INSIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF A CACTUS

DUSTI BOWLING

Teacher Resources

Teacher Resource
Curriculum Connections

The curriculum that is referenced in this Teacher Guide is organized by grade. Each section of this Teacher Resource Guide, includes specific "I can…" statements from the curriculum listed below.

This is not a finite list of relevant curriculum connections and teachers are encouraged to make curriculum connections, if they wish, beyond this curated list.

Curriculum 6/7 Big Ideas & Curriculum Competencies

Careers: *Practicing respectful, ethical, inclusive behavior prepares us for the expectations of the workplace.*

- Question self and others about how their personal public identity can have both positive and negative consequences

- Appreciate the importance of respect, inclusivity, and other positive behaviours in diverse, collaborative learning, and work environments

Arts Education: *Experiencing art is a means to develop empathy for others' perspectives and experiences.*

- Explore relationships between identity, place, culture, society, and belonging through the arts

- Interpret and communicate ideas using symbols and elements to express meaning through the arts

- Express, feelings, ideas, and experiences through the arts

PHE: *Learning about similarities and differences in individuals and groups influences community health.*

- Describe the impacts of personal choices on health and well-being

- Describe and assess strategies for responding to discrimination, stereotyping, and bullying

- Describe and apply strategies for developing and maintaining healthy relationships

- Explore and describe how personal identities adapt and change in different settings and situations

ELA: *Language and text can be a source of creativity and joy.*

ELA: *Exploring and sharing multiple perspectives extends our thinking.*

ADST: Identify the personal, social, and environmental impacts, including unintended negative consequences, of the choices they make about technology use

Curriculum 8 Big Ideas & Curricular Competencies

Careers: Achieving our learning goals requires effort and perseverance.

- *Demonstrate respect, collaboration, and inclusivity in working with others to solve problems.*

- Recognize and explore diverse perspectives on how work contributes to our community and society

Arts Education: *Artists often challenge the status quo and open us to new perspectives and experiences.*

- Explore relationships between identity, place, culture, society, and belonging through arts activities and experiences

- Use the arts to communicate, respond to and understand environmental and global issues

PHE: *Advocating for the health and well-being of others connects us to our community.*

- Develop strategies for promoting healthy eating choices in different settings

- Assess factors that influence healthy choices and their potential health effects

- Propose strategies for responding to discrimination, stereotyping, and bullying

- Create strategies for promoting the health and well-being of the school and community

ELA: *Language and text can be a source of creativity and joy.*

ELA: *Exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world.*

- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts

- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world

- Respond to text in personal, creative, and critical ways

- Recognize how language constructs personal, social, and cultural identity

ADST: Identify the personal, social, and environmental impacts, including unintended negative consequences, of the choices they make about technology use

In addition to Curricular Competencies, the Core Competencies have a strong relevance to this guide. The novel itself, as well as the activities developed in this Teacher Resource Guide align with the Core Competencies of supporting students':

- Thinking
- Communication and,
- Personal and Social Responsibility

For more information on Core Competencies, go here:

https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/competencies

Teacher Resource
A Note on Assessment

Organized Around Types of Learning:

The novel is divided into six sections, one week is suggested for teach section – a standard Read Aloud structure. For each of these sections, the relevant Curricular Competencies are listed to support a potential focus for the week. Depending on the teacher, **the focus for the week will vary.**

Each of the six sections are divided into three *parts*. The description of the *part*, names the type of learning that the activities listed within were designed to support.

- ENGAGE
  (Learning that activates or hooks student engagement and targets instruction about context.)

- REPRESENTATION
  (Learning that checks-in on student understanding(s) and builds comprehension and knowledge.)

- ACTION & EXPRESSION
  (Learning that supports student application of understanding and knowledge.)

It will not be possible to do all the learning activities created within each section. Choosing what is best for your learners will be an important aspect of a successful Read Aloud experience.

Evidence of Learning

So how should teachers decide what learning experiences to select? What should teachers do with the learning that students show? The answer to these questions really comes down to the purpose of the Read Aloud. In some cases, teachers may use the Read Aloud to set up classroom structures with an emphasis on building routines and a classroom community.

Others may prefer to use the Read Aloud for data collection of student learning. The guide was designed to support teachers, **if they choose**, to gather formative and/or summative pieces of evidence to assess student learning. Meaning, if an activity or assignment in this Read Aloud meets your classroom learning objectives and can be used as an assessment to inform reporting – please feel free to collect and assess. **However, the decision to assess or what to assess is solely up to the teachers implementing the Read Aloud.**

Assessment tools (rubrics, learning progressions, etc.) were intentionally **not** included in this guide, as we do not at this time, have common learning standards that reach across all the schools that are participating in this Read Aloud. Our journey to engage with the proficiency scale and our collective learning on assessment is ongoing, and we hope this Teacher Resource Guide can be a supplementary support for that journey.

For information on the proficiency scale, assessment and communicating student learning in the Langley School District see here:
https://instructionalservices.sd35.bc.ca/csl/communicatingstudentlearning/

For information on how to gather, create, store and share evidence of learning in portfolio form, see here:
https://instructionalservices.sd35.bc.ca/csl/portfolios/

The Disability Experience

Building our own understanding of a topic is a vital and familiar aspect of the teaching profession. *The Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus*, the text of this year's **Langley Middle School Read Aloud,** creates an opportunity for building a broader understanding around persons with disabilities.

To start, an important aspect of learning and speaking about disability is the language we use. Respectful terminology when talking about persons with disability is not a straightforward topic. So, providing context for staff about the language of disability was an important aspect to include in this guide.

As we prepare to teach this text, the following questions began to arise – *How do we teach about disability? What are the most respectful words to use? What words should not be used?*

The Disability Experience: Working Toward Belonging, written by Hannalora Leavitt, who is a person with a disability, is a resource that covers a breadth of topics related to persons with disabilities. It is one source that was referenced to begin to address the above questions.

Leavitt begins her language of disability chapter, on the topic of **defining disability**.

She starts with the following dictionary definitions:

According to the dictionary, a disability is

1. *A physical or mental condition that **limits** a person's movements, sense or activities.*

2. *A disadvantage or **deficiency**, especially a physical or mental **impairment** that interferes with or prevents **normal achievement** in a particular area;*

3. *Something that **hinders** or incapacitates.*

Definitions aside, no dictionary can possibly define what living with a disability looks and feels like.

Leavitt models to her readers the limitations of dictionary definitions, as they do not come close to explaining or addressing the wide complexities of the individuals it seeks to label.

She also points out that this definition and a lot of language used to describe and define disability, is primarily negative (*hinders, impairment, deficiency*).

In society we are very much constantly defining our identities – both formally and informally. By age, gender, socioeconomic standing, type of employment; the list goes on and on. However, the idea of defining identity for a person with disability is even more heightened – in fact, it is a central aspect to the experience of being a person with a disability. This is mainly because definitions are intricately connected to access and the qualification for vital care.

As educators this should resonate, as we know that systemic supports are often linked to, 'designations'. Therefore, in the larger societal system outside of our school doors, it's important to know that the defining of a disability often is connected specifically to the accessing of medical care and the qualifying for societal supports as well as identifying within a community job and/or available social circles.

Leavitt encourages her reader to learn the broad scope of terminology, that clarifies the depth of language around disability. She teaches about the varied types of disability, *'– sensory, physical and intellectual'* and *reminds her reader of the distinction between a congenital disability (being born with) and an acquired disability.*

Therefore, as we engage with this Read Aloud journey alongside our students, we want to be thoughtful about how we represent and speak about disability in our classrooms. Knowing that we may ourselves or have colleagues or have students with varying relationships with and to persons with disabilities, we are required to be thoughtful. A very tangible and effective way to be considerate and communicate our respect, is through the way we speak.

The Disability Experience

Leavitt provides a best practice option for the language we use, by naming disability in relation to a person, by using, 'the acronym PWD(s), which stands for person(s) with a disability or disabilities'. This modelling by Leavitt, to put person before the disability, versus putting the disability before the person is known as person-first language. It is often named as being the most appropriate language for persons **outside** of the disability community to use.

Examples of person- first language:

- A person with epilepsy

However, like all communities, there is no consensus on the 'right' terminology, or the person-first language usage. Ultimately it comes down to individual preference.

The Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance (CASDA) speaks to the thoughtfulness and care of navigating the preferred language in their community by stating:

We understand that Canadians on the Autism Spectrum have diverse opinions on language and how they wish to be referenced. Many prefer identify-first language ("Autistic"), while others would rather use person-first ("Person with Autism"). In consultation across the country, it was clear that use of language in the Autistic community continues to be an ongoing discussion.

Source: https://autismalliance.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CASDA-Language-Guide-7.pdf

As we engage on this Read Aloud journey with our students, we want to be clear about situating the best practice of language without oversimplifying a complex conversation. For the purposes of this guide, we have selected to use **person first language**, but we acknowledge that some students may prefer **identity first language** or fluidity between the two.
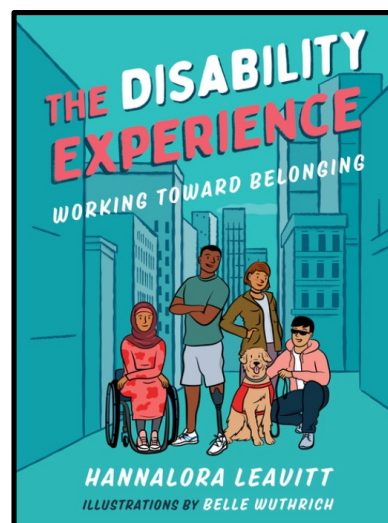
For the most part, the main characters of the Read Aloud will be identified by their names – Aven, Zion etc.. However, in situations where speaking about their disabilities is central, Aven is a 'person without limbs' and her best friend Zion is a 'person with Tourette's Syndrome'.

We thought it was important to explain this decision and to share resources that support ongoing learning about language as it relates to members of our communities. The hope is that this information is not only useful for our Read Aloud experience but also for all Langley classrooms.

Here are additional resources for teachers on the language of disability:

The Power of Inclusive Language- A Recap (2021)
Rick Hansen Foundation
https://www.rickhansen.com/news-stories/blog/power-inclusive-language-recap

Autistic First (Again) (2011)
Autistic Advocate Blog
https://turtlemoon.tumblr.com/post/8705631073/autism-first-again

Person-first language: What it means to be a "person" (2012)
Canadian Medical Association Journal

https://www.cmaj.ca/content/cmaj/184/18/E935.full.pdf

Talking Circle Instructions:

What is a Talking Circle? Here is an explanation as explained by First Nations Pedagogy Online:

https://firstnationspedagogy.ca/index.html

"Talking Circles or Circle Talks are a foundational approach to First Nations pedagogy-in-action since they provide a model for an educational activity that encourages dialogue, respect, the co-creation of learning content, and social discourse. The nuance of subtle energy created from using this respectful approach to talking with others provides a sense of communion and interconnectedness that is not often present in the common methods of communicating in the classroom. When everyone has their turn to speak, when all voices are heard in a respectful and attentive way, the learning atmosphere becomes a rich source of information, identity, and interaction."

Talking Circles and what they are and are not – are described in all of FNESC's Teacher Resource Guides. Here is an excerpt that further supports the use of Talking Circles in our classrooms:

https://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/BC-First-Peoples-12-Teacher-Resource-Guide-2022-final.pdf

"It is important to understand that the type of discussion circles generally used in classrooms are not intended to be used for any therapeutic purpose. Classroom-based Talking or Sharing Circles are not Healing Circles (the latter needing to be facilitated by skilled leaders in specific contexts, and in First Nations contexts, often include additional cultural Protocols).

Talking Circles in classrooms are usually used to demonstrate that everyone is connected and that every person in the circle has an equal voice. They also ensure that everyone can see and hear the speaker. In classrooms, they can be used for a variety of reasons and at different grade levels (i.e. be a part of consensus building for decision-making, as ways to help debrief students' experiences, or supporting learning from each other). It is appropriate to use Talking Circles to discuss some of the topics in these resources. It is important to ensure that students understand and respect the Talking Circle process. This may require some teaching and modelling of expected behaviours in a Talking Circle. As well, students should understand the reasons for using a Talking Circle instead of other types of discussion.

In traditional settings, an object like a talking stick or feather may be used to denote who is the speaker of the moment. It is passed from person to person, and only the person holding it may speak. You can use any item that may be special or has meaning to the class. You could engage the class in choosing what that object is. For example, it could be a feather, shell, a unique stone, or a specially made stick. It should only be used during Talking Circles so it retains its significance.

Here are some basic guidelines for a Talking Circle:

- *The group sits in a circle, so everyone can see each other.*

- *One person introduces the topic for discussion (often the leader of the group).*

- *Only the person holding the special object speaks; everyone else listens respectfully giving the speaker their full attention.*

- *Everyone is given a chance to speak, but someone may pass the object without speaking if they wish.*

- *Speakers use "I" statements, stating what they are thinking or feeling, rather than commenting on what other people have said.*

- *Once everyone has had a chance to speak, the object can be passed around again giving people a chance to continue the discussion."*

FNESC BC First Peoples 12 Teacher Guide: Foundations, Talking Circles pg. 31

Teacher Resource
Supplementary Resources

SORA

The SD35 District Digital Library has **75 audiobook copies** of *The Insignificant Events in the Life of a Cactus* for classroom use that were purchased to support this Read Aloud.

Login instructions here:
https://www.sd35.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/09/SORA-APP.pdf

External Resources

The following are educational resources to support this novel beyond this guide. Both of the resources below were created from the same American organization: Arts & Venues Denver. These resources are included as a reference – teachers should evaluate the aspects of the resource for suitability for their students and classrooms.

Teacher Audience: Chapter Guide (68 pages)
Includes chapter questions, discussion questions and classroom learning activities. Hyperlinks throughout for additional resources.

https://www.artsandvenuesdenver.com/assets/doc/YOBOD-Cactus-Educator-Guide-4c1d7685de.pdf

Student Audience: Adventure Guide (16 pages)
Includes creative activities connected to the novel setting of a desert. Has activity pages meant for independent student work. Hyperlinks for videos connected to persons with disability are included.

https://www.artsandvenuesdenver.com/assets/doc/2018-Youth-One-Book-One-Denver-Activity-Guide-WEB-bdb428ba8a.pdf

Previous District Read Aloud

The SD35 District Website has a digital copy of the previous District Read Aloud. If you participated in the Barren Grounds Read Aloud and are looking for a reference/activity for classroom, use OR if you didn't participate and wish to know more, access **The Barren Grounds Read Aloud** here:

https://instructionalservices.sd35.bc.ca/curriculum-2/secondary-2/the-barren-grounds-teacher-resource-guide/