

## Studying Our Community

A Project by Second-Grade Students  
at Grafton Elementary School, Grafton, Illinois  
*Length of Project: 3 months Teacher: Dot Schuler*

### Phase One

#### *Beginning the Project*

As our Animal Project approached culmination, children began discussing ideas for the next project. Perhaps because of our local eagle-watching field experience, the topic of our own community, Grafton, gradually became one of unanimous interest. After creating a topic web and telling personal stories, children began contemplating and documenting ideas for open-ended questions about Grafton. The teacher encouraged children to formulate questions for investigation. Several local buildings of interest became potential small-group investigations. Questions about local vegetation and littering were also expressed. Essays describing questions for investigation and sources to be used were drafted, proofread, and published for display.

### Phase Two

#### *Developing the Project*

The mayor visited our classroom, bringing photographs of local historical buildings. A walk to locate the buildings followed her visit. Based on questions formulated in the children's essays, we also visited places of interest to the children: the local grocery, bait shop, two gift/antique shops, three churches, City Hall, and a bed-and-breakfast inn. Frequently, community member passers-by would stop to answer the children's questions or invite them into their places of business. Children used clipboards to hold notes, observational drawings, and rubbings of historical markers. After each walk, the teacher recorded children's collective notes on chart paper and displayed them for reference. While several small groups investigated local buildings, other groups chose to learn about the Illinois River and local plants and trees. Our collective notes and sketches were resources for children building scale models, writing books, and making webs of information about local buildings. Using historical documents, a time line was made to show the building or razing of educational buildings on school grounds. The group studying the river used data from the Internet to make a map of the confluence of the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers and a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the two rivers. Interviews were used to collect data and create mobiles to represent local trees and plants. One child wrote an acrostic poem about littering, making enough copies to hang in local store windows. He also wrote a letter of concern to the mayor.

### Phase Three

#### *Concluding the Project*

Culmination began in the school cafeteria where family, school, and community members gathered for refreshments. Then, second-graders accompanied their guests as they toured the classroom. Printed copies of our book *Things about Grafton That You Never Knew* were purchased by many attendees. Additional copies were sold at local stores throughout the year. As a result of the litter investigation, the mayor donated a trashcan for the front of our school building in order for the children to help keep the community clean. The following day, our class toured the town with plastic bags, collecting litter and depositing it in local trash receptacles. Not only had they learned from each other through small-group investigations, but also they learned firsthand about being responsible citizens.

## Comments

Our Grafton project had emphasized the enthusiastic availability of local resources. When studying a topic in the immediate environment, as in project work, parents and community members share a special interest. In addition to community support, our building principal accompanied us on one of our walks. Afterward, he shared his interest in noting how diligently the children worked on taking notes. The children became especially aware of various individual talents as they helped each other work on representations. They each exhibited togetherness, group entry skills, and concern for completion, as those who were finished eagerly asked others if they needed help. Studying our local community had emphasized the camaraderie of our own classroom community.



Children revisited several local buildings to record more notes and observational drawings.



Two children worked diligently on a scale model of the local fudge shop . . .



At culmination, second-graders escorted guests around the classroom and explained the various representations.



while one member of the interest group worked on writing a book about the shop.