

The Right to Water in Literature and Local Communities

Brian Katz
7th Grade English
Gallup, New Mexico

Timeline:

Part I: Data Collection	Weeks 1-2
Part II: Arts-Based Tree Project	Week 2
Part III: Documentary Theater	Weeks 3-4

Contextualization

Students are required to read Susan Parks' *A Long Walk to Water* as part of the 7th grade Engage NY curriculum. This novel is based on the real life story of Salva Dut, a Sudanese Lost Boy who survived the violence and dislocation resulting from multiple historical forces (e.g., colonialism and its aftermath, the Sudanese Civil War, the effects of foreign interest in Sudanese natural resources, as well as the rise of the Taliban in Sudan). After an epic journey to a Kenyan refugee camp, Dut arrives safely in the U.S as a refugee, but feels a moral responsibility to advocate for the people still living in the refugee camps. Despite the new challenges he faces in the U.S., he finds the agency to organize a campaign that funds several well-building projects. Parks has used this novel, in part, as a call to action in support of Dut's organization: Water for South Sudan. Since its publication, students all over the U.S. have read this book, empathized with the situation, and raised money to support the project—shifting these young readers from spectators to political actors in a global world, and positioning them as allies in support of the people of Sudan's [human right to water](#).

Research Project Connecting Literature to Culturally Relevant Histories

Because I will be teaching this unit in Gallup New Mexico, it seems fitting to research the work of the Black Mesa Water Coalition (BMWC), the Navajo Water Rights Settlement and [Navajo-Gallup Water Supply Project](#), and the parallels between the history of water access in Southern Sudan and Naabeehó Bináhásdzo, where [“an estimated 40-percent of residents are dependent upon hauling water for use in their homes.”](#) Just as the conclusion of *A Long Walk to Water* promotes praxis and cultivates hope, this research project intentionally includes the transformational actions being taken by individuals and organizations such as BMWC in order to cultivate [critical hope](#).

Essential Questions:

- What connections are there between Susan Parks' *A Long Walk to Water* and the history that has led up to the water crisis today in Gallup and Naabeehó Bináhásdzo? Why is it important to connect literature to real life issues affecting us today?
- Do people have a right to water? What are the diverse interests, values, and worldviews that shape and have shaped the control of water in Gallup and Naabeehó Bináhásdzo?
- What actions have people living in Gallup and Naabeehó Bináhásdzo taken to advocate for the community's human rights and indigenous rights to water? What values/worldviews drive these actions?
- In relation to water, what responsibilities do people today have to people in future generations?

Part I: Data Collection

Students will analyze arguments presented in data from a variety of sources:

- A variety of guest speakers including Native American Studies professors, activists/members of the Black Mesa Water Coalition, and family/community members, including personal narratives from the students themselves
- Informational texts, including primary sources (e.g., Universal Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and UDHR), tertiary sources (e.g., Roxanne Ortiz-Dunbar's *An Indigenous People's History of the United States*), and newspaper/radio ([NY Times](#), [Yes! Magazine](#), [Yale: Climate Connections](#)), and [videos](#)

Part II: Arts-Based Tree Project

(Based on Boal's "Image of the Problem/Image of the Ideal" and Freirean-based workshops created by Victor Kohl).

Part II actively promotes [systems thinking](#), as it challenges students to develop an understanding of the complex contextual knowledge--the processes, interconnected events and policies that have created the current water crisis in the Gallup area and in Naabeehó Bináhásdzo, in general.

Tree-Image of the Problem

Students will use their research to draw the outline of a tree on a giant piece of butcher paper. There should be enough room to write inside the outline of the tree.

Students will use their research to fill in each section of the tree as follows:

- The roots of the tree represent the causes of the water crisis
- The trunk of the tree represent how the water crisis is effecting people in the present
- The branches of the tree represent the negative effects on future generations
- The fruit in the branches will represent the values (e.g., greed) that we are planting for future generations

Tree-Image of the Ideal

On a second giant piece of butcher paper, students will draw a second tree that represents the causes and effects of the work being done by the Black Mesa Water Coalition (BMWC).

- The roots of the tree represent the causes of BMWC's activism
- The trunk of the tree represents specific BMWC actions and victories as well as actions that students may want to take in the present
- The branches represent how these actions will impact future generations
- The fruit in the branches represent the values that the BMWC is planting for future generations

Students will then present their 2 trees to teach students and community members and receive feedback.

Part III: Documentary Theater

Utilizing techniques from Ping Chong + Company's Undesirable Elements, students will create a theatrical performance of their research. They will likely include significant dates and data that ranges from pre-Conquest through the present. Following each performance, a dialogue will occur between students and audience members.

Common Core Grade 7 ELA Standards met by Part I: Data Collection

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.C

Pose questions that elicit elaboration and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant observations and ideas that bring the discussion back on topic as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.D

Acknowledge new information expressed by others and, when warranted, modify their own views.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.2

Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.3

Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.2

Determine two or more central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.7

Compare and contrast a text to an audio, video, or multimedia version of the text, analyzing each medium's portrayal of the subject (e.g., how the delivery of a speech affects the impact of the words).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.9

Analyze how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts.

Common Core Grade 7 ELA Standards met by Part II: Arts-Based Tree Project

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.A

Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.1

Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.3

Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).

Common Core Grade 7 ELA Standards met by Part III: Documentary Theater

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.1.B

Follow rules for collegial discussions, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.4

Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.7.5

Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations to clarify claims and findings and emphasize salient points.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.8

Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1.A

Introduce claim(s), acknowledge alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.1.B

Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate, credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2.B

Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2.C

Use appropriate transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.2.D

Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.A

Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.B

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.C

Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3.D

Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.5

With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.