

Evaluating the use of picture books and “read aloud” discussions to explore complex topics with kindergarten students

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Research Objectives

The purpose of this exercise is to outline and discuss the effectiveness of a kindergarten-level read aloud lesson plan in order to:

1. Develop students' ability to use reading comprehension strategies
2. Develop an awareness of their community
3. Make connections between the story and their community in order to inspire community activism

Abstract

Read aloud discussions are highly recommended for **classroom literacy practice** and **stimulating classroom discussion**. In this lesson plan, the practice of read aloud discussions was explored with respect to its **potential to teach kindergarten students about complex concepts**, such as community awareness. To address this research question, we conducted the read aloud with a book about community with four students. **Students' comments and reflective drawings** were then utilized to assess the effectiveness of the activity. Overall, we determined through this lesson plan that complex topics can be explored through read alouds and **learning does not have to be a linear process**.

Reading comprehension strategies

“Comprehension is about thinking, understanding, and connecting the meaning of written, oral, or visual texts. Effective readers use a variety of strategies as they make meaning from texts.” (Bainbridge, 2017)

The reading comprehension strategies specifically addressed in this lesson include:

Predicting

Drawing inferences

Activating prior knowledge

Making connections

Methods

- The picture book, “HEY, WALL” by Susan Verde was selected for this exercise
- As a story of art and community, it was chosen with the intent for students to explore the concept of community more deeply

- The read aloud was completed with four students (two JK's and two SK's) and was recorded and transcribed for analysis, along with de-identified copies of the students' reflective drawings of their community.

- Effectiveness of the selected picture book and the read aloud lesson plan was evaluated based on students' comments during the read aloud discussion, as well as post-discussion reflective drawing completed by the students.

Results

The students' verbal responses during the read aloud demonstrate their **comprehension skills and engagement** with the topic of community (see Figure 1)

- How will the boy paint the wall? **“With paint and with other people's help by telling them the wall is sad”** [Student A].
- What does the boy mean when he says ‘Hey Wall, I'm read to change all that'? **“He's going to paint it!”** [Student D]
- What would you draw on the wall if this were your community? **Various answers included firefighters, police car, construction work and sidewalk**
- What can you do to make a difference in your community? **“Take out trash and build churches. Building churches and taking out trash are good things”** [Student C].

Figure 1: Selected transcribed student responses from the read aloud discussion

Results

The post-discussion reflective drawings further demonstrate that students are able to **conceptualize and represent** community (see Figure 2)

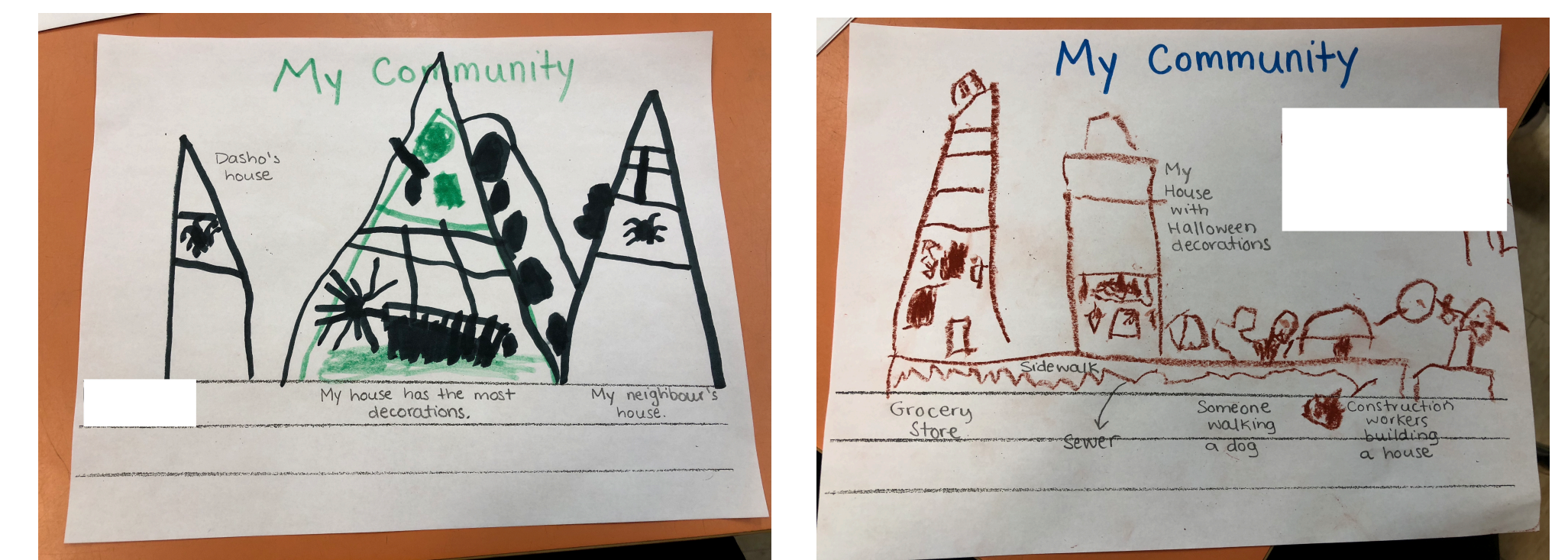


Figure 2: Student A (left) demonstrates a lesser understanding of community than Student C (right). Student A demonstrates a good understanding of the immediate community, from which we would want to extend the student's thinking. Student C can represent multiple ideas about community from the read aloud discussion.

Implications

- Traditionally, classrooms focus on teaching the skill of reading and writing prior to exploring complex topics
- This lesson plan demonstrates how students can engage in critical thinking and complex thought verbally, removing the constraint of developing reading abilities linearly (i.e. learning reading fundamentals from simple texts before complex texts)
- This exercise raises the question: Could reads alouds be an optimal forum for developing reading comprehension and critical thinking skills while basic reading and writing skills are still emerging?

References

- Bainbridge, J. & Heydon, R. (2017). *Constructing Meaning Teaching Language and Literacy K-8* (Sixth ed.). Toronto, Canada: Nelson Education.
- Verde, S. (2018). *HEY, WALL A Story of Art and Community*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers.