

Harbor House US History and Culture Class



Project Purpose:

To provide low-level ESL students with information about immigrant experiences within the context of United States history, and to provide the tools for students to express their own immigrant experiences in a creative way. Given the diverse population that Harbor House serves, the agency's EL Civics program is designed to teach US History from a variety of perspectives. Not only did the agency want to teach students about US history and immigration, but they also wanted to promote mutual respect and tolerance of different cultures and ethnicities. This program was designed to teach students about different cultures and historical perspectives, as well as give them an outlet to share their own stories.

Summary Description of Project:

Harbor House has developed an extremely innovative EL Civics curriculum to teach students about US History. This curriculum includes creative and effective methods and tools. Students study the history of the United States using children's literature and quilt making, focusing on immigration and the US immigrant experience. Topics covered include African American history/segregation, the Great Depression, Chinese immigrants during the Gold Rush, the Westward Movement, and other related topics. The goal of this project is to go above and beyond learning basic English skills, and to build connections between the life stories of students and those of their neighbors.

During the evolution of this EL Civics program, the agency discovered a mutual interest in quilt-making among a large group of its students. Harbor House decided to use this interest and make quilt-making a major focus of the curriculum. Classes now make

quilts while learning about US history and the immigrant experience, and present their work to other students and the outside community. The process of making these quilts during EL Civics classes has brought together Cambodian, Guatemalan, Korean, Mexican and Vietnamese artists who now comprise a whole separate quilting program.

Evaluation Process and Results:

The success of Harbor House's US History and Culture Class is seen in the performance of their EL Civics students. Harbor House's students consistently perform at or above the California state-wide averages for all ESL levels, and the majority of their students pass EL Civics Additional Assessments. Given the popularity of the quilt-making program, this project has grown significantly since its inception. Classroom quilts have been displayed at Mills College, the East Bay Municipal Utilities District (EBMUD) main office, the San Francisco Foundation, and the California Prudential Realty offices in Berkeley. Students have attended receptions at Mills College and EBMUD to present their quilts. In addition, students have expressed increased confidence and self-esteem after participating in Harbor House's EL Civics classes.

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