

For Teachers

In my view, teachers are among the most creative and generous on the planet. I honor and admire all of you.

I thought you might like to know how I have used *Prairie Journey* in a classroom setting to create a rich integrated curriculum. There are so many ways. I hope the project that I describe gets you imagining and creating how you decide to use it.

Also, I am willing to help you with more specific ideas or even to come into your classrooms to co-teach with you, if you would like to do this kind of integrated study. That would be a blast. I am just an email away.

Using *Prairie Journey* in the Classroom

As a teacher-librarian, I began writing *Prairie Journey* as a mentor text for third grade students while studying the pioneer western expansion period of history. I co-taught the study with another third grade teacher. The purpose of the study was to integrate reading, writing and history into a learning experience to help students think deeply and read and write broadly about history. The idea is that if students are going to be reading and writing, why not have reading and writing happen within the context of a content study. We wanted our students write historical narrative that was truly grounded in an understanding of historical fact. The writing would need to evolve from a thoughtful reading experience and writing narrative would give them a chance to synthesize their learning and develop a voice and consciousness about history.

Creating a Learning Environment

As teachers, we used the ideas and principles from Ellin Oliver Keene's *Mosaic of Thought* and Anne Goudvis and Stephanie Harvey's *Strategies That Work*. We developed a learning framework that centered around our essential question - *What was it like to travel the pioneer trails?* Our multi-source, multi-perspective curriculum, was carefully chosen, using historical fiction with examples of good writing, trade books, maps, primary sources and original pioneer journals, paintings, and photos. We put all sources, including multiple copies of our main mentor texts, on a moveable cart so that they were accessible and held our classes in the library where there were lots of tables to stretch out and read and write and comfortable pillows, etc.

What Students Did

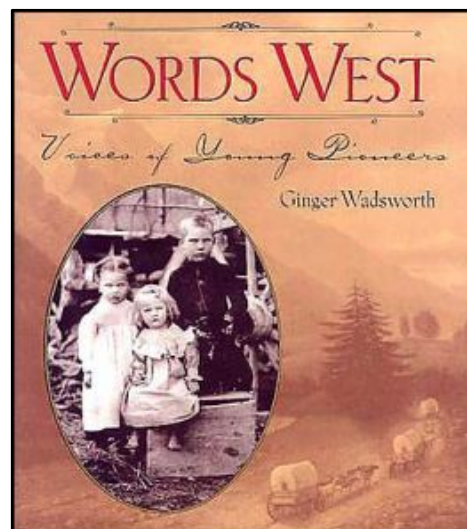
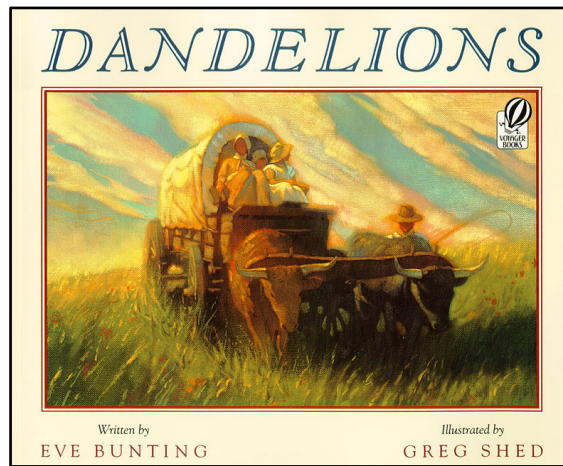
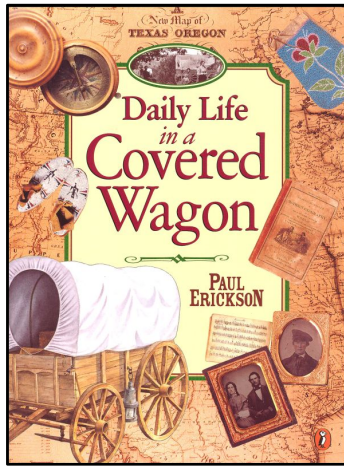
Our students studied maps, photos, paintings, and illustrations, read fiction and information text, responded to the images and text by asking questions, making inferences and predictions, and recording all thinking and new learning as well. We had lively discussions about what we were learning and wondering and thinking.

Each student used their new learning to write their own original pioneer journal or travelogue of a journey that they developed. We asked that the students write multiple entries about real places, specifying where they began and ended their journey, with incidents and characters that seemed true to the times, and a narrative that took place over a realistic time period, including dates.

What Teachers Did

As teachers we each modeled our own learning processes that we were asking our students to use. We shared our reading and thinking, adding our questions, inferences, predictions, and new learning to the charts we were making that showed our student's responses. We showed our students what good writing is and how to take our learning and turn that into a story with characters, plot and setting based on historical knowledge. We discussed everything with our students, so that our classroom sessions were filled with conversation and sharing. Students also modeled their thinking, learning, and story for other students and us too. We also became teacher writers and wrote our own journals. That was the most fun. We understood the problems the students were having writing their narratives because we were having the same problems. So we could solve them together by talking about our processes to become better writers.

Mentor Texts (we used a lot more too!)



Historical Fiction:

Dandelions by Eve Bunting,
Prairie Journey - Frances Bonney Jenner
Rachel's Journal - Marissa Moss

Primary Resources:

Stories of Young Pioneers - Violet Kimball
Word's West - Ginger Wadsworth

Information Sources:

Daily Life in a Covered Wagon - Paul Erickson
Wagon Train - Bobbie Kalman

Assessment

We designed an assessment specific to the project. First, we asked our students to self-assess. They shared either a question they had posed or their thinking about what they learned. They identified one journal entry that they considered to be quality and told why and they showed an example of a craft technique used in their journal writing. We assessed each student by noting the quality of their research questions and thinking, by reading and evaluating their journals for content, accuracy, understanding, and how well they developed and crafted a story with plot, setting and character.

Common Core Standard Morphed into Our Own Standard for Good Historical Writing

(I rewrote the Common Core Standard for 3rd grade Language Arts to reflect this particular study. I included all of the Core ideas, I just rewrote them to make them clear from a writing perspective, so that we could use them to better design and assess the project.)

Clear and accurate information and detail that develop a topic. Story seems real and shows understanding of history. (History)

Narrative event sequences that make sense. (Plot)

Development of narrator/character and character response through use of dialogue, and descriptions of actions, thoughts or feelings. (Character)

The story is grounded in a sense of place. (Setting)

Craft Techniques - Show rather than tell, word pictures, use of senses, imaginative language, strong nouns and verbs, fluency, voice. (Style)