

Lights, Camera, Psyche: Using Mythic Exploration and Performance as a Conduit for Self-

Discovery in Middle School Students

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Abstract

This article presents a curriculum for middle school students that aims to promote self-discovery through mythic exploration, sociocultural investigation, and arts-integrated curriculum. During the middle school years, students are actively learning about who they are, how they relate to others, and what they might want to do in the world. With students spending most of their time at school, it is important to have activities that support this exploration. This curriculum fills that need. Students engage in a sociocultural exploration by investigating their cultural background, choosing a myth from that cultural background, and creating a re-imagined performance of the myth. Students who complete the curriculum are expected to experience increased self-understanding, a deeper connection and sense of interdependence with fellow students, and a sense of pride and accomplishment for creating something new and personally meaningful.

Introduction and Curriculum Rationale

The goal of this curriculum is to provide an integrative, transformative self-discovery project for middle school students. During the middle school years, students are actively learning about who they are, how they relate to others, and what they might want to do in the world. With students spending most of their time at school, it is important to have curriculum that supports this exploration. Therefore, this curriculum aims to support students' personal growth in addition to their academic growth.

This curriculum uses experiential learning (Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2014; Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Martin & Gaskin, 2004), arts-integrated curriculum (DuPont, 2009; Hammond, 2015; Kabilian & Kamaruddin, 2010; McDermott, Falk-Ross, & Medow, 2017; Zambo, 2011), and mythic exploration (Atkinson, 1990; Gottschall, 2012; Henderson, 1968; Hughes, 2017; Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014; Segal, 2015) as the foundation for a student-created theatrical performance. The curriculum will be compatible with the California curriculum standards for middle school English Language Arts, so that it will be academically viable (California State Board of Education, 2013). The curriculum design supports the following learning goals:

1. Through the investigation, exploration, and re-imagined performance of a myth from their cultural background, students are expected to experience increased self-understanding as it relates to their backgrounds and their lives in the present (Barohny, 2010; Henderson, 1968; Jaramillo, 1996; Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014; Mahn, 1999; Pamental, 2010; Vygotsky et al., 2013).

2. Students are expected to feel a sense of interdependence and support with the classmates who experience the process with them (Atkinson, 1990; Gormas, Koole, & Vryhof, 2006; Hammond, 2015; Kremer, 2003; 2007; Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014).
3. Students are expected to feel a sense of accomplishment for creating something personally meaningful, and through reflection processes, may discover a sense of how they would like to move forward in the world, and what they may have to offer their community (Atkinson, 1990; Hammond, 2015; Henderson, 1968; Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014; McDermott et al., 2017).

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Lev Vygotsky believed in the power of hands-on experiences for children's discovery and development. Additionally, Vygotsky theorized that to fully understand child development, the social world in which the child lives and interacts must be examined rather than simply focusing on the individual. This is the foundation of Vygotsky's *sociocultural theory*: that the people in a child's life, and the culture in which they are raised, is responsible for their growth and development. Vygotsky's theory is holistic in the sense that it emphasizes the mind-body connection, as well as the natural world around the child (Barohny, 2010; Jaramillo, 1996; Mahn, 1999; Pamental, 2010; Vygotsky, Webb, & Mulholland, 2013).

Vygotsky considered the child's experience with education as well as their development; emphasizing the importance of interacting with others as a vital part of the learning process. One of the most well-known components of the sociocultural theory, the *zone of proximal development* states that students increase their knowledge and skills by working with others. According to Vygotsky, sharing knowledge and problem solving with others helps students to

better grasp concepts and empowers them to gain confidence in their learning (Barohny, 2010; Jaramillo, 1996; Mahn, 1999; Pamental, 2010; Vygotsky, et al., 2013).

Finally, Vygotsky's theory states that imaginative and creative engagement helps students stretch their existing knowledge and gain new knowledge. (Barohny, 2010; Jaramillo, 1996; Mahn, 1999; Pamental, 2010; Vygotsky, et al., 2013). Combined with the emphasis on collaboration and cultural understanding, this theory powerfully supports and contains the curriculum development work.

Arts-Integrated Curriculum

Arts-integrated curriculum uses the arts as a tool to support students in understanding, processing, and making meaning of new information. It is a practical application of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory because it draws on the student's creativity and imagination in engaging with the curricular content. Arts-integrated curriculum also allows students to actively engage with the content; creating something new as opposed to simply listening to a lecture, which brings in the holistic mind-body approach of the sociocultural theory (Barohny, 2010; Jaramillo, 1996; Kabilian & Kamaruddin, 2010; Mahn, 1999; McDermott et al., 2017; Pamental, 2010; Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012; Vygotsky, et al., 2013). This curriculum will be using arts integration throughout the lessons to deepen student engagement.

Comprehension

The performing arts have proven to be a successful method for increasing student comprehension and enjoyment in English-literature classes (DuPont, 2009; Kabilian & Kamaruddin, 2010; Wolf, 1998). A popular arts-integration method, *readers' theater*, allows students extensively practice and perform scripts based on classroom texts. A similar method, *creative drama*, uses improvisation (as opposed to written scripts) to explore the characters in a

story. The teacher asks questions such as, “what would this character say if _____ happened?” and the students respond as if they were the characters. The effectiveness of these methods in increasing comprehension is linked to the students’ embodiment of the characters. The opportunity to pretend to be someone else helps students see their own differences from, and similarities to, the characters, and personally relate to the story. Additionally, embodying the characters and story permits students to extend the story beyond the text; exploring the message, theme, subtext, and relating the importance of the story to the world beyond the classroom. The story comes to life instead of simply being words on a page (DuPont, 2009; Kabilian & Kamaruddin, 2010; Zambo, 2011).

Integration

Hammond (2015) encourages teachers to assign arts-based exercises, such as student-created poetry, stories, or theatre, to support students’ comprehension and integration of material. This method extends the readers’ theater and creative drama methods by giving students the opportunity to create their own artistic work in response to the class material. According to Hammond (2015) and McDermott et al. (2017), when students feel a personal connection to an assignment, they are more likely to meaningfully engage with, and understand the content.

Story and Myth

The arts, particularly performance arts, can be seen as a modern extension of the oral tradition; an evolutionary practice naturally ingrained in the human psyche (Gottschall, 2012; Hammond, 2015; Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014). Before writing, people relied on the oral tradition to make sure that knowledge was maintained, spread to all members of a group, and passed down through the generations. The long-term reliance on this communication method has led to a desire for story; a desire that has been shaped through evolutionary processes

(Gottschall, 2012; Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014). Many of the stories that communicate experience, lessons, and spiritual wisdom are still vibrantly alive and continue to influence people culturally and collectively. These stories are known as *myths* or *mythic stories*; sacred stories that express spiritual, philosophical, and social guidance for a collective group of people (Gottschall, 2012; Henderson, 1968; Hughes, 2017; Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014; Segal, 2015). Most students are familiar with certain myths, such as the creation myth story told in the bible, or any mythic story of a cultural or religious group's original experience.

Symbolic Patterns

Myths contain symbolic patterns that mirror the human experience on a large-scale, collective level. They allow people to make meaning and understand certain cultural practices, while also feeling a sense of interconnectedness with the rest of humanity. Additionally, myths influence the creation of many forms of art, with the underlying story of the myth being presented in a creatively re-imagined way (Henderson, 1968; Hughes, 2017; Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014).

Initiation.

One of the patterns that frequently shows up in myths is that of *initiation*. This pattern results in a character becoming his or her own person while still being connected to the family, culture, and spiritual community. With this newfound sense of wholeness, the character is able to offer a contribution to his or her community (Atkinson, 1990; Henderson, 1968). While not every myth follows this pattern, from a psychological perspective myths always contain wisdom and guidance that can be explored and worked with (Segal, 2015). In other words, there is always a potential to work with the medicine of a myth and use it to move toward wholeness.

It is my hope that by working with their chosen myth, students experience a process similar to the symbolic pattern of initiation. By exploring their roots, and presenting a creatively re-imagined version of their myth, they will discover an increased self-understanding, grounded both in the past and the present (Barohny, 2010; Henderson, 1968; Jaramillo, 1996; Mahn, 1999; Pamental, 2010; Vygotsky, et al., 2013).

Use of Myths in the Curriculum

This curriculum uses student-chosen myths as the basis for an arts-integrated, experiential English class project curriculum. Studying myths supports students' literary knowledge and comprehension, as the ancient mythic patterns strongly influence the arts and literature (Henderson, 1968; Hughes, 2017; Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014). Allowing each student to choose a myth instead of working with one myth increases the likelihood of student engagement, and for the students feeling a sense of personal connection with the piece (Hammond, 2015; McDermott, Falk-Ross, & Medow, 2017).

The study of the myths will provide the foundation for a student-created theatre performance. The students will reflect on the myth and how it applies to their lives in the present (Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014). Then, they will incorporate the newfound knowledge into a re-imagined performance piece of their myth (**Learning Goal #1**). The students may present their understanding of the myth through theatrical dialogue and staging, poetry, music, movement, or dance. Each performance will be entirely student-created, and will show evidence of the student's careful consideration of the myth's meaning and application in the present.

The students will be encouraged to choose myths from their own cultural background. There are several reasons for this. First, the practice of choosing a myth from the student's own background presents a rich opportunity for the entire class: to be able to hear a variety of stories

and appreciate the similarities as well as the unique perspectives in the stories. The students will be supported in this process by theory and exercises from Kremer and Jackson-Paton's (2014) *Ethnoautobiography* textbook. This textbook provides a framework for developing an embodied awareness of one's cultural background, and integrating that awareness into a new self-understanding: one that incorporates mind, body, and spirit. As the students begin to craft their re-imagined performances of the myths, they will work together with the teacher to plan a class showcase: a performance of their re-imagined mythic stories. Through this process, the students are likely to achieve a deep understanding of the class curriculum, as well as gaining a deeper understanding of the power of community and interdependence (**Learning Goal #2**) (Gormas, Koole, & Vryhof, 2006; Hammond, 2015; Kremer, 2003; 2007; Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014).

Additionally, myths are sacred stories, and it is important that students understand the significance of respect in choosing a myth from their own background, so as to avoid cultural appropriation or a shallow exploration of the culture and myth. Finally, exploring a myth from the student's own culture could provide a strong catalyst for self-discovery (Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014; Segal, 2015). When students have a deeper understanding of where they came from, they may be inspired in terms of how they want to move forward in the world; what familial/ancestral traditions they want to continue forward, and what new contribution they may want to share with the world (**Learning Goal #3**).

Methods

The methods for designing this curriculum will be Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model and the California curriculum standards for middle school English Language Arts (California State Board of Education, 2013). The experiential learning model will support the pieces of the curriculum that are geared toward self-discovery: sociocultural learning, arts-

integration, and mythic exploration. The California curriculum standards will support the academic viability of the curriculum.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Model

Each lesson in the curriculum will be supported by Kolb's (1984) *experiential learning model*. Kolb's model includes four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and experimentation. In the *concrete experience* stage, students encounter something new that is related to the topic of focus. During *reflective observation*, they reflect on the experience, what it meant for them, determine what they learned, and notice any questions that arose for them. In the *abstract conceptualization* stage, students conceptualize a new idea based on what they already know and the new information they have learned through the experience and reflection. Finally, during the *experimentation* stage, students bring their new idea into the world as a culmination of the work they have done throughout the previous stages (Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2014; Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Martin & Gaskin, 2004).

The experiential learning model is a holistic model of learning, meaning it involves the whole person in the process of learning; mind, body, spirit, and emotions. It links classroom content to the outside world, providing a more integrative experience for students, and creating space for reflection (Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2014; Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Martin & Gaskin, 2004).

Kolb's (1984) model empowers students because it emphasizes the process of learning over the product, therefore creating deeper understanding and meaning. Students are able to focus on working with and grasping the concept rather than simply passively memorizing and recalling the concept for a test. The deep learning that comes from this process leads to the

information being integrated into long-term memory. Additionally, experiential learning encourages students to develop a healthy learning identity that is flexible and resilient, by understanding that mistakes and shortcomings are an important part of the learning process. Students typically become more engaged in the curriculum when experiential learning is used; creating dynamic discussions and participating in reflection while they process the information (Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2014; Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Martin & Gaskin, 2004). A table outlining the stages of Kolb's (1984) model that are covered in each lesson is included in Appendix A.

Safe Spaces

For experiential learning to be successful, a safe classroom space must be created for the students and teacher. In this space, students are held in their cycles of trying new things, reflecting on their learning processes and their own life experiences, risking failure, and creating new knowledge. The safe classroom space also ensures that the individual as well as group needs are met throughout the learning process (Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2014; Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Martin & Gaskin, 2004).

California Common Core Standards

The California Common Core Standards cover reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language standards from kindergarten through grade 12, with the intention that each grade level will meet certain standards that cumulatively prepare students to complete high school (grade 12) with sufficient college or career readiness (California State Board of Education, 2013).

The proposed curriculum focuses on the standards set for students in grade 6, and can easily be adjusted to meet the standards for grade 7 or 8. A table outlining the California Common Core Standards that are met by each lesson is included in Appendix B.

Curriculum Design

The following section includes the lessons and content of the curriculum design. All aspects of the curriculum referencing the teacher role are written singularly (teacher), but this curriculum could certainly be taught by multiple teachers in one classroom. The curriculum is designed as a unit spanning 6 weeks, with students meeting for class every day. Each week covers one or two lessons:

Week	Lessons Covered
1	Lessons 1 and 2
2	Lessons 3 and 4
3	Lessons 5 and 6
4	Lesson 7
5	Lesson 7 (with performance)
6	Lesson 8

This design is intended to give students time to work on their assignments, to discuss the project during class time, and to integrate or work on other curriculum content throughout the week, as needed. This curriculum will work best in a class with 20-25 students maximum. Since the focus of the curriculum is on self-discovery, students will have ideally had at least half of the school year to get to know one another.

Each lesson includes journal and discussion prompts, experiential exercises, and assignments. Lessons 2 – 8 will begin and end with an opening or closing ritual, as discussed in lesson 1.

Lesson One: Setting the Stage: Creating a Safe Space Within the Classroom

The opening lesson focuses on creating a *safe space* within the classroom. The intention for creating the safe space is that students will feel comfortable participating in experiential learning and engaging in personal exploration and expression with their peers (Association for the Study of Higher Education, 2014; Hammond, 2015; Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Martin & Gaskin, 2004). The class begins with an experiential exercise and a journal exercise geared toward each student's exploration of what makes them feel safe, comfortable and inspired. The class then transitions into a group discussion about the importance of creating a safe space, or ceremonial center.

By the end of the lesson, the students and teacher should have worked together to develop a set of classroom guidelines for the ceremonial center, agreed upon individual assignments for each student to either open or close each class, and practiced answering a journal prompt through written and oral communication.

Experiential Exercise

Students will participate in team building exercises that make them feel connected as a group. Opening the class with a sense of connection will create an environment in which students are more likely to feel comfortable sharing with and supporting one another. Resources for team building exercises are included in Appendix C.

Journal Prompt

Students will answer the following prompts in their journals:

- What makes you feel safe?
- What makes you feel connected with yourself?
- What makes you feel connected with others?

- What makes you feel inspired and creative, and how do you like to express that?
(ex: music, poetry, dance, storytelling, being active...)

Group Discussion

After students complete the journaling exercise, the class will transition into a group discussion. The teacher opens the discussion by communicating the following idea: *when we do important work, it's a good idea to do that work in a space where we feel safe, protected, and respected*. Students are then invited to respond to this idea and share what it means to them. If they are comfortable, they may share ideas from their journal writing. The teacher may share his or her own answers to the journal prompt.

The discussion then moves into an activity, in which the students and teacher work together to develop 3-5 guidelines for creating the ceremonial center for their classroom (e.g. listen with your heart when others are sharing, we do not share other students' stories or work with students outside of the classroom). The teacher will share 1-2 ideas to start, and students can work to build a list from there.

Assignment

The teacher then shares that since the students will be transitioning from other classes into this class, and then from this class back to other classes, it is a good idea to have an opening and closing ritual to help everyone remember the class guidelines. These exercises can be an opportunity for each student to bring the class to an opening or closing by sharing something personally meaningful. Examples could be a poem, a song, or a stretch that helps the student feel grounded and embodied before playing his or her favorite sport: anything that is meaningful to the student and can bring the class together in presence and focus.

The teacher should assign one student to either open or close each class with his or her own opening or closing ritual. This idea draws on Hammond's (2015) suggestion for students to bring aspects of their own lives into school assignments in order to feel more connected to, and find more meaning in, the work. Depending on the class size, some classes may need to have two student presenters to open or close a class. Alternatively, if a student is not comfortable participating in this assignment, he or she may choose to submit a 1-2 page description of an opening or closing ritual to the teacher.

To bring this first class to a close, the teacher will present his or her own example ritual, such as reading a poem, playing a song, or leading a guided meditation.

Lesson Two: What is a Myth?

Lesson 2 focuses on myth: the definition and misunderstandings of myths, the concept of the oral tradition, and the experience of mythic storytelling in action.

The class begins with a journaling exercise in which students complete a timed free-write about the following prompt: *what is a myth, in your own words and experience?*

After completing the journaling exercise, the teacher invites students to share their ideas in a group discussion. The students should have plenty of time to share and discuss their ideas, before moving into the lesson on myths, which focuses on the following ideas:

What is a Myth?

A myth is a sacred story that expresses spiritual, philosophical, and social guidance for a collective group of people; often a specific culture of people. Myths contain symbolic patterns that mirror the human experience on a large-scale, collective level. They allow people to make meaning and understand certain cultural practices. Additionally, myths influence the creation of many forms of art, with the underlying story of the myth being presented in a creatively re-

imagined way (Gottschall, 2012; Henderson, 1968; Hughes, 2017; Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014).

Oral Tradition

Before writing, people relied on the oral tradition to make sure that knowledge was maintained, spread to all members of a group, and passed down through the generations. The long-term reliance on this communication method has led to a desire for story that has been shaped through evolutionary processes (Gottschall, 2012; Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014).

Exercise: story circle.

After discussing the oral tradition, the teacher and students will engage in circle storytelling, an exercise designed to give students an embodied understanding of the oral tradition, and the telling of a story. Everyone sits in a circle and tells a story, one sentence per person at a time. The story should be improvised, meaning the students are not just re-telling a story they have already heard, but making up a new story. The teacher will explain that this exercise is designed for practicing the improvisational and spontaneous aspects of oral stories. The teacher will begin with a first line, such as “once upon a time,” to get the group started. After the exercise is completed, the group can discuss and reflect on the experience.

Misunderstandings about Myths

Myths have acquired a reputation of being fictional stories, or non-factual assumptions about situations. For example, people often say, “that is just a myth” or “we are going to bust the myths about this topic.” While this is a popular use of the term, it is misleading, and using it in this way takes away from the power and essence of what a myth truly is (Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014; Segal, 2015).

Important Characteristics of Myths

The teacher will then guide the students to discuss the importance of myths. Why is it important to have stories that communicate cultural traditions, spiritual truths, and moral understandings? The students can either have an open discussion, or engage in reflective writing followed by discussion in small groups.

Exercise: witnessing storytelling.

The intention of this exercise is to allow the students to witness the telling of a myth. The teacher will show a video of a storyteller from the internet. Resources for mythic storyteller videos are included in Appendix D.

Homework

The teacher will assign 2-3 short myths for students to read for homework. Suggested myth resources are included in Appendix E.

Lesson Three: Mythic Stories and Patterns in Ancient and Modern Times

The focus of this lesson is for students to experience witnessing and participating in a myth re-telling, identify differences and similarities in reading the myths, hearing the myths, and participating in the telling of the myths, and to re-imagine a myth while still staying true to its central theme or message.

Exercise: Story Circle: Myth Presentation

The teacher tells one of the myths that was assigned for the students to read for the previous class's homework. The myth should be told from memory, so that students can experience witnessing an oral storytelling process. Ideally, the myth will be from the teacher's cultural background (Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014).

Exercise: Story Circle: Myth Re-Telling

After the teacher completes the telling, he or she guides the students through a journaling exercise, in which the students are invited to reflect on their experience of hearing the myth telling. The teacher might use some of the following prompts for the journal exercise:

- What part or parts of the story feel most important to you?
- What was your reaction to the story?
- Is there an image or feeling that comes to mind when you think about the story as a whole?

The students will then be guided to re-tell the myth they just heard, in the same format of the previous class's story circle exercise (each student tells one line of the story at a time). The teacher should encourage the students to tell the story from their heart, and trust their memory of it, rather than getting each part exactly right.

Reflection discussion.

The students will then be invited to reflect on the differences and similarities they noticed from the homework reading, the oral telling by the teacher, and the student re-telling. Students should be encouraged to express what aspects of the story changed and what aspects stayed the same. For example, while some of the details might change, the pattern, structure, and message of the story stays the same.

Journal Exercise

Next, students will be invited to journal on the following prompts. Students may use their myth homework handouts for reference, and the questions should refer to all 2-3 myths that the students read for homework.

- What is the main theme or central message of each myth?

- Do any of the myths make you think of other stories you've heard or seen? (e.g. books, movies, TV shows, plays, games, songs)

Students will share with a partner after the journaling exercise is complete.

Exercise: Creative Drama

The teacher will next ask for student volunteers to act out scenarios based on the myths. This exercise is designed help the students recognize the human experiences demonstrated in the myth, and use their imagination to breathe new life into and expand the myth (DuPont, 2009). By participating in this exercise, students should be able to see how mythic patterns fit into contemporary culture, and continue to be renewed over time (Henderson, 1968; Hughes, 2017; Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014). The exercise can be repeated several times with different characters from the different myths. The teacher will assign characters to the students, and then ask the class (audience) questions such as:

- If this myth took place in modern times, where would this scene take place?
- What might be a conflict between the two characters?
- What would the character names be if this myth took place in modern times?

Alternatively, the teacher can pre-create a set of circumstances that the students (audience) can choose from. For example:

- Instead of creating the world, the characters are throwing a party.
- Instead of competing for universal power, the characters are competing for student body president.

The students will then be invited to act out these different scenarios.

Homework

The homework for this lesson is to choose one of the myths, and write a short modern re-telling, in which the central theme and message of the myth stay the same. The characters can change, but should stay true to their role in the original myth.

Lesson Four: Cultural Background

The focus of this lesson is to engage students in reflection and discussion about their cultural backgrounds, and introduce an arts-based assignment.

Journal Exercise

Students answer the following questions:

- What does *cultural background* mean to you?
- We all have unique cultural backgrounds. What do you know about yours?
- What is something that you associate with your personal cultural background (i.e. a tradition, a story, a recipe, ancestors, a piece of art or a symbol of some kind)?

The students can share in small groups after they complete the journaling exercise. Then, the teacher will guide a group discussion focused on the value of knowing and understanding one's cultural background. The composition of one's cultural background can include ancestors, places where family members lived, traditions, food, and the stories that make up one's family or greater culture. This awareness of one's cultural background can lead to a deeper self-understanding and a feeling of being connected to something bigger (Hammond, 2015; Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014).

Homework

The homework for this class is to create a culture collage. The students will create a collage with images that they feel represent their cultural background. The images in the collage

can be people, words, symbols, abstract art; anything that the student feels connected to. The student does not have to choose one individual culture to focus on, but rather can create the collage according to as many cultures that he or she feels personally connected to. However, the student should be prepared to choose one culture to explore further through future assignments in the unit.

Students will bring their culture collages to class at the beginning of the next week.

Lesson Five: Cultural Exploration and Myth Research

The focus of this lesson is for students to share their culture collage projects with the class, and begin to imaginatively work with their cultural backgrounds. The students will display their collage creations around the classroom, and one by one, briefly present to the class while standing in front of their display.

Cultural Imagination Exercise

Students will choose one image from their collage to do an imaginative journal exercise with. They will answer the following questions:

- Describe your image. How does it relate to your cultural background? What specific culture does the image represent for you?
- Imagine that the image has something to share with you about your cultural background. What might the image say?
- Is there a song, poem, or quote that you feel relates to your image and cultural background? If so, what is it?

Students will share with a partner or small group, and then the teacher will invite the students to discuss the experience as a class. Did the exercise bring up any feelings? Did it make students feel closer to their cultural background?

Homework

The homework for this class is to do further exploration into the culture that the student related his or her chosen image to. Students will research a myth from that culture, and prepare to tell it during the next class. The teacher will provide students with resources for finding myths, such as the resources included in Appendix C, and research guidelines. Ideally, students will have a whole week to find and learn their myths, and will tell the myths in class on Friday. It does not have to be a perfect or memorized telling – the students must simply know the outline and essence of the story (Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014).

Lesson Six: I Am the Keeper of the Flame

The focus of lesson 6 is for students to creatively work with their chosen myth, and begin to understand how that myth can meaningfully connect with their lives in the present. Through myth re-tellings and explorations, students will begin to craft an interpretive performance piece; a re-imagining of their myth, which will be presented alongside their fellow students in a showcase after lesson 7.

The teacher will invite the students to form a circle, similar to the circles in which the students and teachers practiced the lesson 2 oral tradition exercise and the lesson 3 myth re-telling exercise, and each student will be able to share his or her chosen myth. Following the story circle, the students will have an opportunity to discuss their experiences before engaging in a journaling exercise.

Journal Exercise

Students answer the following prompts:

- What is the main theme and message of your myth?

- Do parts of this myth relate to your life in the present? How can you re-tell the myth from that perspective while also honoring the original story? (Be honest with yourself about which parts of the myth must stay the same in order to stay true to its essence).
- In what ways do you like to express yourself? (e.g. writing, song, movement, acting). Brainstorm some ways that you might creatively present your new version of your myth.
- You now have the opportunity to carry the mythic story forward by creatively re-imagining and re-telling it. Do you think that is an important responsibility? Why or why not? What does it mean to you to be the keeper of the flame for this part of the myth's worldly journey?

After completing the journal exercise, students will have the opportunity to share their answers in pairs or small groups.

Homework

The homework assignment for this class will be for the student to determine how the myth relates to the student's life in the present, determine how he or she can create a re-imagined version of the myth from that perspective, and figure out how he or she would like to creatively present the re-imagined version of the myth as part of the class showcase. Students should have time in class to do this work, in addition to doing it at home, and should bring a ½ page description of his or her proposed performance piece to class by the end of the week. Students may present their mythic re-imagination through theatrical dialogue and staging, poetry, music, movement, or dance. The teacher will remind the students that the performance piece should still honor the original essence and story of the myth.

Some ideas for connecting with the myth could be to read it out loud and journal about what feelings, thoughts, memories, or somatic reactions come up as a result; create a piece of art as a response to the myth; read the myth before going to bed and journal any dreams that seem connected to the myth; and journal about popular culture or art (e.g. music, plays, movies, books, etc.) that seem related to any aspect of the myth (Henderson, 1968; Hughes, 2017; Kremer & Jackson-Paton, 2014). Students might also consider which figures in the myth they relate to, and if any of the situations in the myth remind them of their own lives. Students can use experiences from this inquiry to inspire and inform their re-imagined performance of the myth.

Each performance piece will adhere to the following guidelines: 1) it will be original and student-created, 2) it will be based on the student's re-imagined version of the myth, and 3) it will be under five minutes.

Lesson Seven: Rehearsals and Performances

The focus of this lesson is to provide students a container for preparing, developing, and rehearsing their performances. Additionally, throughout the course of rehearsals students will work together with the teacher to create the framework of the show: the structure that holds the show together and allows for successful transitions between individual student performances. As previously stated, the rehearsal component of this curriculum is designed to span over two weeks, with the performance taking place at the end of the two weeks, ideally on a Friday or Saturday night so students can invite family and friends to attend.

Group Warm-Ups

The class will participate in a warm-up exercise together to prepare for their creative work. The same resources in Appendix C can be used to choose these exercises.

Performance Piece Development

After the warm-ups, the teacher will guide the students through exercises that are designed to deepen the performer's understanding of, and connection to, their stories: the elements, the characters, and the theme. As the students begin to understand the nuances and little details of their re-imagined myth, they will be able to relate to it more personally and perform it more authentically. The intention of this process is to engage students' imaginations and social understanding as it relates to their performance piece, thereby fitting into the framework of the sociocultural theory (Barohny, 2010; Jaramillo, 1996; Mahn, 1999; Pamental, 2010; Vygotsky, Webb, & Mulholland, 2013). The idea is that by working with these exercises, the students will breathe life and inspiration into their pieces. A list of resources for performance development exercises is included in Appendix F.

The teacher will alternate between guiding the students through exercises and giving the students time to reflect on and integrate their discoveries into their performance pieces. Each class will also include a period of time for some of the students to present their performance pieces in front of the class and receive feedback from the teacher and fellow students. After spending several classes on development, integration and feedback, the focus will move to polishing the group performance as a whole: fitting the individual student pieces into the larger framework of the show.

Performance Framework

By the end of the development process, students will turn in a write-up of their performance piece that the teacher will use to create a master script of the showcase. The students will work with the teacher to develop a framework and transitions for the performance. Options include transition music, transitional monologues, dialogue, or poetry.

Final Rehearsals and Performances

Once the master script is created, which will include all student performance pieces and transitions, the students and teacher will focus on run-throughs of the performance, including one or two technical rehearsals in the performance space. The students will present their show for family and friends after lesson 7 and before lesson 8.

Lesson Eight: Reflections

The focus of this lesson is to provide time for students to reflect on their experiences with the unit, and assign a reflection paper that will culminate the unit's work.

The teacher will invite the students to reflect on the process of working with and re-imagining mythic stories. The students will be prompted to explore how it felt to connect with themselves on a deeper level, via their cultural backgrounds, how it felt to breathe new life into a myth from their cultural background and perform it in front of an audience, and how they think this type of awareness could fit into their lives moving forward.

The teacher will then give the guidelines for the final reflection paper, which will be the culminating activity of the unit. The guidelines for the paper may include:

- Write a 3 – 5 page narrative reflection essay about your experience with this unit's curriculum.
- Include a brief summary of your re-imagined myth, and be sure to cite the original myth that it was based on.
- Discuss how you were affected by this process. Did you learn anything new about yourself that you would like to share? Do you think the process will affect the way you approach your life in the future? Why or why not?

- What was it like to witness your classmates' telling and re-imagining of their stories? Did you notice any similarities between other classmates' stories and your own?
- Discuss your relationship to myth and story after this unit, and how you think it fits in with the larger world.

Discussion

Designing this curriculum has been a rewarding and exciting experience. The focus of this curriculum was inspired by my own ancestral reconnection work in the depth psychology program at Sonoma State University. It was invigorating to look back on my experience, design the lesson plans with middle school students in mind, and imagine the results of self-discovery that might emerge in participants. I look forward to piloting this curriculum in the classroom. Creating the lessons also sparked considerations and ideas for further development, which I would like to discuss in this section.

First, the curriculum was designed to take place over a period of six weeks. I made this decision due to my awareness that there is a lot of material to cover throughout a school year and often not enough time. Therefore, teachers and schools that use this curriculum will want to take into consideration the amount of time and space that needs to be dedicated to discussing diverse family situations, creating a space of acceptance and inclusion, and creating an open dialogue in which students and parents/guardians always feel safe contributing. While these topics are included in the curriculum, it will also be important to create additional space for them. Perhaps several afternoon or evening information sessions can be provided for families to attend, participate in discussions, and feel comfortable with the upcoming unit.

Additionally, the teacher's role in preparing to teach the curriculum is briefly mentioned, but the focus of the curriculum is on the students' experiences. In addition to the teacher doing

his or her own preparation work, it will be a good idea to keep a reflection journal along the way, and make note of successes and challenges, adjustments, inspirations, and ideas for future implementations.

While this curriculum is designed for a middle school classroom, it could certainly be delivered in other non-academic settings. With its emphasis on self-discovery and performance, it would be a good curriculum for a youth theatre organization looking to produce student-created work. It could also be used in an after-school program as an enrichment activity, or for a youth group looking to expand their creative repertoire. The curriculum can simply be adjusted to fit the needs of different organizations by removing or changing the academic components.

This curriculum design article is the culminating piece for my work in the depth psychology MA program at Sonoma State University. This program has changed my life in countless ways, but perhaps the most profound was that through the program I confirmed that the best way for me to move forward in service was to become a teacher. As I engaged in my own ancestral investigation during the program, I re-discovered the lineage of beloved teachers that came before me. My greatest inspiration, however, is my grandmother, Marty Weixel (my Oma), who has been a teacher for the past 26 years. This curriculum project is dedicated to her, for she is the greatest teacher I know. I am proud to say that teaching is not just in my heart, it is in my blood and in my soul. In the words of Yogi Bhaian:

“I am not a woman. I am not a man. I am not a person. I am not myself.

I am a teacher.”

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Appendix A: Kolb's (1984) Model in the Curriculum

	Concrete Experience	Reflective Observation	Abstract Conceptualization	Experimentation
Lesson 1	•	•	•	
Lesson 2	•	•		
Lesson 3	•	•	•	
Lesson 4		•		
Lesson 5	•	•	•	
Lesson 6	•	•	•	
Lesson 7			•	•
Lesson 8		•		

Appendix B: California Common Core Standards for English Language Arts in the Curriculum

Standard	Specific Number of Standard Met	Lesson
<i>Reading: Key Ideas & Details</i>	2	3, 6
<i>Reading: Integration of Knowledge & Ideas</i>	7, 9	3, 6
<i>Reading: Range of Reading & Level of Text Complexity</i>	5, 10	2, 5
<i>Writing: Text Types & Purposes</i>	1, 3	3, 8
<i>Writing: Production & Distribution of Writing</i>	4	3, 8
<i>Writing: Research to Build & Present Knowledge</i>	7	5
<i>Writing: Range of Writing</i>	10	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
<i>Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration</i>	1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
<i>Speaking & Listening: Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas</i>	4	6
<i>Language: Conventions of Standard English</i>	1, 2	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
<i>Language: Knowledge of Language</i>	3	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

Appendix C: Resources for Team Building Exercises

Bedore, B. (2004). *101 improv games for children and adults*. Alameda, CA: Hunter House.

Farmer, D. (2007). *101 drama games and activities* (2nd ed.). United States: LuLu.

Levy, G. (2010). *275 acting games: connected: A comprehensive workbook of theatre games for developing acting skills*. Colorado Springs, CO: Meriwether.

Safran, L. (2010). *Using improvisation to build literacy*. San Francisco, CA: Princess Ellen Publishing.

Appendix D: Resources for Mythic Storytelling Videos

Emergence Magazine. (2018, July 12). The lindworm with Martin Shaw [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7-uZSIUSpU>.

Michael the Storyteller & Wordsmith. (2011, January 20). Irish storyteller tells Bridgette & Lurikeen [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GAUe1e1sHkY>.

Schumacher College. (2018, March 22). Martin Shaw: The hunter and the fox woman [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyShycLEq-Y>.

Storytime Yoga for Kids. (2018, September 20). Mythic yoga: Brahma's tears: Storytelling by Sydney Solis [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kc67XU4stYw>.

Appendix E: Resources for Myths

Hamilton, V. (1991). *In the beginning: Creation stories from around the world*. Boston, MA:

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

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University Press.

North, C. (2010). *In the beginning: Creation myths from around the world*. Princeton, NJ:

International Consciousness Research Laboratories.

Randall, R. (2017). *Children's stories from myths and legends: Classic tales from around the*

world. Helotes, TX: Armadillo.

Appendix F: Performance Development Exercises

Moore, A. (1960). *The Stanislavski system: The professional training of an actor*. New York, NY: Penguin.

Swale, J. (2012). *Drama games for devising*. London, UK: Hern.