their captions, although not actually writing their captions yet.

Blood on the River

My parent helper spent a great deal of time with this group. She found they were trying to "force" together a presentation, even though they really didn't have any information to present. Since they had so recently changed their question, they still needed to do a fair amount of research to answer it. They spent the first several minutes of time trying to decide on their presentation method. Mitchell had been called out of the room for the end-of-the-year

assessment, so they decided they had to wait for him before deciding. Interestingly, when Mitchell returned, they “informed” him that they were going to do tableaux. He didn’t disagree, so then they began trying to decide what their different scenes could be. That’s where they ran into trouble because they had no information on which to build their scenes. My parent helper suggested a voting booth scene, with the three boys in the group in voting booths, and Kailee, their lone girl member, looking in from outside, clearly distraught that she couldn’t vote. (The mom later apologized to me for giving them an idea, but I told her it was okay . . . it helped them get a start.) When I visited with this group, they were still trying to work on their presentation and were getting a little frustrated because they had nothing to go on. I encouraged them to work on their research and told them they could have an extra day if needed, since they had so recently changed their question. A clear look of relief came over John’s face when I offered them the extra time. I also pointed out that once they had all their information, they might find that tableaux isn’t the best way to present it, and to stay open-minded about that. Finally, I told them that once they had found some good sources for information, they would need to split them up and work on reading them at home. At that point, Kailee and Dylan went to get the sources they already had, and Mitchell and John asked to go to the library to look for more information.

Indian Captive

This group was also focused and working the entire time. They had finished reading and annotating all their sources so Abbey began a master list of all the information they found in answer to their question. When they finished that, they decided they wanted to do tableaux for their presentation and began discussing ideas for their different scenes. They asked me how many scenes they could do. I had given the class a general guideline of five to six scenes to fully portray the answer to their questions. This group wanted to do more. I told them not to get too carried away as they didn’t want their audience to tune them out part way through their presentation. I also encouraged them to think about combining some of their information into one scene. (They were thinking of blocking out a scene for each responsibility they learned belonged to the Seneca women. I encouraged them to combine similar responsibilities, which would reduce the need for a lot of different tableaux scenes, and make each scene more interesting.) At the end of class, they were working on listing props they could use for their various scenes.

Crooked River

I saved the most interesting group for last. It has been almost fascinating to watch this group go from being in the lead in this process to sinking to the bottom. Largely it has been a problem of early “checking out” (they are headed to middle school, after all) and some immaturity rearing its ugly head (likely also a result of the impending transition to middle school). Today, despite the fact that I told them they were receiving a participation grade, two of the group members were almost never on task. They were playing around and working hard to keep their group derailed. After intervening twice, they finally resigned themselves to at least letting their group members try to get some work done. Don’t get too excited though . . .the problems with this group didn’t end there! Once they got started working, they informed me that they had all the information they needed to begin working on their presentation and they had chosen tableaux as their method of delivery. They knew they needed to start working on scripting their captions, so when I was at least mildly confident the two “distracters” had settled down, I left them. It wasn’t long though before I heard some rather childish arguing coming from this group. (Okay, I know . . . I did remind myself that they really are only 10 and 11 years old, despite the incredible work they’d been doing all year). When I got to them, they were bantering over who got to play the African American person in their tableaux scenes because they all wanted to paint their face. I smiled to myself, despite my frustration, and gently, but firmly reminded them to keep their objective in focus. Hannah said, “Well, I want to paint my face black,” followed by Logan chiming in, “We all want to paint our faces black.”

“Remember,” I said, “your purpose here is to teach us what you learned about your question. Don’t get so caught up on who’s playing what part that you lose sight of that.” I also reminded them that it wasn’t just prejudice against African Americans they were looking at. Their whole question began with wondering how prejudice against Native Americans came about. That at least got them to consider the idea of having one person be an African American and another be a Native American, which meant at least two of the five of them could paint their faces. Since there were two who felt strongly enough about painting their faces to argue over it, the others conceded to them. (Okay, so I didn’t exactly get them refocused on their purpose, but at least the fighting stopped! 😊) At this point, I went to check on the other groups. Shortly after I left, I noticed my parent helper sitting with them, which at least kept them focused. (Thank goodness for parent helpers!)

At the end of class I asked my parent helper for her thoughts on what she observed with this group. (I’ve already included her input on the other

groups.) She said she noticed that their notes were very broad and nonspecific (which is exactly right) and suggested that they try to reference specific events in history that demonstrate their points. She gave them the example of Dr. Martin Luther King's work and suggested they give the dates and describe the event. I thought this suggestion might lead them to ask for more library time to research events that would demonstrate their points, but no such luck.

So, with the exception of the Blood on the River group, with whom there was still a chance they might choose a different presentation method, all the groups were going with tableaux. I thought about encouraging the kids to explore other presentation options, but tableaux definitely seems the easiest for them to wrap their minds around and given the extremely limited amount of time we have remaining in the year, I decided it's best at this point to let them run with it.

Reflections

As our year winds down, I've been doing a lot of reflective thinking about this whole process . . . what's been good, what been tough, what's worked, and what hasn't. I'm finding myself looking back over the whole process with a lot of mixed emotions about my success. I thought you might like a peek into the two-sided debate I've been having with myself about it. 😊

I definitely have conflicting emotions as "the teacher." I think the book clubs were a fantastic experience for the kids. Many of them discovered for the first time the joy of sharing their reading with peers, and realized how much more they got out of their reading from the experience. At least one student (and hopefully many more) has discovered that she has the ability to read longer and more difficult texts in shorter periods of time than she thought possible. As a result, she is now reading like crazy and taking on more challenging texts at least some of the time. So, looking back on the book clubs—I have no real regrets, although I still have goals for extending and deepening the discussions with future classes.

As far the inquiry projects go, my feelings are much more mixed. On the one hand, I'm feeling like I really shortchanged them here. As a result of our time crunch, I definitely fell short on teaching and modeling the research process, including how to find sources, how to know if their sources are reliable, etc. Then I needed to model for them how to compile their research and pick out the most important and relevant information. We had done a fair amount of work through the year plowing through tough nonfiction text and determining what's important, but not in the sense of applying that text to a research question.

On the other hand, what I think I have given them is an understanding of the process, which at their level is probably much more important than the final product. It's definitely not an in-depth understanding, but I think they will come away from all of this with the realization that they have the power and ability to develop their own truly meaningful questions and work to answer them. I feel pretty good about that.

Back on the negative side, I have to admit that I am appalled that this whole process took 4-1/2 months. Even when I try to justify it by reminding myself that we only have two to three days a week for reading, so it wasn't really 4-1/2 months, it still seems ludicrous to me. But then I think about all the ground we covered, and all the skills they learned and practiced in that time and I feel a little better about it.

So, just call me Jekyll and Hyde (or maybe just a teacher who is determined to give her kids everything humanly possible, regardless of the hurdles that get in the way). I'm sure I'll have a few more thoughts on this after the kids do their presentations. So with that being said . . . on to next week!

May 19–30

Between Monday, May 19, and Friday, May 30, we managed to fit in at least some reading time on six different days. The kids used this time to finish scripting and blocking their tableaux presentations, make lists of props and costumes needed, make some props, and rehearse. My journal fills you in on each group's progress over the six days, rather than breaking out each group for each day.

Sign of the Beaver

This group began Monday, May 19, benefiting from Nick's efforts to gather more information over the weekend. He shared a couple of articles he had found on-line and they spent their initial time going over those. That gave them enough information so they could proceed with planning their presentation. Gavin came and asked me how long the captions needed to be. I went with him over to the group and Landon asked if there was a certain number of sentences they had to be. I explained the captions needed to be long enough to convey all their important information, but not so long that the audience would lose interest in their scene.

This group is definitely more of a "hands on" group versus a "sit and discuss" group. Once they got into planning their presentation, they were all on task . . . even their most easily distracted member. I sat back observing them for about five minutes, and he was actively contributing ideas the whole

time. I walked up to him and said, “WOW! You’re participating and really helping your group members! That’s awesome!” He had a HUGE smile on his face and we did at least five high-fives in celebration. Then, after encouraging him to keep up the good work, I let him return to the discussion the group was having about one of their scenes. (Note to self here: There is definitely something to be learned here in terms of planning for future book clubs. I need to explore options for “active” ways for kids to share their thinking in their book club group discussions.)

At one point, Nick came up to me and asked if they could borrow a classmate to help with one of their scenes. I reminded him that it was fine, but at this point, he could only ask that classmate for their permission. They needed to be sure the part was small enough that the classmate could do it with only one or two rehearsals, so they wouldn’t take too much of his/her time away from their own group. Nick said, “Great, thanks,” and immediately went to ask Logan (Crooked River group) to be in their presentation. Logan agreed.

On Wednesday, May 21, this group got stuck on how to show the idea that Indians didn’t believe in individual land ownership in a tableaux scene. My parent helper worked with them for a few minutes and began by asking them to think about what that meant to them. They had a brief discussion about it (sorry, I have no details here) and that seemed to give them enough to work with.

When I visited with them that day, they were discussing what to write in their caption about the Indians believing in false gods and they were stuck again. (This is consistent with this group’s history of getting the “big ideas” but not really seeing or getting at the details behind that big idea.) I asked them what came to mind when they thought about the Native Americans worshipping false gods, and reminded to them to think about what they learned from their book. Landon said, “I think about them dancing around a fire and praying to a god of fire.” Then the group was quiet again. I asked them what kinds of gods they thought the Native Americans believed in, and Landon again spoke up, saying, “They had a god for each animal or something.” I talked to them about the gods of the rain, sun, moon, animals, etc. (Landon added a god of death) and asked if they remembered reading about any of those in their book. They all said something to the effect of, “Oh yeah!” Then I asked them what the white people in their book thought about all those gods. Landon said, “They thought it was just savage.” I asked how they could portray that in their scene, and Landon responded, “We

could have a group of Indians worshipping a false god and show a white person standing on the outside looking shocked.”

I asked if they thought they had enough now to write their caption, and they said yes. I reminded them that the caption needed to include enough information to teach the class that Native Americans believed in false gods and what the white peoples’ response was to that. (As an aside—I really wanted to take an opportunity to talk to this group about the idea of false gods . . . whose perspective it is from to say the gods are false, but I held back for two reasons. First, we were so short on time and this group needed every minute to work on their presentation. Second, I teach in an extremely conservative, very religious community and didn’t want to open the door for misunderstandings in my purpose and parent complaints that I was trying to undermine their child’s faith.)

By Thursday, May 22, this group had all their captions written and was working on blocking their scenes. They worked well together and stayed on task the whole time. By the end of class, they had all their scenes blocked and had begun rehearsing. When I stopped to watch for a few minutes, it was clear they hadn’t given any thought to props, so I reminded them that using props might help make their presentation clearer. They began discussing what kinds of props they could use. I reminded them to keep a list of their ideas and then decide who would be responsible for which props.

On Friday, May 23, we fit in about thirty minutes of time for the groups to work. Both Chase and Gavin were absent so Nick and Landon weren’t quite sure what to do. I asked if they could practice anyway, just pretending the other two were there and they said yes. I also asked if they had completed their list of props and they said they thought so, but would look it over to see if they could think of anything else they needed. Nick said he was going to ask his mom to make them Indian costumes (and my thought bubble said, “Oh Nick, she’s going to love you for giving her a whole three days notice that you need Indian costumes for school!”). The two of them worked well for the remainder of the time.

We didn’t have another opportunity to work on these projects again until Thursday, May 29. Chase was not able to participate because he was needed in another classroom for a project they were working on as a gift for their student teacher whose last day was Friday, May 30. Nick’s mom had come through and made a couple of Indian shirts for the group. They tried these on and did one rehearsal without Chase before deciding to work on their props.

They began by talking about what kind of prop they could use to show fire. The hesitation to share thinking in this group again became apparent as they all sat around in silence wondering how they could make a fake fire. I asked them what you need to make a fire (which they all knew since they had just learned how to build a fire in the wilderness at 5th Grade Camp). Nick said they needed birch bark and twigs. I asked if they could think of anything we had in the classroom that might represent twigs. Nick jumped up and went to grab some rulers. I thought that might be enough to keep them going for awhile so I moved on to another group. When I checked on this group again, Nick was trying to figure out to keep the rulers balancing against one another in a teepee shape. I suggested tying them together with rubber bands. They liked the idea so I gave them some rubber bands and left them to work again. On my last check with this group they had the teepee standing on its own and were wondering how they could show flames. More silence. I asked them what colors flames were and they said orange and maybe red or yellow. I asked if they could think of anything we had in the room that was those colors which they could use to make flames, and they asked me for some construction paper. Then they wanted to know how to make flames out of the construction paper. I told them to think about the shape of flames (even in a single candle) and see if they figure out how to do it. They each took some paper and scissors and began working on making flames. Landon brought one over to them that looked pretty good and Nick immediately cut it in half. (“Yikes,” I thought, but it turns out Landon understood Nick’s thought process and was fine with it.) Once they had one that looked pretty good, they all got the hang of it and worked on making flames until the end of class.

On Friday (May 30), we only had about twenty minutes of time to work on the projects. Since this group finally had all four of their members present, and had most of their props, they spent the time rehearsing. They used the time well and said they would be ready to present on Monday.

Blood on the River

As a refresher, this group was the one that was furthest behind because they had changed their question. Near the end of their last meeting, they were in the process of gathering all their information to divide it up so they could each work on some over the weekend. It was pretty apparent on Monday, May 19 that very little (possibly nothing) got done over the weekend. So they each got busy reading over the resource(s) they had and making notes.

A short time later, I went over to the group and asked how they were coming as far as gathering information and they said they hadn't found very much. John was reading a book called, "Vote." I asked him if there was any good information in the book. He said, "No, it's basically a timeline and it doesn't really say anything." "Are you sure it doesn't really say anything?" I asked. "It seems like a timeline would be the perfect source to get you started and give you a really good overview of what led to women getting the right to vote. Then you could go on and research a few of the important events to get more details." I sat down with them and John read me the first few points on the timeline. I asked them what they thought the most important ideas were in that portion of the timeline. Mitchell said that the Constitution was passed and included a measure that said only white men who were land owners could vote. I told them to write that down, including the date. John read the next few points and Dylan said, "I get it now. We just need to find the important events in the timeline and write those down for our presentation!" All four kids moved in closer together and Dylan suggested what to write down for the part John had just read. I could see they were going to make some progress now so I left them to work. When I checked on them again, John and Mitchell were reading over an article about Susan B. Anthony, Dylan was working on making an outline from their timeline notes, and Kailee was on a computer looking up when Susan B. Anthony died. (I wondered if she had checked John and Mitchell's article, but since she was looking at a page that had the information she wanted, I let it be.)

On Wednesday, May 21, this group had a hard time getting going. During this time, Dylan managed to keep some focus and finished working on the notes he had started at their last meeting. My parent helper sat with the group for a short time to try to get them going. I had them read me the caption they were working on and explain their scene to me. I noticed a slight inaccuracy in their caption . . . they had summarized so much they left out an important detail. Their original caption read, "In 1788 it was decided that white men with land were the only people who could vote." I reminded them that this wasn't just an isolated decision that came out of nowhere, but was part of the Constitution that was passed in 1788. I reminded them that their captions are all they have to teach us what they want us to learn and to be sure their information is both complete and accurate. They went to work revising the caption. When I visited this group for the last time that day, Mitchell and Kailee were on a computer looking for information on Susan B. Anthony—they wanted to know what she looked like so they could

plan a costume for her, and John and Dylan were working on blocking out more of their scenes. For the first time in a while, I felt confident this group would be able to pull together a nice presentation before the end of the year.

On Thursday, May 22, Dylan and Kailee told me they needed to finish revising their captions and work on making props. They got busy working on the captions while Mitchell went to talk to their social studies teacher about borrowing some toy guns that are used as props in their social studies plays. When Mitchell returned, John and Kailee were done with the captions and Mitchell worked on ideas for other props. They spent a fair amount of time making protest signs. Overall, the group made some nice progress today. John was back at school on Friday, May 23, so the group used their time to finish blocking their scenes and rehearse. I did have to remind this group about the rules for borrowing students from another group, as they tried to commandeer a student from the Crooked River group for quite a long time. Otherwise they worked well and made good progress on putting together their scenes.

On Thursday, May 29, they continued working on props and rehearsing. An interesting thing I noticed about this group is that each time they rehearsed they made small revisions to their scenes. I was happy to see they were paying attention to the details and realizing that could keep working on improving their scenes. Mitchell wanted to know if he could bring a toy gun to school, since the social studies props were being used at another elementary school in the district. This is something I needed our principal's permission for and he was out of the building for the day. So instead, I gave the group a large piece of cardboard and suggested they try to make a gun from that. That kept Mitchell engaged for the remainder of the time as he found pictures of guns and then worked on trying to draw one that satisfied him. The rest of the group worked on some other props, but primarily kept rehearsing and revising their scenes.

The group spent their twenty minutes on Friday, May 30 rehearsing with all their props and working on eliminating having characters' backs to the audience (something I had to remind all the groups about.) They worked well together and said they would be ready to present on Monday.

Indian Captive

On Monday, May 19, this group began by working on writing captions for each of their Tableaux scenes and picking parts for the scenes. They continued to work well together. They divided up the work so that each

member had something to do: Nikki wrote out outlines for each scene, Abbey was working on the exact scripting for the captions, and Rachael and Francesca were generating ideas for blocking out the scenes. They had several ideas for props, and I reminded them to keep a list so they could decide who would be responsible for each prop before they left that day.

On Wednesday, May 21 they continued working from where they left off on Monday. At one point, they realized they had a small problem . . . they had a scene depicting a woman tanning hides but no one in the group knew what that meant! My parent helper came to the rescue and helped them figure it out. When I visited the group they were practicing one of their scenes. The caption was, “The clan mother has a lot of power. She appoints the council members of the tribe.” I was a little confused by their tableaux scene because there seemed to be two powerful women. Francesca was standing on a chair pointing to two people, and Abbey was also pointing to someone, who was looking at her with awe. They explained that Francesca was the clan mother, and Abbey was picking the council members. I asked them to read me their caption again and told them what I understood it to say . . . that the clan mother picks the council members. They said that was right. I explained why it was confusing to me that was picking the council members if Francesca was the clan mother. Once I saw the “Ah ha” moment in their eyes, I left them to figure out how to fix their scene.

When I returned, they were practicing their revised scene. Francesca was the clan mother and was pointing to two people who were to be council members (these would be portrayed by two boys borrowed from another group). Rachael was standing nearby clapping. When I checked on them for the last time that day, they had fixed their problem. This time Abbey and Nikki were clapping. I talked them a little bit about working on their facial expressions in their scene. Since they couldn’t move in their scenes, their expressions would be crucial for showing the emotion in the scene.

On Thursday, May 22 and Friday, May 23, the group worked on making a list of all the props they wanted for their scenes. They put together quite a list and worked on dividing it up based on things they knew they had at home or could easily get. They spent the rest of their time rehearsing. They worked together well and were excited about bringing in all their props and doing their final rehearsals.

By Thursday, May 29, Francesca had brought in two armloads of props, including plant pots, dolls, and costumes. Other group members had brought

in some small things but said they still had more to bring in. By Friday, they had several more props including baskets and costume pieces. They spent their time rehearsing with their props and making sure no one had their back to the audience. F They said they would be ready to present on Monday.

Crooked River

Yes, you guessed it. This group continued to have the most difficult time staying on task. That being said, they continued to make progress and I'm optimistic they will have a good performance when they are done.

When this group began working on Monday, May 19, they had two captions written and were working the third. When I approached them, they were sitting around the table discussing their social studies projects. When I asked them what was happening with their inquiry project, one student read me a line about prejudice having to do with "weak versus strong" and said they didn't know how to show that. I asked the group what they thought "weak versus strong" meant and we discussed that it likely wasn't referring to just physical strength. We talked about political power, wealth, etc. That seemed to help them with that problem, however they said they still had another problem. They didn't have the three roots of prejudice they had learned about in their presentation, but couldn't figure out what they were missing. I asked them to tell me what they had in their captions so far. I asked if anyone knew what they were missing and they all said no. I asked the student to read back through her research notes that listed the roots of prejudice. After she read them, the kids still couldn't figure out what they were missing. Slightly frustrated with their apathy, I wanted to leave them to figure it out, but again felt that time restraints were too tight to have them spend a lot of time on this one question. So I told them they were missing the economic piece. I asked if they remembered what that was, and Michelle said, "It has to do with rich people versus poor people and stuff like that." Then Logan and Hannah both said, "Oh yeah!" and they began discussing ideas for a scene to show that concept. Before leaving, I reminded the group to add specific examples to their tableaux captions, as they had with Martin Luther King, Jr. in one of their scenes. They worked the rest of the time on their captions, although it still took a few reminders to individual group members to stay on task.

On Wednesday, May 21, the group worked on adding some specific examples to their captions. I asked them to share one of their captions with me and tell me what the scene would look like. The caption said, "People were made of fun for their behavior." The scene depicted Logan as a Native American doing

a traditional dance, and the other members of the group as white people, standing around laughing. (Okay, this is the second group to think along the lines of laughing at others' differences and/or misfortune . . . I'm thinking now this in part due to the fact that these kids are growing up very isolated from the realities of prejudice. They live in a community that has very little diversity. I'm sure they have been exposed to aspects of prejudice on TV and in movies, but they probably didn't even know what it was. I'm still trying to decide if it's good that they think the worst that happens is people get laughed at, or bad that they are so sheltered they don't understand how deep prejudice runs and how much it can wound its victims.) I asked the kids if they thought that being laughed at was all that happened. They said no and Hannah L. said, "We could have a hanging rope. That would be better and more powerful." The rest of the group liked the idea and they began discussing how to make a hanging rope for their props. I left them with the hopes that would keep them on task for awhile.

My parent helper spent a little time with them between my visits. She reported that the group was working, but it was pretty much the girls running the show, with the boys just following along. Otherwise she said they were doing fine.

When I returned, four of the five group members were practicing a scene. Emily was sitting at the table, not really paying attention and doodling. I reminded her she needed to participate with her group members. She responded, "I'm just the narrator," in a tone of voice that implied she thought that role was unimportant and she didn't need to practice with the group as a result. So, I said to her, "Emily—you have the most important part! You are conveying all the information your group wants us learn. Without the narrator, it would be very hard for your group to teach us. You need to practice with your group every time so you know you can read the captions loudly, clearly, and with good expression. At this, Emily sat up and said, "I know. I'm going to memorize all the captions, so I know them really well!" I told her that was fine, but she could keep them with her anyway to refer to if she needed. Then she got up and walked over to where her group was practicing.

On Thursday, May 22, the group told me they were going to work on making a list of props they needed. However, I'm not sure the group got much done at all that day. They seemed to be everywhere and had a very difficult time staying focused. At one point, our principal had come in (he often does a quick walk through our classrooms) and was at the table talking to them.

Friday, May 23 went much more smoothly for this group. I began our meeting time by telling them that I thought things had gotten out of hand the day before and unless they felt they were ready to present now, I expected to see them working productively today. It probably also helped that they only had thirty minutes. I also haven't mentioned that we started today with our first official presentation from the "My Heart Is on the Ground" group. I think when the "Crooked River" group saw their presentation, they realized they still had some ground to cover before they would be ready to present to the class. They spent today rehearsing, finalizing their list of props, and determining who was responsible for each of the props. By the end of their meeting time, they told me they thought they would be ready to present next Thursday.

Thursday, May 29: It turns out they weren't ready after all, largely because they didn't have all their props and costumes yet. (The problem with a three-day weekend and then a couple of days of school with no time to work on these projects is that they forgot all about bringing in their props!) So they spent today really practicing their scenes and discussing exactly how they would use the props they were going to bring in. There were no real problems today.

Friday, May 30: They had all of their props, so they spent their time rehearsing with everything in place, including costumes. Since they only had 20 minutes, they used their time well. They said they would be ready to present on Monday.

My Heart Is on the Ground

This group has earned the proverbial gold star for keeping things together and staying focused through the end of the year. They were focused and on task throughout these two weeks, and not only finished and presented their Tableaux, but worked on another short story I gave them.

Monday, May 19: They worked on writing their captions. They had ideas for six different scenes and wanted to know how many they could/should have. I told them they needed enough to clearly convey everything they learned about their question, but they didn't want too many because after awhile they might lose their audience. They decided they were okay with six and I agreed. I sat with them for a few minutes and observed. They were struggling a little with exactly how to show each of their ideas. I suggested they focus

first on completing their captions, making sure they had all the information they wanted to share in them, and then decide from there what aspects of the captions to portray in their tableaux scenes. They went to work on their captions and I went on to other groups. By the end of the class period, they had all their captions written and were working on blocking the scenes and figuring out their props. Since they all had roles in the tableaux scenes, they asked Abbey (Indian Captive group) to narrate for them and she agreed.

Wednesday, May 21: They were very well organized today, and had nearly all their props. Kenzi brought in an Indian costume and had arranged for her mom to bring in shovels the next day. Jessi brought in several different pieces of clothing that could be used for costumes and the girls sorted through them and decided how to use them. They not only planned a wardrobe for each person, but worked on making sure the whole group would look coordinated (for example, they all decided to wear black pants). Jessi took the lead and acted as “director” while they rehearsed each scene. Near the end of class they came to me and said they were ready to present the next day. I have to admit that even though they had been working hard, I was surprised. I asked if they were sure and they said yes. I went over and told them I was really proud of how hard they had worked and asked if they would show me one of their scenes. They grabbed Abbey and did a whole rehearsal for me. Their scenes were all nicely blocked and portrayed their messages very well. The only suggestion I had for them was to work on their facial expressions. Their scenes were depicting highly emotional events and while some of the girls were showing this in their expressions, others weren’t. I left them to work on that and after class they said they still wanted to present the next day.

Thursday, May 21: The girls arrived at school all wearing black pants and very excited about their presentation, only to learn that Anna N. was absent. Jessi asked if they could do it without her. I asked her how she thought Anna would feel about that, and she said probably not good. I reinforced that notion, explaining that Anna had worked just as hard as everyone else in the group and would not want to be left out of the presentation. I promised they could present the next day if Anna was back. They wanted to know what to do in the meantime. I asked them if they felt more practice would be beneficial and they said no, they really were ready. So I gave them each a copy of the book *Gleam and Glow* by Eve Bunting. I explained that even though this was a picture book, I wanted them to read, keep thinknotes, and discuss it just

they like had with their book club book. They seemed enthusiastic about this idea and asked if they should read the book out loud together or each read it on their own. I told them they could decide, but that it might be best to read it through and make notes on their own the first time through, and then if they wanted they could reread it together. They went right to work, even though two of their group members had not yet returned from their reading pull-out class. They promised to fill those girls in on what they were supposed to do as soon as they came back. (I don't think I've mentioned previously that every Wednesday and Thursday, two of these students go to a reading pull-out class. They usually return 10–15 minutes after we start our reading time. As a result, this group always had to work without them for the first several minutes, and then bring them up to speed when they returned. To me that makes it even more impressive that they were the first group to be ready to present.) I checked on them a few minutes after their classmates returned and they were all working on reading the book (independently) and making notes.

Friday, May 23: Anna N. was back and this group was raring to go. They got in their costumes and prepared all their props while everyone else got out some paper and a pencil. (I had suggested they might want to take notes because, “You never know when you might have a quiz on all the things you’re teaching each other in these presentations.”) To be honest, at that point I hadn't really decided what kind of follow-up, if any, I was going to do on the presentations, but I knew I needed them to have some motivation to pay attention, and this was sure to do it. (Yes, I know—that's terrible, but I had forgotten to plan ahead for this moment and had to make a quick decision.) Mr. Noskey came in and found a seat. (I had invited him to come and watch, not only because of what he had observed the previous day, but because I really wanted him to see the end product of all the work the kids had done.)

The girls did a great job with their presentation. All of their scenes were well blocked, clearly displayed their message, and they had really improved their facial expressions since they rehearsed for me. After a big round of applause for them, I did a little debriefing with the class. I began by asking if anyone had any questions. Landon asked if the girls knew what kinds of diseases the kids at the school died from. Anna O. said there a few different sicknesses but she couldn't remember the names. Kenzie said they also died from trances. The kids asked what that was and Kenzie tried to explain it but wasn't able to do it clearly enough for the kids to fully grasp. So I explained it to them. Then Michelle asked why Indian parents would send their kids to the school if they didn't want them to go. Kenzie said if they didn't

agree to send their kids, they were usually forced to send them anyway. I asked how they were forced to send them and this was the one area where I was disappointed in their response. The articles they read had included information about tactics used such as withholding food and resources from reservations where families refused to send their kids, but Kenzie just said they would take them at gunpoint. She also added that some parents chose to send their kids because they wanted them to learn English so they could read and understand the treaties offered by the white men.

To continue the debriefing, I asked if anyone had any comments for the girls. Surprisingly no one said anything. I asked how they thought the group did and several kids said they did a great job. I asked what was so good about the presentation. The kids responded with comments like, “It was easy to understand what they were showing,” “They had good costumes,” “They used props to help make their scenes clearer,” and “They had good expressions on their faces.” We also discussed how the girls portrayed motion in their scenes even though they weren’t moving, and what a nice job Abbey did reading their captions loudly, clearly, and with expression. I asked the class to share some of what they learned from the group and several students shared ideas from their notes. They had clearly understood the girls’ presentation and learned from it. Mr. Noskey told the girls he thought they did a great job and then left the room. (Phew! 😊)

Here are the captions they used in their presentation:

1. If Indian parents did not agree to have their children taken to the school, they were taken by force.
2. Once the children arrive at the school, they immediately have to get their hair cut. For them, it means taking away their Indian past.
3. The kids struggled to learn English and were forced not to talk or sign in their past language.
4. The children were given diaries to write about what they did each day.
5. Many kids died from various diseases at the school.
6. Many kids tried to escape because the school was not a great pleasure.

Overall, their captions are fairly simple, but they do show that they learned about life at the Indian schools and gained at least a little insight into why parents sent their kids there. Their tableaux scenes were very well done.

For the remainder of the time that the other groups have continued to work on their presentations, this group worked on *Gleam and Glow*. I won’t

go into detail about their discussions, but will tell you that after they had spent a couple of days discussing it, they had come up with some very good thoughts about the story, things they questioned in the story, and what the author’s message was. They had finished all this by Thursday, May 29, so when they asked if they could draw for the twenty minutes of work time on Friday, I felt they had earned the privilege and let them.

Monday, June 2

PRESENTATION DAY!!!! 😊

I arrived at school this morning with a chant going on in my head . . . “Please, please, please let no one be absent today!” The corners of my room were stacked with props, costumes, wigs, etc. —it was very exciting!

After the great job the My Heart Is on the Ground did, and monitoring each group’s progress, I was optimistic that the presentations would go well today. I had some concerns about the “Crooked River” group, but otherwise felt the presentations would be good. I picked sticks to determine the order of the presentations and allowed time after each presentation for the kids to ask the group members questions. Most of the questions they asked were to repeat or clarify a caption; some of the questions were asking for explanations of the tableaux scenes. This was particularly true for the Crooked River group.

Sign of the Beaver

Their inquiry question was Where did white settlers get the idea that Indians were savages? Their tableaux captions (worded exactly as given to me) were as follows:

1. The white settlers thought that the Indians were savages because they had no written language, which is strange, because how else would they communicate?
2. Another reason is that the Indians were unschooled and had no knowledge of reading, writing, or arithmetic.
3. A third reason the English settlers believed the Indians were savages was because they could never stay in one place.
4. The English settlers also thought that they were smarter and more superior than the Indians because they believed that their weapons were more sophisticated and more fatal.
5. But the main reason the English settlers were most disgusted in was that the Indians believed in false gods, such as the rain and fire gods.

The boys did a very nice job with their scenes. They were well rehearsed (although there were clear leaders and followers) and they used props to help clarify their scenes. What I was most impressed with though, is that what they taught us in their presentation was truly information that came from their research. Although some of the information was portrayed in their novel, it was not in a context that would have helped to answer their question. This was a group that really struggled with the research process and had a hard time understanding some of the more difficult text they came across. Yet they were able to pull from their research (with a little guidance) the information they needed, and then put it into captions (without so much guidance) that their classmates could clearly understand. I was so proud of them! In addition, the boys clearly did their best to engage all group members in the process and the final product. Hurray!

My comments to the boys on their grade sheet:

- Question is meaningful and researchable: Excellent question!
- Group’s presentation shows evidence of research: Yes!
- Question is clearly answered in the presentation: Yes!
- Tableaux captions are well-written and informative: Yes—Is written language the only way to communicate? Also, you need to explain a little more clearly what you mean by the “Indians could never stay in one place.”
- Tableaux scenes clearly depict ideas in captions: Wonderful!
- Tableaus scenes were appropriately blocked and well-rehearsed: Scenes were nicely blocked, but adding facial expressions and gestures would help make them clearer. Nice use of costumes and creative props!

Overall comments: You did a wonderful job researching a tough question and teaching us what you learned! 😊

Indian Captive

Their inquiry question was, “What did Indian women do?” Their tableaux captions were as follows:

1. The Clan Mother had a lot of power. They chose only men council members, usually chosen for life. The Clan Mother gave advice to the council members. She could fire a council member if she felt she made a mistake. Then she would choose a new member in their place.
2. Indian women made pots, raised kids, farmed, and played during the day.

3. Outside the Indian women's homes they wove baskets, made corn husk dolls, and tanned hides to make them waterproof and useable.
4. What Indian women did around the house was cook, sort and pick fruits, and get water to use.
5. In their homes, they made clothes, carried children in cradle boards, cleaned and washed clothes.

This group did a fantastic job with their costumes and props. While the organization within their captions was a little questionable, overall they communicated the various roles that Indian women held within the tribe and their tableaux scenes clearly portrayed the captions. They were able to get a little of their information from their novel, but most of it came from their research and went beyond what was included in their novel. In particular, the role of the Clan Mother came solely from their research. The girls also did a great job making sure Francesca everyone had an active role throughout the process and it was clear that everyone was confident in their role in the presentation. Another hurray!

My comments to the girls on their grade sheet:

- Question is meaningful and researchable: Yes!
- Group's presentation shows evidence of research: Yes!
- Question is clearly answered in the presentation: Good information!
- Tableaux captions are well-written and informative: Very nice—the “outside,” “around the house,” and “In their homes” was a little confusing.
- Tableaux scenes clearly depict ideas in captions: Very nice!
- Tableaus scenes were appropriately blocked and well-rehearsed: Beautifully done! Make sure no one has their back to the audience (Logan and Mitchell). Nice costumes and use of props to make your scenes believable!

Crooked River

Their inquiry question was “What causes hatred and prejudice against a certain group of people?” Their tableaux captions were as follows:

1. People judge other people by the money they have. Like a poor person being excluded or laughed at for not being like rich people.
2. Different groups of people got mad at other groups and that led to fights and war. An example is Martin Luther King Jr. standing up for blacks' rights.

3. People are hated for their social behavior. Many Native Americans have been persecuted for their cultures.
4. People are judged by what they have done in the past. Like a Native American being locked up and watched for their crimes that he has been accused of because of the lack of trust between the two groups.
5. People often had their rights cut back because of their gender. An example is that women used to not be allowed to vote.

This is the group that made the fast sink from the top to the bottom, and unfortunately that is apparent in their captions. While they made a nice effort with their presentation—using costumes and props to help communicate their message, their captions did not clearly answer their question and some were confusing because they incorporated examples from their novel which were difficult for those who hadn't read the book to understand. Their examples also did not always support the point they were meant to exemplify. They incorporated their research into their captions, but not in a way that clearly answered their question (which makes sense, since they began to seriously fall apart shortly after realizing they had the answer to their question in the materials they had gathered.) Looking back on their grade sheet now, I am surprised to see I gave them an A. I think I wanted to give them credit for all the hard work they did early in the process, and for putting together a nice presentation, even though what they learned was not clearly communicated. Rethinking it now, I probably should have been more honest with their grade. (I also remember now struggling with giving them a lower grade because we had so few grades in the trimester and that would have significantly affected their overall term grade, which didn't seem totally fair given how well they had done early in the term. This is why I hate giving grades!)

My comments to them on their grade sheet:

- Question is meaningful and researchable: Excellent question!
- Group's presentation shows evidence of research: Yes!
- Question is clearly answered in the presentation: Good job!
- Tableaux captions are well-written and informative: You need to be sure your examples demonstrate your point. For example, how did Martin Luther King Jr. lead to fights and war? Number 4 is also not clear.
- Tableaux scenes clearly depict ideas in captions: Great!
- Tableaux scenes were appropriately blocked and well-rehearsed: Good

job! Make sure no one has their back to the audience. Nice costumes and good use of props!

- Beautiful job overall!

Blood on the River

Their inquiry question was “How did women get the right to vote?” Their tableaux captions were as follows:

1. 1788—the Constitution of the United States was passed and it had a law that said only white men that owned land and paid taxes could vote.
2. 1848—Seneca Falls—the first fight for women’s right to vote.
3. 1906—Susan B. Anthony died March 13, 1906, fourteen years before the 19th Amendment got passed, but was a big help for women’s voting rights.
4. 1913—Ten states allow women to vote: Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Washington, California, Arizona, Kansas, Oregon, and Illinois.
5. 1917—Jeannette Ranken is the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress. She is from Montana, where women can vote!
6. 1917—Over 200 women are arrested for civil disobedience while calling for women’s rights in a national campaign in Michigan.
7. 1920—The 19th Amendment becomes law! Women can vote in every state!
8. 1971—The 26th Amendment lowers the voting age to 18 years old.

Interestingly, when they began their presentation, they were confused over whether they answered, “When did women get the right to vote?” or “How did women get the right to vote?” I ended up clarifying it both for them and the class after their presentation because some of the kids were confused. I explained that the “when” question could be answered with a date, and that they supplied much more information than that in their presentation. Also, because this group was much further behind in the process than the other groups (as a result of the late change in their question), they did not spend much time rehearsing. I offered them extra time (what little we had), but I think they felt more ready than they actually were. Their presentation was fine, but the lack of rehearsal was evident as they seemed to be figuring out (and even changing) scenes as they went. That being said, they did a nice job with their research, as none of the information they shared was even hinted at in their novel. They had some holes in their presentation, such

as who Susan B. Anthony was and what she did that was so important for women's right to vote, but overall they shared a lot of good information. They also went beyond their question with their last caption, which their classmates were quick to comment on after their presentation.

My comment to them on their grade sheet:

- Question is meaningful and researchable: Yes! (You definitely researched and answered the “how” question!)
- Group's presentation shows evidence of research: Great!
- Question is clearly answered in the presentation: Yes!
- Tableaux captions are well-written and informative: Most are perfect. You need to say what happened in Seneca Falls and what Susan B. Anthony did. Your last caption isn't needed— it goes beyond your topic.
- Tableaux scenes clearly depict ideas in captions: Yes!
- Tableaus scenes were appropriately blocked and well-rehearsed: You needed to rehearse more to allow for smooth transitions between scenes with less discussion, confusion, and questioning. You did a great job with costumes and props. Mitchell's facial expressions contributed a lot . . . you all needed to use them more!

Overall comments: Overall, nice job, particularly with the time constraints your group faced!

Here are the comments I gave to the group that presented earlier (My Heart Is on the Ground) on their grade sheet:

- Question is meaningful and researchable: Yes!
- Group's presentation shows evidence of research: Much of the information in your presentation came from your book. I would have liked to see more information from the articles as well.
- Question is clearly answered in the presentation: Excellent!
- Tableaux captions are well-written and informative: Very good (just proof for spelling and conventions errors).
- Tableaux scenes clearly depict ideas in captions: Wonderful!
- Tableaus scenes were appropriately blocked and well-rehearsed: You set a great example for the groups that followed! Great use of costumes and props!

Beautiful job girls!

You can probably imagine the HUGE sigh of relief I breathed once all the presentations were done. Needless to say, with only three more days

of school, had anyone been absent, or a group had a problem with their presentation, I would have lost a fair amount of sleep. However, I still felt it was important to complete some type of follow-up activity with the kids to see how much they learned from the presentations and to help me assess the overall effectiveness of the projects. Going back to my threat to give a quiz on what the groups teach in their presentation, at first I thought about having each group write two or three quiz questions on their presentation, but we've really run out of time to do that.

Tuesday, June 3

I asked the kids to write a paragraph about what they learned from each of the presentations, other than their own. My instructions were to tell me what they learned, not to evaluate the presentations, but a few kids did both. I can't decide if it was a mistake or not to allow them to use their notes to write these paragraphs. On the one hand, I have to question if they really learned the material or were just copying what their notes said. On the other hand, I didn't intend it as a quiz, and just the act of writing the paragraphs hopefully helped cement at least a little of what they learned in their minds. This is yet another problem I faced as a result of running out of year. I probably would have spent more time on this and really assessed what they learned had the time been available. It was both interesting and a little frustrating that kids who were asked to participate in another group's presentation wrote that they didn't have complete notes because of their participation. I have to wonder . . . didn't they pay attention to what they were reading or trying to show in the various scenes? It seems like the mere act of participating in a scene would help them remember what it was about. Here is a summary of what the kids wrote about each group.

My Heart Is on the Ground

This group got their message across quite successfully, although they had an advantage because the whole class learned a fair amount about the Carlisle Indian School during our background building lessons. That being said, what this group did accomplish was to clearly demonstrate (and solidify) some of what we had learned earlier and add to that base of information. Most of the kids did a good job summarizing what this group encompassed in their presentation. One student, Emily, clearly incorporated what she remembered thinking/feeling when we read the Carlisle School article because she wrote about how sad the kids were to leave their parents.

Sign of the Beaver

Some of the kids basically rewrote the group's captions—a few even word for word, but overall, most appeared to have learned exactly what the boys in the group wanted to teach them. It was interesting though that some of the kids didn't understand the symbolism in the boys' presentation (when they portrayed Indians in a classroom unable to answer questions) to show that the Indians were uneducated. A couple of kids wrote that the Indians went to school to learn English and math, and one even wrote that the white men thought the Indians were savages because they couldn't fill in the blanks on English words or answer math problems. Had there been more time, I definitely would have spent some of it discussing how the different groups used various forms of symbolism in their presentations and teaching them how to discern between factual information and symbolism. That would have been a pretty high level lesson for 5th grade, but one I think they could have handled after all they had done this year.

Indian Captive

The message in this group's presentation was relatively straightforward and easy to understand, so the kids had no problem summarizing it. However, I was surprised by how many kids made no mention of the power held by the Clan Mother, since that fact was new to us. One student's summary was interesting in that he thought the Clan Mother was the "god mother" and was powerful because she could talk to the gods. Hmmmm.

Crooked River

As you can imagine, the summaries on this group's presentation were mixed. Some kids were able to glean the main ideas from the presentation—people are hated because they are poor, look different, follow different social practices, have different beliefs, and/or come from a people with a problematic history. However, several of the kids wrote what the scenes were about, but weren't able to clearly articulate how the ideas they understood from the scenes contributed to prejudice. Kailee went so far as to write, "Mrs. Titcher, I'm not going to lie, but I got confused a lot! But some of the things they did were two people who are poor on their hands and knees begging for money. Also Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. giving a speech and two people being held by a bodyguard so they didn't hurt him. Lastly, two people crying and a person trying to kill another person!" Most of the kids included something about poor people and something about Martin Luther King, Jr. in their summaries—the remaining information was not consistent.

Blood on the River

Despite the long transitions and occasional confusion between scenes, this group was able to somewhat successfully get their message across. Most of the kids' paragraphs included dates and events and a couple of kids went so far as to comment that they never knew women couldn't vote until 1920. Most of the kids mentioned Susan B. Anthony and the fact that she died before the 19th Amendment was passed. However, the one idea I'm not sure was clear to the kids was that getting the right to vote was a long and difficult process for women. Very few kids communicated this idea in any form and a few kids only mentioned one or two isolated facts without even mentioning the 19th Amendment.

My Final Thoughts

So, now that we are done, the year is over, and my kids are moving on to middle school, there is so much to reflect back on and evaluate. We covered a LOT of ground and learned and practiced some very valuable skills between February and June. The kids read an entire novel as thinkers, not just observers of text (something I'm fairly confident many of them had never done before). They learned to share and discuss (even argue over) their thoughts and feelings about text. They learned how to decipher, evaluate, and learn from some very tough nonfiction texts. They discovered that their questions are meaningful and relevant. They struggled through a difficult and sometimes confusing research process and came out with some very valuable information. I was delighted to see the level of thinking, the attentiveness of the audience, and the way in which the kids showed ownership of these books. They really knew—and cared about—what they read. In the process, I barely touched on some of the standards I am supposed to teach and more deeply covered others that are not part of my mandate. I spent countless hours planning, evaluating, and reevaluating to plan some more. I doubted myself, pushed the kids, and celebrated so many “Ah ha” moments (for both me and the kids). So, would I do it again? IN A HEARTBEAT!

I think the kids came away with some very valuable skills that they would not have gained had I followed our “normal” curriculum. I think a few of the kids are now more confident readers and at least one is a much more passionate reader. Some of the kids realized that reading with others can make reading much more fun and interesting, and as a result, no longer “hate” to read, although it still may not be their favorite pastime. However, beyond all that, the fact that my fifth graders were looking at and learning

about questions such as the roots of prejudice fills me with great pride. No, they didn't develop an exhaustive or even mildly comprehensive answer to the "big" questions they asked, but they learned that they can ask some very important questions, and they have the ability to at least attempt to answer those questions. I hope they will retain not only some of the skills they learned this year, but the belief that their thoughts, questions, and opinions are important and valuable, and that they will carry that belief with them into their middle school, high school, and college classrooms. They have so much good thinking to share with the world.

So, in a nutshell, I'm not sure who learned more—me or the kids, but I know it was a great ride for us all!