

Spring 2018

Pathways Progress

Black History Month Learning Opportunity

February 1st marked the beginning of Black History Month, so Wyoming Behavioral Institute's Pathways students took this as an opportunity to enhance their knowledge of the West African culture. This all started with their teacher, Mrs. Connie, introducing an article from *Upfront Magazine* about Martin Luther King. Shortly afterward, the students and their teacher came up with a plan to create griot masks, write their own legends, and transform the legends into skits. Embracing their acting skills, the students then performed before their peers and staff. The stories behind the griot masks were also revealed. The masks ranged from warriors to domestic and wild animals; all were creative and colorful.

As far as the storyline for the plays is concerned, they too were of a wide variety such as: "Why the Clouds Form Shapes", "How Wolves Came to Be", and "Why Vultures Are Greedy And Feed On The Dead". Prior to all of this creativity, the students had to dissect some of the original griot stories, such as "The Epic of Sundiata" by D.T. Niane, "Cow Tail Switch" by an unknown author, and others.

Pathway's students not only learned more about African culture, but had the following to say about their projects: "I loved performing in front of an audience". Another expressed that he enjoyed the creativity of each student's legends and skits and that the mask-making project was an opportunity for students to express themselves.



It's amazing how one news article sparked such a large flame of cultural growth!



From the Teacher's Desk

Pathways students are preparing to be college and career ready. In order to meet this expectation, their reading material is, to a large extent, from informational texts such as Scholastic Scope Magazine. As students read textual information, they acquire a greater understanding of the central idea of a text and the connections between texts with similar themes. The inclusion of proverbs required the students to delineate whether the meaning of particular words was connotative or denotative. The use of figurative language challenges the students to stretch their creativity. Although WBI student grade levels range from 6th to 12th grades in one classroom, each student learns to read and comprehend literary nonfiction texts at a fairly high level of complexity. Proficiency rates are different for all, but all are achieving as they collaborate and create.

Pathways students are currently working on memorizing poetry at a rate of two poems per week. The poems include: "The Little Man Who Wasn't There" by Hughes Mearns, "The Vulture" by Hilaire Belloc, and "After the Party" by William Wise. Some of the students already have three and four poems memorized! They are considered Level I poems, however, once they memorize 20 Level I poems, they will move on to memorizing 20 Level II poems such as "The Height of the Ridiculous" by Oliver Wendell Holmes. Studies have shown that such memorization techniques improve state standard test scores significantly. We are planning a poetry slam to show off their talent!

The Fox (A Proverb by a Pathways Student)

There once was a sly fox, her name was KB. She was very sneaky. She would steal from the wolf, coyote, bear cub, rabbit, elk, and deer. She had stolen for so long that it became a habit of which no one knew.

She would take food from the coyote and wolf, and then would slyly snatch gems from the deer and elk. Finally, she would employ ways to embezzle money from everyone else in the forest. Not a soul could figure out who would do such a sin; so they called a meeting and made a plan to figure out who the thief might be.

“Ray-Ray, you called us here for what! Should I even trust you? Dumb coyote!” Scarlet the deer yelled. Ray-Ray was known for calling meetings over missing as little as a sock. It was very annoying.

“Calm down! This is serious. I know property has been stolen lately, and we are here to address that,” Ray-Ray calmly replied. Soon the

chatter began; Navie and Ticia started to yell out together. That little rabbit and bear cub knew how to make noise. “It’s KB! She is the only one that is not here, and all of us have had something go missing!” they shrieked.

So they scattered, trapped KB, and drug her to court. The decision was made that the tip of her tail was to be burned; it was her pride and joy. So they pinned her down, then took a torch and set flames to the end of her tail.

Thus, due to this tinny fox’s mistake, every generation since is marked with black-tipped tails. Yet, she and all her further kin have never stolen again.



The Story Behind the Mask

My Mask represents a warrior in the wolf pack, which is a small army owned by 5 brothers John, Andrew, Micheal, Luke, and William.

The mask is wide to symbolize a wise man. The colors yellow and purple indicate rich and powerful men because the warriors in the small army are famous, rich, and powerful. The red on the mask is the blood they have shed in the countless battles they fought. The green on the mask indicates the battle where they were all turned into wild beasts by a wicked witch.

The wide blue eyes of the mask signify when they look up into the heavens, and give out their war cry (which is now why they howl at the moon). The corresponding proverb on the mask, used frequently by griots to teach a lesson, is: “Teeth do not see poverty”.

I equate this Masai proverb to the telling of the deprivation of the five brothers and the people of the small army, in the story *The Epic of Sundiata*. Ultimately, they had nothing to their name until they grew to fame and gained many riches (they put their teeth into their work). (Written by a Pathways student)