

Postholing

By Martha LaCroix Dailey

WHEN A TWENTY-ONE-YEAR-OLD LAW STUDENT FROM TOKYO'S CHŪO UNIVERSITY VISITED OUR TENTH GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES CLASS FOR FOUR CONSECUTIVE DAYS THIS YEAR, HE CREATED A TEACHING ENVIRONMENT THAT WILL LAST LONG AFTER THE UNIT TEST. Sponsored by the Never Again Campaign,¹ the young man demonstrated Japanese calligraphy, *origami* (paper folding), and *judō*. On the fourth day of his visit, he asked all the male students to remove their ubiquitous baseball caps while he told them about the *hibakusha* (survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombs) that he had met. He widened his concern for "survivors" to include Americans who were present at the atomic test sites, Navajo victims of uranium poisoning, and the untold numbers of people affected by the 1986 nuclear explosion at Chernobyl.

More than just an ambassador for Japan or a spokesman for the prevention of future nuclear wars, the Chūo student had our students riveted when he told them about his visit to Chinese museums portraying the atrocities inflicted upon the Chinese by the Japanese. "My grandfather—who was a gentle, loving man—was in that war. I could not believe that he had killed. When I returned to Japan, I went to him. It was true." As the speaker tried to hold back his tears, the students felt the pain of his personal testimony; a small bit of the agony of World War II went to the heart of each and every one of them.

INTERACTION AND INTERACTIVE

Interaction with Asian visitors is, in fact, a key component of our course. For example, a Youth Leader from the Ghandi Peace Foundation in India had a one-week residency at our school, and a wood block artist from Japan spent a week helping students carve designs out of kitchen floor tiles while they were introduced to *ukiyo-e* (prints). With help from nearby Williams College, students were bussed to see Indian dance performers create a Hindu *rasa* (aesthetic experience), observe Buddhist monks create sand *mandala*, and view classical works of art.

Interactive computer programs are also key. Each of our classrooms has at least one computer equipped with PC Globe, a computer atlas and data base that offers instant access to the latest information (population, health, politics, leaders, language, culture etc.) on 208 countries around the world. Soon students will be connecting with Asian students through audio and visual teleconferencing. Indeed, "Pen Pals" are an integral part of the course; we hope soon to have electronically linked pals abroad as ideas are shared, policymakers are interviewed, and global literary magazines are published.

Time lines also help encourage different types of talent. In the China unit, for example, students make a time line for all the dynasties from Shang to Manchu, incorporating a Chinese theme and reflecting historical time with spatial designations. While students are graded separately on a corresponding essay on selected highlights of Chinese achievements in each dynasty, here the emphasis is on the creativity of the time line. Each year students add new themes; dragons with multi-colored scales, three-dimensional lanterns, pagodas or paper mache construction; or, as the illustration shows, murals of the different pagoda, the heights of which reflect the length of different dynasties. Students are provided with the rubrics by which assessment will take place *before* the project is initiated; this helps students recognize, and often exceed, standards in content, performance, and delivery.²

THE STRATEGY WE CALL "POSTHOLING"

Since 1961, in short, teachers at Mt. Greylock Regional High School in Williamstown, Massachusetts have adopted a strategy that we call "postholing." By this we mean that we introduce tenth grade students to Asia through four units (Japan, Korea, China, and the Indian subcontinent) of eight weeks apiece. Each unit presents a historical overview, but instead of trying to cover too much, primarily emphasizes the culture and values of the people by using historical tools in conjunction with anthropology, art, music, ecology, and, of course, the computer programs and personal contact described above. As just seen, every effort is also made to construct assignments that recognize students' multiple intelligences.³

"Postholing" has thus always been a rejection of the text-bound world history "cover-

ing" monumental events in three-day spurts through a time machine that left students with a mass of information that was easily entangled and quickly forgotten. We try instead to build a foundation for lifelong learning, one in which students are viewed as workers who seek answers to questions, and teachers are viewed as managers who create learning environments through a full range of resources. As William Glasser points out, when students see that learning adds quality to their lives, they no longer devise ways "to avoid the meaningless work of memorizing throwaway knowledge."⁴ In the process, they learn both about themselves, and about Asia. ■

NOTES

1. The Never Again Campaign was started in 1985 by Donald and Marion Lathrop at Berkshire Community College in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and a Japanese woman, Yoko Kitaura Shiokawa. Eight volunteer peace ambassadors were chosen this year from seventy applicants to represent NAC, a non-political, people-to-people program of the Peace and World Order Project at BCC. For more information on hosting an NAC ambassador, call the Lathrops at (413) 499-4660, ext. 351.
2. The Chinese Dynasties Project was designed by me. For lesson plans and rubric details, please contact Dr. Martha L. Dailey at Mt. Greylock Regional High School, Cold Spring Road, Williamstown, MA 01267 or e-mail: marthald@sover.net.
3. Research by Harvard University's Howard Gardner has identified a range of "intelligences"—including spatial, artistic and kinesthetic—in addition to the verbal and mathematical intelligences that schools traditionally encourage. See Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York, Basic Books, 1983); Howard Gardner, *The Unschooled Mind: How Children Think and How Schools Should Teach*, (New York, Basic Books, 1991); and Howard Gardner and Thomas Hatch, "Multiple Intelligences Go to School: Educational Implications of the Theory of Multiple Intelligences," *Educational Researcher*, Nov. 1991.
4. William Glasser, M.D., *The Quality School: Managing Students Without Coercion* (New York, Harper Perennial, 1992), 225.

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