



IDENTITY

orientation



Our class comes together to share their stories within the circle, linked to two core frameworks:

microaffirmations



- Students get to know the hummingbird, eagle, and butterfly as central to *Mexica* culture, making connections to their own wisdom, beauty, and strength.
- Students explore the school's core values of RAICES (Respect, Awareness, Initiative, Community, Encouragement, Serenity).

Students receive *Tiahui* slips, which list the RAICES core values, to offer microaffirmations for positive student engagement.

BELONGING



Each circle begins with 10 minutes of meditation, or *Teyolia*, to center students and help learners to self-regulate prior to listening.



Students get to know who their classmates are and learn the patience to listen to one another.

Students learn and practice how to disagree with one another, learning to respect each other without causing harm.

What seeds will you plant to awaken student agency?

EFFICACY



Students are asked to consider, "What is the Aztec calendar asking us to reflect on as we go through our day?"

Students build capacity for a Grade 5 capstone presentation in which they share their learning in an artistic format around the RAICES core values and a *cuento* that they select.

Class closes the circle by touching their hands and repeating a mantra in Spanish, English, and Nahuatl: "Lo que siento, lo que pienso, guía lo que hago." "What I feel, what I think, guides what I do." "No yolo, no mati, no tekio!l, Tlazocamati."

INQUIRY



Our class comes together to discuss reflective questions around a *cuento*, or story of the week.



The class engages in inquiry around the Aztec calendar, exploring the numbers as metaphors and symbolic systems.

Students provide feedback to the class on how community members have been listening to one another, filling a jar of marbles over time for visual affirmation.

Learning Experience

(e.g., lesson, unit, practice, project, PD module, assessment, etc.)

Tlatokan (Nahuatl word for "We are one") Community Circle by Alessa Ibañez

Essential Question

How do we plant seeds for students to find voice and identity?



Street-Level Stories

"Since I began teaching at Raíces del Saber, my philosophy as an educator has evolved. I have had to unlearn outdated practices that no longer serve my students, making room for new ways of knowing and being. A key part of this shift has been reclaiming our identity and roots as Latine and Indigenous peoples. The Xinachtli Pedagogy, developed by my colleague Mr. Carlos and others, is a model that emphasizes teaching in harmony with the natural world. Through this approach, children learn to connect with nature via activities like gardening, community building, meditation, and storytelling, among others. Having witnessed firsthand the impact of this pedagogy, I see how it fosters student agency, increases engagement, and strengthens a sense of community. When students' learning is rooted in their culture, language, and connection to nature, it leads to greater participation, respect, and a deeper connection to their heritage."

— Alessa Ibañez



IDENTITY

orientation



Students discuss their previous learning and are asked to put on their “wonder hat” to chart what they wanted to learn about based on prior learning. Students chose to build “fairy gardens,” which combines financial literacy (math) and the plant cycles (science).

microaffirmations



Students learn about the various types of hardship families can face, and they share their own lived experiences. Students learn about big concepts like housing insecurity and addiction.

They learn how food is a basic necessity that everyone needs and share stories about it. They learn that food needs to be cultivated in places like community gardens.

BELONGING



radical inclusion

“What does community mean to you?” is an anchoring question for discussion. The goal is to include every student’s perspective and humanity into the classroom. Circling up with this question allows students to build a community of trust and vulnerability.



circle up

Students circle up with various local food businesses in their actual community to learn about food and business culture. For example, students interviewed Prince George’s Italian Club, a local restaurant and other non-franchise businesses.

By engaging with local businesses, students begin to see they belong to a larger community that they can learn from.

What seeds will you plant to awaken student agency?

EFFICACY



making learning public

Students visit and learn from local community members—the mayor, counselors, and other business owners.

For example, in connecting with a business, students were invited to make mini pizzas, showcasing how food ingredients from farms provide the ingredients for the pizza to be made.



reflection & revision

Students reflect on what they learned from community interviews and apply it to their own “fairy garden” business plans.

Students share their business plans and “fairy gardens” to their peers, reflecting back what they learned in the process.

Gratitude circles are offered and led with the notion that we never know what others are going through—tying it back to how gardens can be a solution to community needs.

INQUIRY



questions over answers

Students explore what the needs of the community are and how planning and building “fairy gardens” benefits their community.

Students explore the benefits of gardens, such as serving as food and medicinal resources for the community. Students use critical and creative thinking to uncover how gardens can be a solution to community needs and develop a “fairy garden” business plan.

feedback



over grades

Students explore what it means to take care of a garden as a business. They are provided feedback on their “fairy garden” business plans as they develop them.

Students learn skills such as taking care of plants, budgeting, and cooking, which also strengthen social awareness.

Learning Experience

(e.g., lesson, unit, practice, project, PD module, assessment, etc.)

Fairy Garden Unit by Kelsey McDonald

Essential Question

How can we all take part in helping our community?



Street-Level Stories

"Transparency is an essential value in our classroom, cultivated through circle discussions. We begin by reviewing previous lessons and then offer students choices about what to learn next, such as specific skills or math units like time, money, shapes, or measurement. Peer-to-peer activities, like Think-Pair-Share, encourage collaboration and deepen their understanding. Students are also given time to reflect on their learning by asking 'I wonder' questions, which sparks curiosity and inquiry. In our circle discussions, students share their thoughts and explain the reasoning behind their choices, often linking their learning to real-world issues like housing insecurity. We rotate through subjects and collaboratively select projects. For example, the 'fairy gardens' project was chosen by the students, which gave them the opportunity to apply financial literacy skills by planning and budgeting for their gardens. Through this project, students not only learn about plant life cycles by nurturing their own plants but also engage with broader social issues, such as housing insecurity, addiction, food culture, and local business practices. This project-based approach fosters meaningful learning and promotes a sense of responsibility toward themselves and others. Students learn to care for and nurture their plants with the understanding that this care extends beyond the classroom, connecting them to the larger community and the many interwoven roles plants play in daily life."

— Kelsey McDonald

[Pictures of "Fairy Garden" Unit](https://qrs.ly/psgecye) <https://qrs.ly/psgecye>



Learning Experience

(e.g., lesson, unit, practice, project, PD module, assessment, etc.)

Debating and Communicating
by Paula Martinez

Essential Question

How do we communicate/assert different points of view using evidence and reasoning, and how does this conversation impact our world?

IDENTITY

Storiation



Students practice microaffirmations to ensure peers feel truly heard.

microaffirmations



Storiation is interwoven as students contribute anecdotal evidence to create impact for the listener.

Students take away deeper understandings of themselves, their peers, and the topic.

BELONGING



radical inclusion

Debate centers students' voices as they are the drivers of the conversations.

Debate centers students as it requires listening to and valuing their ideas.



circle up

Students develop speeches using their own passions and ideas, supported by evidence.

Working on a debate team with peers fosters belonging and a united school community.

What seeds will you plant to awaken student agency?

EFFICACY



making learning public

Students use what they know to research and develop arguments for both sides of the debate topic.

Students publicly share their learning in a series of debate rounds.



reflection & revision

Students have five minutes to share their speech while spending 25 minutes listening deeply to other perspectives from their peers.

INQUIRY



questions over answers

Students select relevant debate topics that impact real life. Inquiry is ongoing as they awaken to new ideas and consider solutions.

Students create their own assertions for each side of the debate topic.



feedback over grades

Students will use inquiry and personal experience to guide the areas they will write and speak about in connection to the debate topic.

Feedback is received from peers and debate judges in order to refine and improve arguments.



Street-Level Stories

“The idea for our debate team started in 2016, when an eighth-grade student asked, ‘Why don’t we have a debate team?’ Our school is Title 1, with many students from bilingual and immigrant families who face socioeconomic challenges. I felt that debate was a perfect fit for our community, as it would engage students in academics, foster critical thinking, and provide a platform for public speaking. Debate embodies everything a traditional school structure aims to provide in terms of literacy and collaboration.

As the team grew, our success gained local support, eventually leading to district sponsorship. The community rallied behind us, with parents volunteering as judges and team supporters, and our special projects director securing transportation funding. At a recent school board meeting, our team was recognized, with a strong showing of parent support. We’ve since hosted debate assemblies, competed in tournaments across Southern California, and visited the LA Public Defender’s Office to explore career paths. Teachers, staff, and even former students have stepped in as volunteers and mentors, creating a truly community-driven effort.

When we started, we were new to debate formats and rules, but through continuous learning, feedback, and collaboration, we’ve made tremendous progress. From initially being observers at tournaments, we clinched our first-place trophy in February 2024—a testament to our growth and dedication. We made it to the top of the mountain!”

— Paula Martinez

[Students Debate https://qrs.ly/g3gecym](https://qrs.ly/g3gecym)



Learning Experience

(e.g., lesson, unit, practice, project, PD module, assessment, etc.)

Geometric Properties
By Nolan Fossum

Essential Question

How can we deepen our understanding of ourselves and others through the use of properties of geometric symmetry?

IDENTITY

orientation



Students explore their ancestral histories, ethnic identities, and cultural traditions.

microaffirmations



Families, caregivers, community leaders, and elders share traditions that weave mathematics into the practices of work, recreation, custom, religious observance, or celebration.

BELONGING



radical inclusion



circle up

Drawing inspiration from the texts *Part Asian*, *100% Hapa* and *Hapa.me* by Kip Fulbeck, students share their own stories and values in relation to their cultural and ethnic identities.

Through these stories, students have the opportunity to understand the richness of the diverse traditions that come together within our classroom.

Additionally students co-design the learning experience as they curate a set of objects whose symmetrical properties will be the basis of study.

What seeds will you plant to awaken student agency?

EFFICACY



making learning public

Students' symmetry projects will be compiled into one or more books in the spirit of Fulbeck's Hapa Project. These books will be on display for the broader school community.



reflection & revision

Students will not receive traditional grades for their contributions to the project. Instead, students will write reflective responses about the mathematical properties they studied, as well as their takeaways learned about themselves and others through this collective project.

INQUIRY



questions over answers

Students explore properties of Geometry through the use of symmetry transformations. They have their choice of many images to use for the project—images from our texts, pictures of themselves, or images from a set students have curated.



feedback over grades

With the use of these chosen images, students will explore the concept of mathematical symmetry through geometric transformation as applied to mathematical figures and real-world objects.



Street-Level Stories

“A couple of years ago, I discovered Kip Fulbeck’s *Part Asian, 100% Hapa* by chance, and was moved by its authentic stories, which highlighted both shared Hapa identity and individual uniqueness. The book’s photos, featuring people of Hapa identity with short blurbs written in their own handwriting, captivated me. The subjects ranged from young children to elderly individuals. As a math teacher, I was drawn to the features of each face and remembered an article I had read about facial symmetry. This led me to think about how students could compare real-life objects to their symmetrical counterparts by reflecting the left half of an image onto the right, and vice versa. This geometric exploration of symmetry would be a perfect opportunity for students to practice digital skills—cropping and reflecting images with attention to scale and coordinates—using photos of faces, pinecones, feathers, baseballs, and more.

But the deeper learning came from reflecting on the identities in the book—appreciating the beauty in ‘imperfect symmetry’ and using it as a gateway to explore students’ own complex racial, ethnic, and cultural identities. The personal stories in the book reveal diverse ways of expressing identity, and I knew this would inspire my students to share their own unique stories.

Every day, my students teach me about themselves in both subtle and profound ways. As I learn to listen and see more clearly, I grow as an educator, finding new ways for students to experience the joy of learning about themselves and their world through math.”

— Nolan Fossum

Hapa Me Project: <https://qrs.ly/evgecyt>

Hapa Me Instagram Account <https://qrs.ly/n1gecyx>



IDENTITY

orientation



microaffirmations



As the unveiling of student work in Witness Mountains came near, students felt compelled to share the story of their collective inquiry that they had just experienced together. Students chose to share photos, writing, design plans, and other artifacts from their study that did not necessarily make it onto Witness Mountains in the final cut. This resulted in a beautiful display of work that told the story of their months-long inquiry. The inclusion of work that hadn't been curated onto Witness Mountains created space for all learners to see their work reflected in the celebration and brought pride because it was still chosen by peers to be included. To hear students publicly share why they thought a certain poem or painting that had been made on the land should be included was beautiful to hear. The collective identity of our class was strengthened, and there was space for all to participate.

BELONGING



radical inclusion



circle up

Witness Mountains quickly became an inquiry project that required many different skill sets from the children, promoting radical inclusion. There was the physical work of creating the mountains (cutting the mountains from plywood, decorating with spray paint, making stencils, hanging the selected artifacts, doing the math to make each mountain to scale, studying the topography of the land to have an accurate representation of the top of the mountain), curating the artifacts that would make the final cut from the whole, (learning how to curate, celebrate the pieces that were selected to be included in the final plan, and those that didn't make it), and planning the unveiling of the work to the community (invitation list, delivering invitations to honored guests, food and drink planning, preparation of the event space in the gym). There were many pathways into this work, and there was something for every learner to take part in, moving toward the public sharing of their work together.

What seeds will you plant to awaken student agency?

EFFICACY



making learning public



reflection & revision

As we explored the mountains of the Cowichan Valley, I connected with the creator of the Witness Blanket, Carey Newman, over Twitter. This connection was important as the children began to plan the unveiling of their work with our community. The students were already pretty used to publicly sharing their work in some way or another. During the planning phase of the work, a child thought out loud, "What if we ACTUALLY invited Carey Newman?" We recorded a short video of her giving the details of the event, tagged him in the tweet, and waited for a response. The students were thrilled when he accepted! This brought on a heightened sense of responsibility for the work, and the children felt a real call to step up and into their plans. Carey's presence, along with other community members, contributed to a sense of ownership and pride in their collective work as they shared with an authentic and interested audience. It was such a gift to see the impact of their presence on the children.

INQUIRY



questions over answers



feedback over grades

When Witness Mountains was first pitched to the students, my teaching partner and I didn't know just exactly what it would be. We began exploring Carey Newman's *Witness Blanket* exhibit, which was travelling and accessible to us at the time. My teaching partner and I would make many offerings and provocations to the students over the course of our time together, and we were always watching to see what stuck. This happened to be an example of art and reconciliation that deeply resonated with the kids, and they continued to show us that this was an area of study they were deeply interested in. This way of engaging curriculum allows students to have a voice in their areas of study and for us to provide many options to them throughout the year. This inquiry turned into a multi-month exploration of the land of the Cowichan Valley as the children wondered what would it mean to witness six of the most culturally significant mountains to the Quw'utsun people. This question opened a beautiful exploration of the land and its original caretakers.

Learning Experience

(e.g., lesson, unit, practice, project, PD module, assessment, etc.)

Witness Mountains
by Cayla Brown

Essential Question

How can working together, sharing our experiences, and learning in real-world settings help us grow as a community of learners?



Street-Level Stories

“At Q'Shintul (Mill Bay Nature School), our teaching is guided by the BC Curriculum, the First People's Principles of Learning, and Truth and Reconciliation, with deep respect for Cowichan Elders and Knowledge Holders. We aim to provoke learning ‘from the inside out,’ using various mediums to guide children in meaning-making.

When we learned about the *Witness Blanket* art installation by Carey Newman, my teaching partner and I knew it would be an ideal way to engage students in thinking about the land and their connections to it. The Cowichan Valley is home to six sacred mountains, and we set the goal of climbing each one. Along with artifact collection, storytelling, and Hulq'umi'num language lessons led by Sonya Charlie, this became our inquiry.

As we climbed Maple Mountain, Stoney Hill, Mount Sicker, Mount Prevost, Tzouhalem, and Mount Richards, students collected artifacts that told the story of our time on the land. Back on campus, we co-created our own ‘Witness Mountains,’ guided by our head learner (principal), who led thoughtful curation sessions with the students. They decided which artifacts to include and shared their own writing for consideration.

As our inquiry culminated, we began planning a public learning celebration, and our head learner suggested we invite Carey Newman. He graciously accepted, and at the unveiling, he spoke to the children about Truth and Reconciliation, sharing his own *Witness Blanket* and gifting each student a coin as a symbol of witnessing. It was a powerful moment, deepening students' understanding of their work and its importance.”

— Cayla Brown