Read Aloud – Voting Choices

As the elections time comes, it is incumbent on teachers as those who educate students for engaged proactive citizenship to immerse students in awareness of voting. This does not mean voting for a specific candidate or proposition, but rather the right to vote whose exercise is the hallmark of our American Democracy. How can this best be done, given that students in our classes are not eligible to vote and our school elections are about school student government alone?

 There are many picture books, which by focusing on a young child as the center protagonist fully engage students as future voters in the process come this Election Day.

Here is one exemplar:

The Walk- 2023- Abrams Books for Young Readers

Author: Winsome Bingham

Illustrator: E.B. Lewis Grades 1-4

This book, which has a beautifully imprinted hard cover watercolor painted illustration of an adult community of voters walking to the polls on both its front cover and the back cover, can literally “walk” students into the significance of voting. The young peer who is the focus is a granddaughter who takes this walk to the polls with her grandmother. The grandmother makes certain to use this symbolic walk as a civics teaching opportunity to infuse the values of voting: one in which all have a right to be heard, all need to help each other get to the polls, all become a community as they vote, and voting is a test for citizens to pass by voting their minds. The walk to the polls which deliberately includes disabled and elderly as well as two children too young to vote, never mentions any candidates. Offices, or issues, but is focused solely on the community shaping walk as a family of voters unified to and from the polls. The grandmother tells her granddaughter at the beginning of the story- “. . . leaders are not born . . . they’re made through molding and modeling.” This book initiates that process through the Read Aloud.

Topic: The right to vote, Constitution, what it is to be an American Citizen, students voices, empathy for the elderly and disabled, American Culture.

Genre: Family stories, picture books, Citizenship themed picture books, Grandparent stories, Community lives.

Before the read aloud:

1. Remove the print cover of the book with its title, and open the book, so that the students can see both the back and the front hardcover with the embedded evocative watercolor painting of the walk. Have them describe the walkers on the back. Make sure they mention that these walkers are diverse adults. Be certain they observe and note that one of the adults is using a cane and it is possible to see a walker partially visible in the painting. Have the students speculate why in a book titled “The Walk” the author included at least two persons on the cover who need assistance walking. Next, have them identify the two children on the front cover and speculate about their connection with reference to their “holding hands.” Finally have the students brainstorm ideas about the “story” or the author’s purpose in writing this work. List or let them draw their ideas on an experiential chart.

During the Read Aloud:

2. What does the grandmother mean when she says: “leaders are not born, they’re made through molding and modeling.” In what ways do your family members try to “mold and model” for you how to be a kind, loving and caring person. Give the students a chance to share as many ideas as they can. Also, get them to share what the Grandmother has revealed about the purpose and number of participants on the walk. Make a separate experiential chart or section on the smartboard for that.

3. As the woman pushing the walker is picked up, what does she does she talk about, which is not familiar to you? (Year 1972)? What does the owner of the barbershop mention which is also not familiar to you (Year 2008)?

4. Where do you think the walk’s final destination is? What do you notice about the granddaughter’s changing behavior and involvement as the walk continues? Make certain the students mention that she is actively waving at the participants, smiling at them, tapping on windows, “smushing” the adults along with her grandmother. What is the final destination for the walk? Have the students react to it and the end and ask how many have ever gone to the poll place with their parents or adults.

AFTER THE READ ALOUD

TAKE ACTION PROJECT:

5. You too just like the students in the story, can be part of the active “THE WALK” experience of voting. Here are some ways we as a whole class or as individual students can go on “THE WALK”

a. Let us walk the neighborhood just before the election and take pictures of all the posters and signs about the elections and all the flyers and notices our families, receive about voting –the poll hours, mail in ballots, registration, absentee ballots and beyond- we can make a collage or mural collage of these and post it online on our website or outside our school (some schools are really the designated poll sites). Individual students can also make signs or create slogans or develop a brief i-movie trailer, urging adult family members to “mold and model” for young voters the process by having the students go with them to the polls as future voters. These digital and artifact resources can be shared with the PTA as partners and on the school and district website.

b. If possible in a given school district, students can film with permission from the adults those actually walking to the polls and interview them about why voting is important to them (not the candidate or the issue), but why voting is important. These interviews can be written up for the school newsletter or with permissions from the adults posted online. PTA officers and boards would be excellent subjects for this.

c. Students in grades 4 and up can research the years 1972 and 2008 to find out why they referenced in the story. They might also interview family members about the election voting experience that most touched their lives. Of course, if these family members come from countries where they had no right to vote or could vote but votes meant nothing because result was fixed, that is important as well. A Voting oral history podcast or set of interviews can be done each year.