

## **NEH Project: The Most Southern Place on Earth July 2018**

### **Delta Jewels/Matriarchs' Stories**

**Submitted by:  
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#### **Overview:**

This is an elementary school level (4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> grades) project integrating English/language arts and social studies. This lesson is designed to give students an introduction to several black matriarchs of the Mississippi Delta through their stories which encompass the history, culture, and civil rights of the Jim Crow era. Oral traditions, personal histories, and life stories of these women will be the basis for this project. The first sessions will be spent learning about the voices and stories of these black grandmothers of the Mississippi Delta. After discussion, collaboration, and reflection, students will then reach out to other grandmothers to learn about their own life stories and gain perspectives. The culmination is a shared project display of photos or portraits of their grandmother along with a written narrative of the interviews.

#### **Objective or Learning Target:**

Students will learn and reflect upon the lives, legacies, and voices of several black grandmothers of the Mississippi Delta region through an engaging book that contains interviews and portraits of over fifty matriarchs.

#### **Description:**

Teacher will introduce, present, and discuss excerpts from the book, Delta Jewels (Alysia Burton Steele, 2015). With conversation and the use of additional media (downloaded pictures/video clips/podcasts from <https://www.deltajewels.org>), teacher will lead exploration of Mississippi Delta region by focusing on these everyday black women's lives and their stories. Students will then work in small discussion groups. Teacher will distribute different photos of several of the grandmothers along with their stories to each group. Each group will have 3-4 women to study and discuss. In their groups, students will create a list of characteristics which these Delta grandmothers possess. Are there similarities between these women's stories and lives? They will create a Venn diagram showing overlapping characteristics along with individual qualities. What makes these matriarchs so resilient? Each group will share their findings with the whole class. This will provide the class an opportunity to discuss the kinds of roles these women played in the Delta region. They will use critical and creative thinking to design their own questions which will then be used in their own independent interview projects to encourage women to share details about their own life struggles and personal histories. Students will then either choose to interview one of their own grandmothers or another grandmother whom they know. This could also be carried out as a video project depending upon available resources. After the interview, the students will work individually on their final projects. They will make portrait drawings or photographs of their subjects along with writing passages to show what

they have learned about their grandmothers' stories. Students will share projects in class so that all can learn about the oral history of their grandmothers. What common themes are in the stories of their grandmothers' voices and those of the Delta matriarchs? Are there differences? Why or why not? Do they possess many shared characteristics? As a culminating activity, each grandmother's story and photo together with those of the Delta Jewels will be displayed around the school to make this a school-wide learning experience.

### **Day 1-2**

Introduction of matriarchs from Delta Jewels, viewing of media presentations, and initial discussion

### **Days 3-4**

Continued discussion and viewing of media presentations; initial small group meetings, Group work with close study of 3-4 matriarchs, brainstorming shared characteristics, Venn-diagram comparing/contrasting the Delta Jewels grandmothers

### **Day 5-6**

Small group presentations to the class on their matriarchs. Work together as a class on suggested questions to interview their own grandmothers. Explain final project.

Individual time outside of class to interview (in person or by phone) their own grandmother or matriarch neighbor, older friend, etc. Allow up to a week for interview completion with data gathered and portrait/photo.

### **Days 7-8**

Work in class on independent student projects which consist of a picture/portrait and 3-4 written paragraphs about their own grandmother's story. Proofreading done by at least two other classmates and the teacher.

### **Day 9-10**

Completion of independent student projects. Each student explains his/her project to the class and answers any questions. Display projects around the classroom. The projects along with the Delta Jewels photos/passages will also be posted throughout the school building.

### **Possible Community Service Extension:**

- a. Visit a nearby retirement center to interview grandmothers implementing the same project and sharing the final products with the residents there.
- b. Organization of friendship buddies between each student and resident. Meet together once a month to establish a relationship by reading and playing games.

**Summative Assessment:**

“Over the shoulder” assessment while groups work. Teacher monitors each group as they work.

Products created (as described above).

Presentation/discussion of independent projects.

**Resources:**

*Delta Jewels, In Search of My Grandmother’s Wisdom* by Alysia Burton Steele, Center Street, 2015.

Delta Jewels Support Foundation website with videos, podcasts

<https://www.deltajewels.org>

YouTube videos:

Jewels in the Delta

Delta Jewels Reading

Jewels in the Delta 2

Alysia Burton Steele/Conversations/Mississippi Public Broadcasting