

Session 5 Transcript: Bryan Andes

- Hi, my name is Bryan Andes, and I'm one of the kindergarten first grade teachers here at PS 212, Midtown West School, in Midtown Manhattan.

- And I'm Rowena Hurst, and I'm the other kindergarten first grade teacher at Midtown West with Bryan.

- So today we wanna talk to you about our theater study curriculum. Which is essentially a social studies curriculum, in which we explore the inner workings of what it takes to put on a show using a social studies lens. This is an integrated approach to learning where all of the learning throughout the year whether its reading, writing, maths, science and the arts are all tied together into this theater study. The main part of the first grade theater study starts of course in first grade. But there is a significant fairy stale study that happens as part of our kindergarten year. Here at Midtown West, Rowena and I both loop, which means we stay with our students for two full years. We teach kindergarten, and then we teach first grade. This study is really about two full years of learning. In kindergarten we do an extensive fairy tale study, and each year is different. In recent years, we've defied our fairy tale focus as the live action films that Disney has produced. This past year was Aladdin, so that became the centerpiece of our year. We still explore tales by Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Anderson and Charles Burrow. During the fairy tale study, we read endless amounts of books of fairy tales, we show many fairy tale films and theater productions, we explore fairy tales through dramatic play, blocks, puzzles, games, anything you can think of is a complete emersion in the world of fairy tales. We want them to develop a deep understanding of where the tales came from, the importance of oral story telling, and the importance of tales being retold in many different ways. This entire study is divided up into different phases. The first phase of the study is the discovery phase. The second phase of the study is the research phase. The third phase of the study is the creation phase. And that's divided up into two smaller phases. And the final phase is the implementation phase. Our school, Midtown West is located in the theater district here in Manhattan. So we are just a few blocks from Broadway, so essentially this study is about learning about your neighbor. Our city standards are about learning about jobs in your community. So we use theater to illustrate what it means to work together. How people have different jobs in the theater, whether you are an actor, whether you work behind the scenes, whether you work in the front of the house, that all jobs are essential to creating a show.

- [Rowena] So we begin with learning about what is a community. So we study that question, and we explore the theme, we read lots of books, we come to the conclusion that a community is a place that keeps people happy, healthy and safe.

- [Bryan] So how do we define what a community is? We start inside our own classroom community.

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- [Rowena] Students then develop a job chart to use throughout the year. Now everyone can have a job to make our classroom a safe, healthy and happy place. We also start to explore the classroom environment. We start by mapping a birds eye view of the physical setup of our room. And then we work in teams to collaborate to build the map using blocks. The final map, which is 3D, includes drawings of what would be on top of the shelves and tables, and then we also label a printout version of the map.

- So after we finish exploring our classroom community, we begin to branch out into the neighborhood surrounding our school. So we take a few trips around the neighborhood and we begin mapping the different places and the different types of places. And the kids have their clipboards with them, they take notes and they have so this is where curriculum starts to integrate with it, and they take notes on what each building is, who we saw there outside, every building that we see on our walk. And the kids decide if they think its an office building, do they think its a shop, do they think it's a restaurant, theater.

- [Bryan] We start to develop their math strategies, for more efficient counting.

- [Rowena] So once we come to the realization that there's an abundance of theaters in our neighborhood, we decided that's what we're going to zone in on, we're gonna study. So before we begin our research we are invited to a Broadway show. And on that trip students are encouraged to take in their surroundings when they go in the show, to start noticing things about the jobs that are happening. They look at the different people that are working, they start to notice what a theater looks like on the inside what are the people that are working in the theater doing, what tools are they using, what language they're using when they're speaking with people.

- And from there we develop the list of initial jobs that we see happening in the theater. And then we build on that. So once we have developed our list of theater jobs, we then begin the research phase. The students then meet with professionals across all areas, and this happens in two ways. We invite guests into the classroom where kids will conduct research within our classroom, or they go out into the field, visiting theaters and meeting with professionals in the theater and actually seeing the jobs in action.

- [Rowena] There's always a meeting before we have a guest visitor, we use books, videos and other resources to help students build more knowledge and to develop their specific interview questions.

- [Bryan] During the post visit meetings, students reflect on their learning inside their own personal research notebooks.

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- Well, the research notebooks are used as a way for children to reflect on their understanding about the jobs.

- [Bryan] One of the other big things we do as part of our study is we focus in on a song writing team, or a composer lyricist, as an author focus.

- [Rowena] The goal is that we will use songs from their musicals in our original fairy tale story that the first graders write.

- [Bryan] We use these songs during reading lessons to explore word study, and meaning. This includes finding rhyming words, words related to phonic work, and words that are unfamiliar and help them build vocabulary. This also sets up another guest visit, so one of the things we do as part of our study, is we invite actors who sing these songs, and portray these characters in productions all around the world to come and meet with the kids. So, during the research phase we also begin to integrate science into this study. Our first unit is a study on sound and light, our second unit is a study on color and fabric, and our final science unit of the year is a study on simple machines.

- [Rowena] Among other things they did for science when we're doing our sound unit was that they created their own one stringed guitars where they use string and they attach it to the table, and then they had to experiment with pitch. So they had to figure out how could they make a high pitch, how could they make a low pitch. They were also checking for the vibrations because they've heard all about how sound is created through vibrations.

- Our final science investigation of the year is on simple machines. So we look at pushes and pulls, we look at how simple machines work. So not only how we use simple machines to construct some of our set with the kids, but then also how these machines work on stage during the performance. So students will think about how are we gonna move tree during a performance? And then we build a simple machine to do that. This one would be, wheel and axle.

- [Rowena] Another way that we use math to integrate into our study, is we look at our current units and how they can correlate with our current work that we're doing. So one year we're learning about Beauty and the Beast, so we were doing a measurement unit that was measuring fish. So we change it all, so that instead of measuring fish they measured roses. And then this past year when we were doing Aladdin, we did magic carpets instead of fish. Then we decide to, we start coming up with different ideas for what our story could be about. Kids come up with different plots, and then we talk about which ones work, which ones might not work, we problem solve why that would that not work for our show. We also have to think about what songs will work, because we're integrating the songs from our study. So the songs

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have to work with our plot. So then when its time to actually start writing the script, we really just start with who is gonna be speaking first in this scene, where is it gonna be taking place. And then we'll say, "Okay, what do you think this character might be saying?" And a child will make a statement what we've typed it in to the computer. And then we ask the children, "do you wanna build on that? "Do you have another idea? "Is there something else that the character might say?" So then we just continue to write down everything the children are saying, and we build off of each other's ideas, and we continue to keep writing, we will finish a scene and then we go back to it and we do a lot of editing and revising as we go. And teaching, teaches into the process that we want them to be doing independently in their work when they're doing their writing workshop.

- Then we move into a second part of the creation phase. And this is the exciting time of the year where children reflect back on all the jobs that they learned about. They look at their research note books, and they start to think about which job am I best for? Which job suits me the best? Which job can I carry out for the creation of our class musical? So the idea is we wanna highlight that all jobs are important. So whether you're an actor on stage, whether you're a wardrobe worker, whether you're a stage hand, each job is vital into the creation of the musical. And this is where children's individual talents really shine. We start to build on their strengths, we start to see what are you good at? And this also integrates into the next writing piece. During our next writing task, students are creating their own resumes, and persuasive essays to convince us which job that they should have.

- [Rowena] One of our writing units, is persuasive writing. So we integrate that into our social studies where the children write their essays about to convince us of what jobs they think they should get for the show. So they also have to backup their writing with reasons to be convincing. So for example, a child who might wanna be a fight director they might talk about how they a lot of experience in karate. So that can help them to get that job.

- [Bryan] The next thing we would do for our show, is we design the playbill covers and posters for our show. So every student gets a chance to develop a design that they think is best suited for capturing what our show is about.

- [Rowena] And we use this as part of our persuasive writing unit. We talk about how artwork can be used to persuade somebody. So seeing a poster on the street for our show, that convinces somebody to come see it, because they're gonna be interested in the design, wanna learn more and find our what the show is about.

- No matter what writing we're doing, and we consider drawing also writing. We also take them through the steps, the process. So all students are responsible for drafting. And doing many drafts before they come to a final piece. We want them to carry out that process over and over,

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we want them to reflect on their first draft, and change things for their second draft, and keep getting better and better as they move through. As we move deeper into the creation phase, we now start to see the full design jobs come to life inside the classroom. Theater workshops begins as all students are now actually carrying out their theater jobs for the production. This includes set design, costume design, sound design, and design. During this phase, students again carry out the entire process that the real professionals do. So you will see students researching, drafting, building models, painting.

- As the design work is going on, all the other jobs are taking place as well. So for example the wardrobe workers, they're starting to organize the wardrobe, they're setting up bins for each student where they're going to store all their small pieces, and the small pieces of clothing, and their shoes, and they start making labels for all their pieces. They organize the closets so that they can keep track of everyone's costumes.

- Our director is very busy at work starting to create blocking charts. And we actually made all the students into mini paper dolls that the director can then use and take home to stage the scenes.

- When the costume designers are finished and they have their designs complete. We take them on a trip to the fashion district and we start looking at the different types of fabric we take our work designs with them and they pick out which fabric they want to match their designs that they have. And then when we have all the fabric and things we need for the costumes, we start actually creating a lot of them in the classroom and the students help sew and create a lot of the ensemble pieces.

- [Bryan] During the final two months of the study we move on to the implementation phase. We begin rehearsals, we start previewing and then we have an official opening night. And our final presentation is really just that. Its not just the show that the audience sees on stage, its divided up into a three hour final project. The first hour being the film, in which we document the entire year, and present that to the audience so they can see the process that the children carried out which led them to opening night. The second part of the event is the museum. Where all the students who were the designers, and the directors, part of the stage group, the wardrobe department, all in a meet and greet museum where they're showcasing their work, they're answering the audience's questions, and they're being highlighted for their jobs. Then the final hour of the event is the actual live musical. What's different about our show is that we present everything in front of the audience. So we wanna highlight all jobs during the live performance. So we don't just support actors who are on stage in their scenes, but all stagehands move the set and change the scenery and bring out props in view of the audience. Each of those moments becomes its own scene and gets audience applause. If we had a quick

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change, that happens in front of the audience. Where the wardrobe workers come center stage and will quickly change the actors into their next costume.

- [Rowena] The whole point of this experience is that everybody has a job and everyone's job is important, that this couldn't work without everyone working together.

- So we hope this curriculum can help you because even though we're in theater district in New York City, we believe that this study can happen anywhere. Everyone has a local arts program, everyone has a community theater, and even at the very least, there's always a way to tie rich story telling into your curriculum. So we hope that you can see elements of your entire year within one art rich program such as the theater study.

- [Rowena] We've really seen how this type of work that we do in the classrooms can really spark passion for learning in our students. Because everything that we're doing has a purpose, everything is so authentic. And so it really drives that in trust of student work.