

CURRICULAR INQUIRY

Slavery and Child Labor

—From Holly Occipinti’s class

After an inquiry study like this one, it is important to support kids in creating a closure project that has meaning for them. This is about much more than simply making a poster or even doing a presentation. When kids demonstrate their learning and understanding through a culminating project, ideas are individualized and action oriented. Choosing a path of action makes all the difference. Students find their own voice to share what they have learned. And not insignificantly, kids in this inquiry got to join the “adult” world by using their actions for change.

A Final Class Project in Holly’s Own Words— Creating a Quilt Together

While thinking about a path of action, one of our inquiry groups found an organization called More Than Warmth on the Internet (www.morethanwarmth.org). More Than Warmth is an educational project to encourage students of all ages to learn about world cultures. The mission of More Than Warmth is to “foster understanding, knowledge, and compassion among cultures through nonviolent, nonpolitical, and nonreligious means.” The More Than Warmth quilt project has American school kids create quilts for impoverished children around the world. According to the project’s website, the first children’s quilts and letters were given to a friendship center in Kabul, Afghanistan, in March 2002, just seven months after the tragedy of 9/11.



Since then, quilts have also been given to schools for girls, orphanages, day-care centers, schools for the deaf, street children, and trauma centers. As the final step in the action path for our child labor inquiry project, we decided to do a whole-class project and create a quilt that would be sent to an ashram in India that houses rescued child laborers.

More Than Warmth sent us some precut quilt squares and we each designed one. The guidelines encouraged us to keep the drawing free from references to war, political agendas, or religion. The organization wants to send a strong message of peace and friendship. So before we started creating the individual quilt squares, we talked about the reasons for steering clear of religion and politics. Several kids commented that we might make someone mad if we talked about our politics or religion. Kids agreed that this made sense. So keeping the guidelines in mind, we began by talking about what the quilt should have on it. As a class we came to a consensus that the design of the square should communicate hope, love, unity, and caring. We then reviewed all of the information we'd learned about the realities of child labor through reading, viewing, and listening.

Each student sketched his or her own design in pencil first, then showed it to a partner to share what it meant and to talk about it. After completing the design, kids meticulously traced over it with bright permanent markers, which brought the quilt squares to life. Students noticed that some squares were similar in design. The energy was palpable.

The students really couldn't believe that they were involved in such an important project and that they were creating this quilt with their own hands. When they finished their quilt squares, each child wrote a letter to explain the meaning of his or her design.

Once all the kids completed their letters and quilt squares, we met as a whole class and shared them. The kids burst with questions: "Will the children get to sleep with it?" "Who will read the letters we wrote?" "Will it keep them warm enough?" "Will someone get to keep it or does it stay in the ashram?"

By creating this quilt together, our students were able to do something about child labor. They were able to fight back. As one child wrote in her letter, "Remember, always fight for what you think is right." As educators, we were overjoyed. We believe that because one student asked one question—Is there slavery today?—and we all followed it to its logical conclusion, these kids' lives are forever enriched. Our students' curiosity resulted in a more complete understanding of the dynamics of poverty and human rights—and this inquiry gave them a chance to do something about it. That's the active use of knowledge for you!