

Education and Arts Roundtable

Project Title: Collapse: Moffett Elementary School

Project Dates: May-June 2005

Grade Level: 1st Grade

Collaborators: Moffett Elementary School
Visual artist Meriel Stern

Partner Teacher(s): Magdalena Garcia (team teacher)
Luisa Barba (team teacher)
Patricia Cruz (team teacher)
Meriel Stern (visual artist)

Learning Disciplines: Language Arts-Writing; Social Studies

“They had experienced a lot before getting to the Museum and all of that background . . . enabled them to stand a little taller in this community institution and join the same conversation [with] anyone else seeing the exhibit . . .” –Magdalena Garcia, Teacher



Moffett student artwork

Project Background

► **What Museum exhibition / collection / exhibit inspired your project?**

The Natural History Museum's 2005 exhibition, *Collapse?* based on Jared Diamond's book, *Collapse: How Societies Choose To Fail Or Succeed*. Why do some civilizations decline while others flourish?

► **What was the “big idea/essential question” that guided the project?**

How do our choices affect our world?

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► Who were your community/artist partners or collaborators?

Meriel Stern- visual artist

Project Goals

► What were your interdisciplinary goals? (e.g. classroom learning content, art form, museum content/subject)

We wanted students to understand the core concept of the *Collapse?* exhibit, which was about interdependence and how our choices affect not only our world but others as well. In order for our students to understand the concept of choices, we needed to bring the concept of change to their attention. We utilized the visual arts, specifically collage, as a way of helping students conceptualize change in a beginning, middle and end sequence. Then, from there we could talk about the choices made that inspired the change and how different choices would have had different results.

► Were there additional learning goals you hoped to accomplish? (e.g. social/developmental goals)

A major goal in our classroom was that students would be interacting with this material in both English and Spanish in an effort to promote their bilingualism.



Moffett students engaged in classroom activity

► What California State standards did you plan to cover?

Language Arts

Reading Comprehension

- 2.2 Respond to who, what, when, where, and how questions.
- 2.7 Retell the central ideas of simple expository or narrative passages.

3.0 Literary Response and Analysis

- 3.1 Identify and describe the elements of plot, setting, and character(s) in a story, as well as

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the story's beginning, middle, and ending.

1.0 Writing Strategies

1.2 Use descriptive words when writing.

2.0 Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics)

2.1 Write brief narratives (e.g., fictional, autobiographical) describing an experience.

History-Social Science

1.4 Students compare and contrast everyday life in different times and places around the world and recognize that some aspects of people, places, and things change over time while others stay the same.

Project Activities

► Describe the project. How did you decide what to do? How did you plan your project?

Our planning of the project moved from what the students were familiar with, to that which was unfamiliar to them. We tried to keep that concept in the forefront of any activity we did. We wanted the students' experience at the Museum (and with the Museum content) to be a personal one, so our goal was to see how the themes were the same as in their own lives.

► Describe what happened? What were the activities?

- We began with having students study about children all around the world in an effort to help them connect to the different countries represented in the *Collapse?* exhibit and how we should care about those unfamiliar people, because they are people just like us.
- At that point, our collaborating visual artist came to the classroom for 2 days and helped the children create collages. The students took a long piece of tagboard, divided it into a beginning, middle and end and then used a variety of materials to represent an object changing.
- Then we helped children understand the concept that change is inspired by a choice being made by utilizing two pieces of literature, The Lorax and The Butter Battle Book by Dr. Seuss. These books helped to illustrate how people's choices can have a very powerful and lasting impact on the world around them. The students acted the stories out, wrote alternate "what if" . . . endings and drew pictures of key moments to capture the meaning of the stories.
- From there, students were ready to preview the actual Museum exhibit. We had copies of the different rooms of the exhibit printed on transparencies and showed them to the students. We encouraged them to make their own personal predictions and connections first as to what each room was about before explaining what they were actually going to be seeing on the fieldtrip. This was an important step in our scaffolding of the visit both because of our students' developmental needs, being 1st

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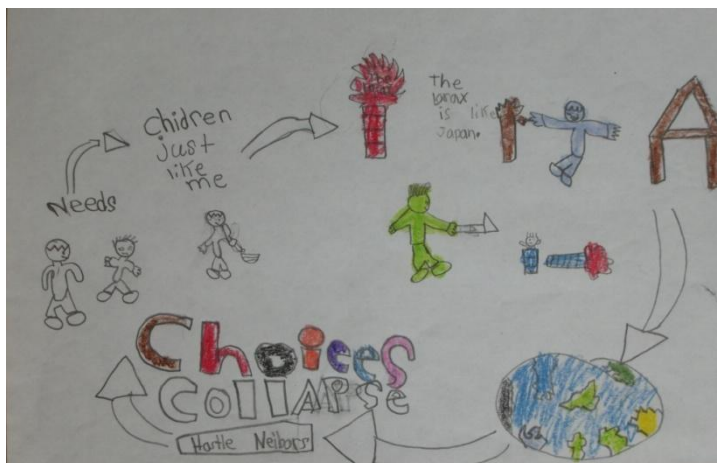
graders, and also being English Language Learners, we could translate into Spanish what they would be witnessing at the Museum.

- The trip to the Museum came next and each group of students was given cameras to capture something that was most inspiring to them at the museum. In essence, they were given a “choice” in how to represent their experience at such an exciting yet unfamiliar place.

Project Reflection

► Did you have any “ah-hah” moments? Transformative teacher or student moments? Unexpected moments or discoveries?

I realized how important it was to have a grounding piece of literature, a common shared story that we could all dialog about and relate to the Museum. That was The Lorax for us. But what was unexpected was how fully that story would help students connect to what was in the exhibit. The students were capable of being in the Museum and, even though they were only 6 or 7 years old, could really relate to what they were seeing. It was incredible to have students stand in the room that was about the Shogun in Japan who enforced the plan to plant a tree for every one that was chopped down and say, without our prompting, what was going on there and what choices were being made by the Shogun. They had experienced a lot before getting to the Museum and all of that background had enabled them to stand a little taller in this community institution and join the same conversation that anyone else seeing the exhibit would have had. It was great!



Student artwork about “choices”

► How did your community/artist partnerships impact your project?

Having a visual artist come into our classroom had a great impact on our students, because it was an unfamiliar person who helped them conceptualize a familiar topic in a new way. She also came on the fieldtrip with us, which just broadened our students’ connection to the larger world around them.

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► **How was your student work made public?**

The students' collages, written reflections, pictures drawn and photographs were displayed in the Inter/Act space at the Museum.

► **How did you document your work and your students work?**

We documented the project through photography and student reflections, and collected and saved student work.