

## 1<sup>st</sup> Graders Become Young Authors

### **Purpose:**

Our school has an ongoing commitment to infuse economic concepts into our curriculum across the board, K-12. This year our school is also putting an emphasis on writing proficiencies. I therefore decided to somehow use a writing project as my vehicle for infusing economic concepts.

### **Vocabulary:**

Capital resources, choice, consequence, consumer, division of labor, goods and services, human resources, producer, sales, resource allocation, trade

### **Project:**

Students wrote and published their own literary work.

### **Process:**

I read to my class the story of *Officer Buckle and Gloria* by Peggy Brown. Afterward my class did a writing response on safety tips. During the next two weeks I worked with each student and interviewed them about their best tips on 13 different life subjects. They became so excited about this project that I realized it could be the perfect vehicle.

I decided to call this project *Blue Skies: Fresh Advice About Life From First Graders*. I encouraged the children to write down as many of their ideas as possible. We actually practiced our writing skills and wrote down bits of advice for two months. During that time we talked a lot about trade and what we have to trade – time, skills, items we no longer want, things that we can make.

While we pursued our writing, but before we had an actual product to see, I introduced the class to ideas about trade – what makes a good trade, and how people view trade differently. I used three of the Powell 15-minute website lessons to accomplish this – the [Trade Bag Activity](#), [The Scarecrow's Hat](#), and [Socks for Supper](#). I also took advantage of every reading opportunity to talk to my students about the economic concepts of making choices and understanding how our choices result in certain consequences. By repeatedly pointing out concepts of trade, choice, and consequences already embedded in our existing curriculum, these become a very natural point of reference for the students. The structure they provided enabled us to have a basic economic understanding in place when we were ready for the marketing part of our project.

Also during this time, I purchased children's sunglasses in bulk, which I encouraged the students to wear while I photographed them. I took the photographs both individually and in small groups, giving our book a visual theme which played off the project's title.

At the end of the two months of writing, I collected their advice and chose the fifteen best for each category. I made sure that each student was well represented. Then I chose the best photographs and put together a format of two photographs and five pages of text for each subject chapter. I made sure that each student was also visually represented.

I was originally going to make a simple brochure-type booklet that would be printed at a local print shop. (This could be self-published with a computer program and a copy machine.) However, while I was passing around the mock-up, the wife of an independent publisher saw it. She described it to her husband and he offered to get involved with the publishing. He explained the options and the cost to me. A friend of our school donated the funds needed to cover the up-front cost of publishing the book.

We used a local custom publisher. I had many meetings and emails with him and his staff to develop the type of layout I was envisioning. This took a month of hard work and creative thinking that was above and beyond my teaching job. It was a big stretch for me but the end product was very rewarding. There were many unexpected advantages to using a local publisher. My class received a guided tour of Color House Graphics and was able to actually see our very own books come off the press. We learned about other job positions and the interdependence of many people working separately to produce an end product. We interviewed some of the employees and learned about the skills and training they need. We learned about safety concerns and the maintenance of the machines used in the production process. It was an amazing and moving experience. The funny thing is that to my first grade class it felt very natural.

We had a big celebration night called “Blue Skies Gala”. In preparation for the event, we talked about the talents each student possessed, and then divided our duties, which they learned is called the division of labor. My class practiced for their reading of three of our chapters into the microphone. We mastered the necessary tasks at each of the work stations – the advice table, the book plate table, the sales table and the bookmark table (I had a local college print matching book marks with the title of our book and individual bookmarks of each student).

The night of the gala we met in our classroom while the rest of the guests gathered in the gym. At 7:00 pm my class lined up in pairs and made a grand entrance into the gym while walking down a red carpet to the music *Blue Skies*.

For a crowd of about 150 people we did a reader’s theater of selected material from our book and thanked the people who helped us. The students then went to their work stations, selling and signing their books. They were champs, working and signing for at least an hour. To date we have sold over 1500 books, and have earned back all of our seed money.

There have been so many benefits. We have had an overwhelming response from people who sponsor our school. Many people have shared stories of how it has blessed people. The media attention has been beneficial to our school. The students have dramatically improved their reading, writing, and math skills as they went about the business of selling

books. They learned about making down payments and repaying loans. They learned the difference between gross and net income. They learned the importance of personal responsibility as they went to book signings, gave live readings, wrote letters, and packaged the books for mailing. The students have excitedly honed their geography skills as they tracked sales all over the United States (we have sold in 28 states to date), and learned about tools of distribution. As the books have traveled around the world, students have been introduced to global trade.

This has been a real boost to my students. They see themselves as authors and know that by working together they can accomplish unexpected things. They took pride in sending a copy of their book to President and Mrs. Bush, and were honored by an encouraging letter in response from the First Lady.

I don't want to make light of the hard work such a project requires of the teacher. Finding a custom publisher with whom to work, securing up-front capital, and the work of marketing the product require time and tenacity. But just like the children, I learned that by stretching myself, I, too, could accomplish far more than I ever expected. This entire project certainly has been one great big adventure!

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