A New Take on a Familiar Strategy: Using Dialogue Journals with Content Area Literacy

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Background Research

- NCLB: No social studies tests
- Devaluation of social studies in the classroom
- Teachers’ lack of subject knowledge
- Lack of high-quality social studies instruction
Nuts and Bolts

- American Revolution: French and Indian War to the Treaty of Paris
- 10 Weeks
- Students: 2 Dialogue Journal entries per week
- Teacher: 1 written response per child, per week
Text

- Nonfiction: Trade books
- Historical Fiction: Read aloud, leveled groups
- Biography: Leveled groups
Activities

- Readers’ Theatre
- *1776* performed by American Eagle Prod.
- Colonial Day
- Simulations
- Writing and art activities
- Art critiques
Seeking...

- Literal comprehension, content knowledge
  - Nonfiction
  - Fiction

- Reading comprehension skills
  - Predicting
  - Questioning
  - Inference

- Essential social studies thinking skills (NCSS, 1994)
  - Drawing inferences from factual text
  - Detecting bias and propaganda
  - Drawing conclusions from multiple sources
Literal Comprehension

- Pretest/Posttest
- Embedded retelling
- Summarizing (Fiction)
- Summarizing Plus
- Concrete questioning
Pretest/Posttest

- Pretest mean score: 21.9%
- Posttest mean score: 90.6%
Literal comprehension “embedded” in responses of higher-level thinking

- Why did the king make the colonies? Did he want to be an even bigger empire so he expanded it? He should have guessed they would betray him when he made those huge taxes. (Kyle; questioning, evaluation)
More Embedded Retelling

- I also think that the Quartering Act is crazy. Nobody wants the Redcoats to just move in and say I’m going to live here! That makes the colonists have to pay a lot more than they really need to. I would hate having strangers live in my house! I really don’t think this is right…It would be terrible if the Iraq soldiers moved into my house. We can’t afford to house them. (Amy; judgment, making connections)
Summarizing Fiction

• I am reading the book *Lydia the Patriot*…The Boston Massacre just happened and Lydia’s brother was a part of it. Her uncle was too until he had to go and give birth to her aunt’s baby. When Will, Lydia’s brother, came home he told them the story. Her father is a printer and he needs to write about the event. He doesn’t know what to write because Lydia’s uncle has a totally different story. This book is really good. Have you ever read it? (Maggie)
In my book we read 22 pages today! New record! But Sarah is now engaged with Robert. But they are going to be in a pickle pretty soon because there parents are not going to approve, well, Robert’s anyway. I hope it ends well…not the greatest chance but they are going to take it. I am worried for Sarah’s brother. He’s in enemy territory. So he needs to get out as soon as possible or there will be trouble. (Anna; prediction)
Concrete Questioning

- Students write questions that demonstrate literal understanding of a concept
  - Why did George Washington have his army stay at Valley Forge in the winter? Why did the French help America in the Revolutionary War? (James)
  - I was wondering if when the American Revolution was going on did America have a different flag from the British or did they still have the same one because they are still part of Britain? (Melissa)
Reading Comprehension Skills

- Prediction
- Inference
- Questioning
- *Making connections
Prediction

• Lydia ran across the street to talk to her brother. I think he might get in trouble because he ignored the Sons of Liberty. (Amanda)

• I am worried for Share’s brother. Well he’s in enemy territory. So he needs to get out as soon as possible or there will be trouble. What do you think he should do? (Anna)

• I think they will put Jonathan in jail because if they can’t kill a 13-year-old, I’m thinking they will put him in a cell. (Connor)
Inference

• I like being a spy during simulations. It’s pretty cool because I am with the Loyalists during that time but I am still a Patriot. I feel bad for the Patriots. They hardly have shoes, food, and shelter, while the Loyalists have warmth, are being fed, and have good clothes. It’s a good thing the French came because we would have been slaughtered and still be part of England. (Kyle)
More Inferences

- I don’t think the patriots could have won without Washington, he is a natural leader and he fought through everything. The moment Lord Cornwallis surrendered to Washington must have been the best moment in his life (besides the whole president thing). (Brian)
Today in our book Captain Harkins died. R.I.P. But he saved Joey so I think he was a true hero. Why did the officer shoot his gun in the first place? (Jack)

Did they have grenades back then because in The Fighting Ground it said grenadiers. What does that mean? (Paul)
Robert asked Sarah to be his wife, and Sarah asked Robert to be her husband. They really want to get married but what will their parents say? (Amy)
Making Connections

I bet it was hard to live in such bad conditions at Valley Forge. It was probably like how the Pilgrims lived. (Anna; Text to text, text to world)

You know how no one knows who shot first at Lexington or Concord..that makes me think about Roanoke! (Kayla; Text to text, text to world)
More Connections

I wonder if we will ever find out which side was more vicious. I know in American books it makes the British sound evil but in British books it probably says the same about Americans. Which side do you think is worse? (Brian; Text to text, text to world)
Essential Thinking Skills for Social Studies

- Drawing inferences from factual text
- Questioning bias and credibility
- Drawing conclusions from multiple sources
1. Drawing Inferences from Factual Text (Wondering)

**Wondering**

- I was wondering when they tarred and feathered people if they knew that the tax collectors were really not to blame but they needed to take it out on somebody anyway or if they didn’t think about that, or if they really thought that they were to blame, because I think that is totally wrong. (Melissa)

- It is kinda weird that the French helped the colonies. I would think they would say no because we beat them in the french and indian war. Maybe they just wanted someone to beat Britain and helped us. (Kyle)
2. Questioning Bias and Credibility

- Miss K, is it true like in the movie that slaves would run away and join the Loyalist side because they were promised freedom? (Anna)

- In my novel so far it makes the British sound terrible…It says when a group of Patriots surrendered the redcoats kept on killing them and torturing them. If this book was the first thing I read about the Revolutionary War I would think the British were evil, completely evil! (Brian)

- The 1776 play was a little weird because the people sang most of the time and some of it didn’t really look like it actually happened. (James)
3. Drawing Conclusions from Multiple Sources

- Do you think Paul Revere should have been a president because he sure deserved it for waking all the minutemen up. In my opinion we would have lost the war without him… I think he would have been a good president because he is willing to risk for a greater good. Also he has good leadership and a president needs to lead the country. (Jack)

- I think that colonists were right to fight or else we maybe would still be ruled by England but I don’t think that they are totally innocent for what they did for a lot of things. (Melissa)
Alan was sorting out his feelings about killing during war. He had written the teacher a question about why the Patriots bothered taking prisoners instead of simply killing them. She answered with this entry:

There are always prisoners in war. One, maybe they can get information from them about their side and gain an advantage. Two, it is hard to kill a man who gives up and surrenders—that is more murder than combat in a war. So I am glad that they did not just kill everyone. (Miss K)

Alan wrote back:

I understand what you mean by saying it [killing soldiers who had surrendered] would be more like murder than like war. Also I’m glad that they didn’t just kill everyone because the Patriots called British guilty all the time, and then they would be the ones guilty not the British. (Alan)
Teacher’s Responses in Journals

- Guess who defended the British soldiers who shot the people? John Adams!! Can you guess why? (Miss K)

- I have no clue why John Adams did that. He was being very brave though. (Maggie)
Can you think of any place like Valley Forge that exists today? Where soldiers are miserable but determined to fight for their cause? (Miss K)

No I cannot think of any place as brutal as Valley Forge where the army is or was. (Michael)
Better Teacher Questions

…a good, caring sister for her younger brother. She dared him to go outside to see what was going on [during the Boston Massacre]. (Allie)

One question—how is Lydia a good, caring sister if she dared him to do something dangerous? What did I miss here? (Miss K)

Well Lydia felt horrible for sending Stephen out, and after awhile she spilled the beans…Lydia apologized for making him go out…She learned to love her brother after his accident. (Allie)
Anna had written in detail about her disapproval of tarring and feathering. The teacher responded and asked her if she could think of another protest the colonists did that was more acceptable. Anna responded with:

Yes! I can think of other things because of the book you read today. Women at war I think. I remember the part when it said all the women boycotted tea, cloth, and other British goods. One thing I know is the women’s way was so peaceful. (Anna)
Practical Suggestions

- Use engaging text
- Don’t over commit yourself
- Be sure your instruction matches your goals for the dialogue journals
- Respond with questions that extend each student’s individual ideas
Questions????