Knowing yourself: What are your dreams and what is success?

The Dressmaker of Khair Khana Lesson Plan

By: Lindsey Wuest

I. Introduction (5 minutes)
   a. Welcome!
   b. Take out copy of The Dressmaker of Khair Khana.
   c. Speaking to the class: What is the Common reading Program and why do we have to read this book?
      a. Define the Common Reading Program
         1. According to the Dean of Students Office, “The Common Reading Program is designed to provide all 6,400 new first-year students with a common intellectual experience to stimulate discussion, critical thinking, and encourage a sense of community among students, faculty and staff.”
         2. In translated terms, the COMMON Reading Program gives you all something in COMMON. This book allows you to start discussions with an international flair. It allows you to walk into a class and find a first year student who is connected to you because you’ve both read this book. Most importantly, this book gives you a look into a world you may have never seen (or even thought of) before.

II. Energizing Activity (7 minutes)
   a. Before class, a two-dimensional, colorful paper dress will have been constructed and then cut into enough pieces for each member of the class to have one piece.
   b. Pass out the pieces to each student while explaining the activity.
      a. Take four or five minutes right now to write down one your dream/goal on the piece of paper I am handing to you. You dream/goal can be defined as a life goal, a career goal, something that you strive for in your life, your greatest hope, or what you are working hard for right now.
         1. no requirements or limitations
         2. as lofty or as specific as you would like to, but make sure it is something you are excited about, engaged in or maybe even something you have a passion for.
      b. Have decorate paper, then pass up to front of room. Hold for later.

III. Relating it to the book (20 minutes)
   a. Split the class into four groups, give 1 handout per group. The goal of this activity is to have the students think critically about the main character and her motivations—eventually relating Kamila’s motivation to their own.
   b. Instruct to look at side of handout with web.
      a. In The Dressmaker of Khair Khana, we met a driven young woman named Kamila.
      b. Questions to ask the class:
         1. Can anyone tell me, who is Kamila and what was her situation was while the events in the book were taking place? Just a very brief overview.
            a. Allow for answers from the class
            b. Guide students to main points that we want to be expressed:
               i. Kamila is a woman in Afghanistan
               ii. Kamila is a certified teacher
               iii. She practices Islam
               iv. The Taliban have come to control her city
               v. She is worried about her large family
         2. On the Sheets in front of you, please write Kamila’s dreams in the center circle. Using what you know about Kamila from the books, please fill in the three smaller circles
below her name with three of Kamila’s dreams of goals. Then, chose which one is most important to her. Work as a group and chose a person to present the goal or dream that you found most important to Kamila. (10 minutes)

c. Have each group share and explain goal deemed most important to Kamila.

d. Once the groups are done presenting, be sure that the following goals and dreams of Kamila have been highlighted:
   a. Providing for her family
   b. Freedom from the Taliban
   c. Allowing her family access to education
   d. Being self-sufficient
   e. Making a difference in the lives of others
      1. (This goal is very important to go over and should be saved for last.)

IV. What is success? (13 minutes)

a. Have class flip over to My Ideas of Success side of handout.

b. Speaking to the class: Making a difference in the lives of others. When I read the Dressmaker of Khair Khana, I thought that was Kamila’s greatest dream. The way Kamila found to do that was through her dressmaking business that supported tens of families in their neighborhood. Later on, Kamila was able to make a difference through her involvement with the UN as a teacher and an inspirational figure.
   a. But remember, Kamila’s ideas of success- that is, reaching out to the larger community in a dangerous time weren’t always supported by those closest to her. Kamila didn’t let that stop her from pursuing her dreams.
   b. For Kamila, she didn’t feel SUCCESSFUL until she was reaching out to others.

c. Speaking to the class: But, what, exactly, is success?
      1. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtSE4rglxbY
      2. This video explains that success is something that we think has an exact definition. It must be accepted that we can’t succeed at everything. It also explains that our ideas of success are sucked in by things outside of ourselves. Don’t give up on your ideas of success, but do make sure that your ideas are truly your own. Be the author of your own ambition.
   b. Have class fill out worksheet; share your own personal example based off the worksheet.
   c. While the students are watching the video and filling out the work sheet, play some smooth jazz and use the time to tape together the pieces of the paper dress on which the students wrote their dreams or goals earlier in the class.
   d. Full video of Alain de Botton’s speech, A Kinder, Gentler Theory of Success, posted on Sakai

V. Reflecting on ourselves (5 minutes)

a. Tape the dress at the front of the room. The students will notice that it is made of their dreams and goals.

b. Now it’s time for inspiration: Sometimes, our dreams come together in a way we never would have expected, but that doesn’t mean that the end result isn’t something beautiful. This dress is made of this class’ hopes and dreams, just like the dresses in Khair Khana were made of Kamila’s hopes to improve her community.

c. Encourage the students to come up and look at the dress that is made of the class’ dreams and goals. Ask the class to notice the diversity among the goals and to appreciate that each person has their own idea of success that is unique and important to them.
In each octagon, write a value that correlates with your definition of success. Values can be defined as things or ideas in your life that are important to you.
The Dressmaker of Khair Khana

Why is this the most important goal/dream?