TITLE OF PROJECT: “Emily Endures”

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GRADE LEVEL: Taught to 3rd grade; adaptable to 4th grade-high school

OVERVIEW: This is a six-week unit focused on the life and poetry of Emily Dickinson. Students memorize some poems, write about and discuss others, learn about her life, create visual art, and finally perform in an alphabetical performance piece including three poems put to music that I composed on the piano.

THE “BIG IDEA”

Poetry is a powerful art form, and it is a worthwhile endeavor to study the life and poetry of one of America’s most prolific and talented poets.

LEARNING STANDARDS that the project addresses

This addresses many learning standards for both the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts (http://www.corestandards.org/) and Visual and Performing Arts Standards, Grade 3, in the State of California, where this unit was taught. Specific standards are listed in Appendix A.

KEY UNDERSTANDING(S) of Emily Dickinson, her work, and her world that students will develop from this project:

- Emily Dickinson was a prolific writer of poems and letters but was not well known until after her death.
- Emily Dickinson led a unique life, especially as an adult, rarely leaving her home, but communicating with the outside world through letters, vast reading, and communing with nature near her home.
- Emily Dickinson used many forms of figurative language (metaphors, similes, and imagery) to depict her notions of her external and internal worlds.
- She had an expansive mind.
- Nature was the inspiration for many of her poems.
- She had many losses in her life which caused her to write many poems about death and immortality.
CULMINATING PERFORMANCE TASK(S) that demonstrate(s) student understanding:

- Create an alphabetical coloring book about Emily’s life.
- Create an alphabetical performance for an audience which includes
  - Music and dance composed to three of Emily’s poems: “The Bee is not afraid of me,” “There is no Frigate like a Book,” and “Hope is the Thing with Feathers.”
  - Recitation/dramatization of poems and quotes of Emily
  - Factual information
  - Accompanying slide show reflecting Emily’s life/poems
  - Student written poems about Emily put to music of Mozart
- Make 3-media visual art projects pertaining to one specific poem line
- Design bookmarks around a chosen poem
- Write a paragraph about a favorite Emily Dickinson poem
- Write a poem about Emily in free verse
- Try to write a poem in Emily’s common meter style

SKILLS that students must develop or improve to succeed on the culminating performance task:

- Learn how to find metaphors and similes
- Learn to carry out a collaborative discussion by using sentence starters such as “maybe, I disagree because, another idea is . . .”
- Be able to justify thinking by finding evidence in the text
- Learn to memorize lines
- Learn to speak and gesture dramatically
- Learn to summarize information

SEQUENCE OF LEARNING EXPERIENCES, MINI-TASKS, AND FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS that will enable students to develop the required skills and targeted understandings:

- Listen to a variety of books read aloud about Emily Dickinson
- View photos of Emily’s family and home (available in books listed in the Resources section of this project and at the Emily Dickinson Museum website, www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org.).
- List facts learned about Emily and her life.
- Decide on most important facts to be included in Alphabet book.
- View images of words/ideas from Emily’s poetry. For example, look at different images of frigates and choose the ones that best fit with her words.
- Write initial thoughts about what Emily might be trying to say in a poem
- Collaboratively discuss a number of Emily’s poems in small groups.
- Share groups’ ideas with whole class. Be able to refer to text to back up thinking.
• Watch You-Tube videos of others’ depictions of Emily’s poems (try searching for “Hope is the Thing with Feathers,” “I heard a fly buzz when I died,” “Because I could not stop for Death,” or other favorite poems).
• Memorize poems by Emily Dickinson
• Write about possible meanings of poems in an Emily journal and discuss in small group
• Write a paragraph about a favorite Emily poem to explain why.
• Choose favorite lines to illustrate in three out of four media: collage, paint, computer, colored pencil.
• Celebrate Emily’s birthday on December 10 with gingerbread lowered down from a high place
• Learn the songs composed to Emily’s lyrics
• Help develop dance to accompany music and poems
• Figure out how many years ago Emily was born: Collaborative math activity
• Make the art work for the Alphabetical coloring book.
• Make a bookmark with favorite line from Emily’s poem.
• Choose which letters one wanted to do during the performance and audition.
• Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse.
• Perform.

Because of this unit’s length, I was able to assess the students’ understanding of key ideas in multiple ways. Particularly valuable were the student discussions about select poems (evidence of their understandings about figurative language) and class discussions about her life. The culminating tasks of alphabet language for our coloring book and our play and the students’ varied interpretations of Dickinson’s poems were evidence to me that they assimilated these enduring understandings.

SUGGESTED POEMS, LETTERS, AND OTHER RESOURCES helpful to or suitable for the project:

A teacher wishing to pursue this unit will want to have access to the following:
• Emily Dickinson: Selected Letters, ed. by Thomas Johnson (1958)

In addition to the resources used below, which are suitable for students, teachers may wish to consult:
• Dickinson: Selected Poems and Commentaries by Helen Vendler
• The Gardens of Emily Dickinson by Judith Farr with Louise Carter
Poems below can be found in *Emily Dickinson: Poetry for Young People* (ed. Frances Schoonmaker Bolin, Sterling Publishing, 1994), a good collection for elementary students:

“Hope is the Thing with Feathers”
“I dwell in possibility”
“I started early, took my dog”
“I’m Nobody, who are you”
“A Narrow Fellow in the Grass”
“The Bee is not afraid of me”
“The Grass so little has to do”
“There is no Frigate like a Book”

Other useful poems for this level include
“This is my Letter to the World”
“The Months have Ends”
“Twas such a little, little boat”
“Blazing in Gold”
“The Poets light but Lamps”
“Answer July”
“This was a Poet”

NOTE: these are available in *The Poems of Emily Dickinson, Reading Edition*

**Letters:**
Letters to Norcross cousins (Louise and Frances), especially final note (1886) (printed in *Emily Dickinson: Selected Letters*)

**Books:**
*Emily Dickinson’s Letter to the World* by Jeanette Winter
*Emily* by Michael Bedard
*My Uncle Emily* by Jane Yolen
*The Mouse of Amherst* by Elizabeth Spires

**DVD**
“The Belle of Amherst”: one-woman show of Emily Dickinson, performed by Julie Harris (who at end of unit; students will recognize many quotes and poems. First half is enough for 3rd grade)
TEACHER REFLECTIONS

This project was excellent for facilitating learning, as the topic became absorbing to the students. Quite a few of them had the fever and a number of parents let me know how much their children talked about what they were learning and how excited they were to be in a performance about Emily. Children were eager to talk about their thoughts about the poems in discussion groups and LOVED the songs put to the poems. We have a poem of the week and also repeat earlier poems each day at the request of the student of the week. Emily’s poems are chosen the most, especially the three we sing along with the piano.

It was amazing how well my students became at making meaning by collaborating. I learned that they just need enough practice. One thing that helped was that, early on, I had each group choose one person who was good with ideas. Then we had a “fishbowl” discussion which those selected at the center and everyone else around them taking notes of what they noticed. It was great modeling of children who could refer to the text to support their thinking and who could invite others into the discussion. It helped the others become better at this.

I have not done formal assessment of information learned but in hearing student discussions, it’s clear they have gleaned a great deal of information because I hear them include in conversation: “Well, she died of kidney disease so many she was already sick,” “Well, she’s the one who did the baking, so maybe . . .” “I wonder why she didn’t go out for so long.” The students were proud of themselves and one of the greatest events was at our cast party, my student who speaks little due to being on the Autism spectrum sat in his chair and recited quote after quote of Emily with great expression. He also sang a solo for one of the songs and it was amazing for a child who needs constant reminders to be in the present, to come in on his part every time with no reminder at all. To have reached a boy who is so often completely unavailable was a wonderful effect.

For next time, I learned to find poems that were somewhat accessible, with something that will grab a third-grade mind. I found it helpful to introduce each poem with kids choosing a line that was intriguing to them and practicing saying it dramatically. Kids got together with others with the same line, and practiced it. Then the whole poem became a choral reading in parts.

Let your passion lead the way. The kids will catch it. Dickinson is gold!

APPENDICES (in order)

- APPENDIX A List of Learning Standards
- APPENDIX B Alphabetical coloring book: two sample pages “B” and “U”
- APPENDIX C “Emily Endures” photo collage
- APPENDIX D Writing Samples (3 pages)
  - Paragraphs about favorite ED poems: student writing samples (1 page)
  - Poems written in Emily Dickinson’s style: student writing samples (2 pages)
- APPENDIX E Music sample: “Bee is not afraid of me” music by Bonnie Raines
APPENDIX A: Learning Standards for “Emily Endures”

Common Core Standards for English Language Arts (http://www.corestandards.org/)

Reading Standards for Literature 3rd grade
1. Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.
4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.
5. Refer to parts of stories, dramas, and poems when writing or speaking about a text, using terms such as chapter, scene, and stanza; describe how each successive part builds on earlier sections.

Reading Standards: Foundational Skills 3rd grade
4. Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
   a. Read on-level text with purpose and understanding.
   b. Read on-level prose and poetry orally with accuracy, appropriate rate, and expression on successive readings
   c. Use context to confirm or self-correct word recognition and understanding, rereading as necessary.

Writing Standards 3rd grade
1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons.
   a. Introduce the topic or text they are writing about, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure that lists reasons.
   b. Provide reasons that support the opinion.
   c. Use linking words and phrases (e.g., because, therefore, since, for example) to connect opinion and reasons.
   d. Provide a concluding statement or section.

Speaking and Listening Standards 3rd grade

Comprehension and Collaboration
1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 3 topics and texts, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
   a. Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.
   b. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., gaining the floor in respectful ways, listening to others with care, speaking one at a time about the topics and texts under discussion).
   c. Ask questions to check understanding of information presented, stay on topic, and link their comments to the remarks of others.
   d. Explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion.
2. Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
3. Ask and answer questions about information from a speaker, offering appropriate elaboration and detail.
Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
4. Report on a topic or text, tell a story, or recount an experience with appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details, speaking clearly at an understandable pace.
5. Create engaging audio recordings of stories or poems that demonstrate fluid reading at an understandable pace; add visual displays when appropriate to emphasize or enhance certain facts or details.
6. Speak in complete sentences when appropriate to task and situation in order to provide requested detail or clarification. (See grade 3 Language standards 1 and 3 on pages 28 and 29 for specific expectations.)

Visual and Performing Arts Standards (State of California), Grade 3
(http://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/)

Theatre
2.0 Students apply processes and skills in acting, directing, designing, and script writing to create formal and informal theatre, film/videos, and electronic media productions and to perform in them.
5.1 Use problem-solving and cooperative skills to dramatize a story or a current event from another content area, with emphasis on the Five Ws.
5.2 Develop problem-solving and communication skills by participating collaboratively in theatrical experiences.

Music
2.1 Sing with accuracy in a developmentally appropriate range.
4.2 Create developmentally appropriate movements to express pitch, tempo, form, and dynamics.

Dance
2.3 Create a sequence that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Name and refine the parts of the sequence.
2.4 Create a wide variety of shapes and movements, using different levels in space.
2.5 Perform dances to communicate personal meaning, using focus and expression.
2.6 Compare and contrast the role of the performer with that of a member of the audience.
2.7 Demonstrate a variety of partner skills (e.g., imitation, leading/following, mirroring).
2.8 Create, memorize, and perform original movement sequences with a partner or a small group.

Visual Arts
1.4 Compare and contrast two works of art made by the use of different art tools and media (e.g., watercolor, tempera, computer).
Emily Dickinson

An ABC Coloring Book About her Life

by Ms. Raines' 3rd graders
Santa Rosa Charter School for the Arts
January of 2012

(c) Bonnie Raines 2012
B is for Bee. One of Emily's favorite creatures was the bee. She wrote more than 50 poems about them. "Fame is a bee.
It has a song-
It has a sting-
ah, too, it has a wing."

Below is another of her bee poems.

The bee is not afraid of me
I know the butterfly
the pretty people in the woods
receive me cordially
the brooks laugh louder when I come
the breezes madder play
wherefore mine eyes, thy silver mists
wherefore oh summer's day

(c) Bonnie Raines 2012
U is for upper left room. Many days and nights, Emily sat at her little table in her room in the upper left room of the Homestead, looking out at her flowers and at the fields across the road, and was inspired to write her poems.
There is no Figure Like a Book

Emily Endures

Dance Standard: Perform dances to depict themes.

Visual Arts Standard: Create a work of art.

Writing Standard: Support a point of view with reasons.

Dramatically Ticked ecological connotations.

"I am afraid of life on yiphoone."

"There is no Figure Like a Book."

"Emily's poems when she is not doing school work, are about learning and expression."

"They hear them."

"Emmy was an insane about the bee is not a book."

"Learning Emily's poems with our own hands on the book."

"Perform simple rhythmic patterns..."
Paragraphs about favorite E.D. poems

My favorite Emily Dickinson poem is "There is no frigate like a book..." First of all, I think that the poem is about imagination. For example, in the line "There is no frigate like a book to take us lands away," I think that it means that a ship in a story will carry you away into the depths of the book in a far away land. Secondly, I like the way the poem makes you not think of any thing else. You just want to relax and not think. It will always be my favorite poem on earth.

Hope is the thing with feathers

I like the poem Hope is the thing with feathers—by Emily Dickinson. My favorite lines are, the tittle and yet, never in extremity. If asked a crumb of me, I think Emily's poem means that hope will never go away and that hope can keep you alive. I liked it so much I still remember every word.

My favorite Emily Dickinson poem is "There is no frigate like a book..." I think that it makes me fly across the page. Secondly, I like how it makes me imagine the whole time I say it. Finally, I like how she created it. It is lovely. I can speed this poem to the world.
Poems written in Emily Dickinson’s style

The sun is like a fireball
it soars across the sky
the night flies fast before the sun
scared of the gleaming rays

by Silvia

The gold is like a shimmering boat
that sails across the sea
with every sparkle and every shine
it puts a smile on me

by Audrey

The ocean’s calm as music
that carries you away
like a bird in flight and finds the light
until it finds the night

by Alyssa

A bird is like a flying fox
that dances round the air
it drifts along the rushing stream
it sings along the soul

by Adena

The gingerbread cooled in a spot of light
it started to come alive
The children ran and ate it all
and it started to glow so bright

by Silvia and Audrey

A bird is like a flying fox
that dances round the air
it drifts along the rushing stream
it sings along the soul
by Adena

(c) Bonnie Raines 2012
The waves go sailing like the air
a humming down below
they whisper songs into my ear
to make me go to sleep

by Rylee

A boy sits in a tiny cave
he builds a tiny boat
it sails as if it were a whale
to bring the boy back home
by Josh

(c) Bonnie Raines 2012
The Bee is Not Afraid of Me

The bee is not afraid of me I know the butterfly

The pretty people in the woods receive me cordially

The brooks laugh louder when I come, the breezes madder play

Where are mine eyes thy silver mists where feet are summer’s day