The Story of Us: An Urban Fifth Grade Class Creates a Living History Document Through Memoir and Photography

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Abstract

This is a ten to twelve week unit for fifth graders aimed at challenging and, perhaps changing, the perception that many hold of history as dry and dusty old stuff that really has nothing to do with them. This is a cross-curricular unit that encompasses several disciplines: mathematics, literacy, social studies, and the visual arts. It is intended to enhance and build upon what students have already learned, rather than replace core curriculum elements. Throughout this unit, students will be doing the work of historians as they collect data, analyze and represent their findings, read and write stories about their life and times through memoir, and capture themselves and their community in photographic essays.

So much of what students study as history seems to come to them pre-packaged. Their work here should help them see that history is messy and personal—more collaboration than absolute truths.