



## Literature for Action: Introducing Service Learning Through Books

By Alissa Griffith

As the school year comes to an end, teachers revisit the never ending process of reflection. Packing, storing, and filing (never discarding) units of study and student products completed throughout the year, afford teachers the opportunity to evaluate what worked, what did not work, and what changes need to be made to existing lesson plans to provide students with more meaningful learning experiences. Such reflection leads to the inevitable questions—“Which units and lessons will I teach next year?” and “How will I “tweak” lessons in order to provide more engaging, rigorous, respectful work and learning experiences to challenge my students, while addressing the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCoS) and the new framework for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning?”

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

Most of your existing units of study or lesson plans are probably already aligned with the NCSCoS, but do they sufficiently address the framework for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning? While this new framework calls for mastery of the core subjects included in the NCSCoS (English, mathematics, science, history, etc.), 21<sup>st</sup> century learning also suggests the knowledge, skills, and dispositions students will need to possess in order to be successful in the future work force. These include:

1. **Life and Career Skills**—flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, and leadership and responsibility.
2. **Learning and Innovation Skills**—creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, and communication and collaboration.
3. **Information, Media and Technology Skills**—range of functional and critical thinking skills related to information literacy; media literacy; and information, communications and technology literacy.

## **Service Learning**

One strategy for preparing students for learning and living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is service learning. Service learning experiences are those reciprocal teaching/learning experiences which range from volunteering and community service projects to field studies and/or internships or mentor relationships. Service learning provides gifted students with opportunities to capitalize on their own cognitive, affective, intuitive, and societal characteristics—those characteristics which differentiate gifted learners from other learners. Through service learning, gifted students are empowered to explore their own interests and passions, attempt to solve societal problems, employ leadership skills, and examine their own sense of justice while investigating authentic community issues and concerns.

Service learning lends itself to integration into most content areas of the NCSCoS. For example:

- Science—pollution, composting, agriculture, and recycling
- Social Studies—cultural awareness/equity, scarcity of natural resources, global poverty/economy, and individual rights
- Math—integration of research and data collection

With regards to language arts, infusing literature into a lesson or unit of study can issue an irresistible invitation to develop a service learning project and can spark the imagination of a gifted student who wants to invoke societal change.

## **Children’s Literature**

Students at all grade levels enjoy stories, become involved and identify with the characters, and are introduced to new perspectives which foster a deeper understanding related to issues outside their own world. Many books and novels exist today that provide insight into life circumstances as well as global, social issues which may intrigue gifted students and strike the cord which “calls them to action”. Literature, therefore, can be used to spark an interest in service learning projects across grade levels for gifted students.

Following are some suggested children’s books with ideas as to how they might be incorporated into the curriculum to address 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills through service learning.

**Book:** Seuss. (1999). *The Lorax*. New York: Random House.

**Issue:** Reforestation or pollution

**Project ideas:**

- Initiate a campaign to reduce pollution or replant trees.

- Create posters for distribution around the school containing messages about pollution or reforestation.
- Adopt an area of the school grounds or community for replanting or clean-up.
- Hold a fundraiser to purchase trees for the school campus or a local park.

**Book:** Naylor, P. R. (1992). *Shiloh*. New York: Dell Publishers.

**Issue:** Animal Rights

**Project ideas:**

- Create a brochure or poster to raise awareness about the treatment of animals.
- Organize a fundraiser for the local ASPCA.
- Develop a public service announcement for the school's closed circuit channel or a public television.
- Reflect on the moral and ethical questions raised in the book through journaling and/or a classroom debate/discussion.

**Book:** Bloor, E. (2001). *Tangerine*. New York: Scholastic.

**Issue:** Diversity, Inequity, Ecology, Disabilities, Health

**Project ideas:**

- Create a book for visually impaired students.
- Tutor or read to visually impaired citizens in the community.
- Research organizations which provide glasses for visually impaired citizens in the community.
- Advocate for the need for ecologically sound environments.

### Conclusion

Reflecting at the end of the year about the effectiveness of units and lesson plans affords a perfect opportunity to “up-grade” learning environments. Revitalizing units and lessons by planning culminating activities to include service learning experiences is a way of incorporating project-based learning and supports rigorous, meaningful curricula for gifted students who will be prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Children’s Literature for Service Learning

#### **Grades K-2**

Burton, V. L. (1988). *The little house*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Cooney, B. (1982). *Miss Rumphius*. New York: Viking Press.

DiPucchio, K. S. (2005). *Mrs. McBloom, clean up your classroom!* New York: Hyperion.

DiSalvo, D. (2003). *City green*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Fleming, C. (2003). *Boxes for Katje*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Lasky, K. (1997). *She's wearing a dead bird on her head!* New York: Hyperion.

Polacco, P. (2001). *Thank you, Mr. Falker*. New York: Philomel Books.

Silverstein, S. (2004). *The giving tree*. New York: HarperCollins.

Stewart, S. (1995). *The library*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.  
Wong, J. S. (2007). *The dumpster diver*. Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

### **Grades 3-5**

Avi. (2001). *The secret school*. San Diego: Harcourt.  
Philbrick, W. R. (1993). *Freak the Mighty*. New York: Blue Sky Press.  
Robinson, S. (2007). *Slam dunk!* New York: Scholastic Press.  
Spinelli, J. (1992). *Maniac Magee: A novel*. New York: HarperCollins.  
Van Allsburg, C. (1990). *Just a dream*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

### **Middle School**

Hiaasen, C. (2005). *Flush*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.  
Hiaasen, C. (2002). *Hoot*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.  
Hunter, Z. (2007). *Be the change: Your guide to freeing slaves and changing the world*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.  
Perry, S. K. (2000). *Catch the spirit: Teen volunteers tell how they made a difference: stories of inspiration from 20 remarkable recipients of Prudential Spirit of Community Award*. New York: Franklin Watts.

### **Teacher Resources**

Duper, L. L. (1996). *160 ways to help the world: Community service projects for young people*. New York: Facts on File.  
Karnes, F. A., & Stephens, K. R. (2005). *Empowered girls: A girl's guide to positive activism, volunteering, and philanthropy*. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.  
Kaye, C. B. (2004). *The complete guide to service learning: Proven, practical ways to engage students in civic responsibility, academic curriculum, & social action*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.  
Lewis, B. A., & Espeland, P. (1995). *The kid's guide to service projects: Over 500 service ideas for young people who want to make a difference*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

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