

High School Hunger Games Teaches Lessons

How a contemporary novel teaches the Hero's Quest, Ecology, Geometric Probability, and Totalitarianism

By MAUREEN GREENE

Jon approached the target with the bow and arrow in hand. All four of his team classes for the past three weeks had led him to this moment. In English, Jon read how Katniss Everdeen, the main character in the novel The Hunger Games, by Suzanne Collins, used her bow to defeat her enemies in the arena. In math, Jon calculated the probability of hitting the center of his target. In science he learned about the biomes that both he and Katniss live in and how factors like carbon and nitrogen affect them. And, in social studies, Jon learned how totalitarian governments, like the one in the novel, use weapons, enforcement of borders, and unequal distribution of wealth to gain and keep power.

Jon's peers watched from the baseball dugout as he locked the arrow into the bow just as Coach Mike Belliveau had showed him. He fired the arrow. Congratulatory yells from his classmates quickly followed the loud "thwack" of his bow as it hit the middle of the target.

Jon and the rest of our students on team 9C have just concluded a three-week, interdisciplinary unit focused on The Hunger Games. The New York Times bestseller follows the adventures of Katniss Everdeen as she participates in a post-apocalyptic reality show. The difference is that in Panem, the reality show is a life-and-death competition in which only one competitor survives. The competition is broadcast to every household over the nation's only available station, state-run, of course.

This popular novel was introduced to the 9th grade English curriculum at Souhegan High School last year because Katniss Everdeen, the main character embarks on a hero's journey, an important curricular element of the 9th grade. Team teachers Ken Boisselle, Mike Facques, Betsy Wallisch, Kim Theriault and Maureen Greene began planning the unit in August by identifying elements in the book that fit well in each class's curriculum. When they returned to school, each teacher continued to plan the unit with student experiences that mirrored the characters'.

The unit began with an "opening ceremony" similar to those found in the novel and in modern Olympic Games. As in the novel, teachers grouped students into Districts for the unit, and continually assessed students' collaborative worker skills throughout the unit. Students worked together to meet each of the learning expectations in their core classes. Guest speakers were also invited to class to help bring the book to life. Chick Weatherbe, a local survivalist came to discuss aspects of the local environment that could be used to survive, such as making fire and shelter in the wild. Scott MacKelvey an Amherst resident and bow hunter came to discuss responsible and modern hunting techniques.

English teacher, Ken Boisselle, designed a unit around the Hero's Journey, stating that "the students really got to feel the themes from the book by actually playing out the game." The English unit called for students to analyze Katniss's hero's journey from her call to action, through her road of trials and transformation, and finally analyzing what it means to return "home." Students' also wrote a personal narrative essay in which they depicted a personal journey of their own.

For the culminating activity of the unit, each content area designed a series of challenges. Utilizing administrators, support staff and other teachers in the building, the challenges were stationed in various locations around the school. Districts of students were given the task of following the map and completing as many challenges as possible. 9C students could be found using geometric probability to solve math problems in the Info Center, using their knowledge of totalitarianism to analyze current regimes in the 9th grade hallway, identifying aspects of the hero's journey in the football stadium, and demonstrating their knowledge of basic principles of ecology in the Writing Center.

Dean of Faculty, Gigi Klipa noted that "the enthusiasm was high as the teachers and students dressed their parts. Students made t-shirts and dressed in matching headbands to signify their districts; each group of students carried their district's totem symbol."

Ethan Quinn, a freshman on team 9C reported that he "especially enjoyed learning about geometric probability in The Hunger Games because it helped [him] understand the concept in a fun way." Another student, John Bowler, appreciated the emphasis on collaborative worker skills. "I liked being able to work with four other people on my school work. I think it will help me when I get out in the real world, because I'll have practice working with a variety of different people."

Writing Center Coordinator and Literacy Coach, Jeanne Sturges, commented that, "As an example of inter-disciplinary curriculum design, the Hunger Games unit meets a high mark. Aligned to State Standards, high interest, and authentic assessment are key ingredients for rigorous and engaging student learning. What a great opportunity for students and teachers alike."

Science teacher, Betsy Wallisch echoed John's sentiment, "It was great! My colleagues and I worked collaboratively together to plan something that was enriching and engaging for the kids. I can't wait to do it again with next year's kids!"

Souhegan Students Get a Crash Course in Cuban Culture

By KATIE PULFER
SOUHEGAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT

AMHERST - Cuba, a country a mere 228 miles away from Miami, Florida, is a country to which very few Americans have had the opportunity to travel. On November 4, a group of Souhegan High School students, consisting of eleven students and two teacher chaperones – Aimee Gibbons and Kathy Maddock – departed Miami and landed in Havana, Cuba.

While we all experienced the feeling of building excitement and anticipation when boarding the flight, it wasn't until we exited the tiny airport in Havana that we fully comprehended the fact that we were, in fact, in Cuba.

Our eyes were glued to the scenery outside the windows as the bus carried us from the airport to our hotel. We were entranced by the antique cars, the monuments to national heroes, the picturesque waves crashing on the beach, and the people.

Our purpose for traveling to Cuba was to learn about Cuban culture through firsthand experience. Our travel license was for an academically-based trip through, Insight Cuba, so all of the places we went to with our guide, Amircal, were edu-

cational in some way. That meant no trips to the beach to laze around in the sun and waste the day away. Instead, every day was packed full with places to go and things to do.

After exchanging our money for the Cuban Convertible Peso, the currency specifically designated for use by tourists in Cuba's dual economy, we were off. A couple of blocks away from our hotel, we came to an open-air market selling assorted handicrafts like carved wooden figurines, bracelets, and pottery. This was our first interaction with Cubans, and since not everyone in our group spoke Spanish, many were slightly wary of what to do. Thankfully, all the Cubans were very nice to us; many of them even spoke some English. The Cubans were friendly and helped us feel welcome during our stay.

Early in our trip we visited an Afro-Cuban religious center and artist's home in old Havana. It was essentially an alley that had been completely covered with painted murals and organized so that there was a sort of stage in the middle of it. When we arrived, a band was playing traditional Afro-Cuban music while costumed performers enthusiastically danced for an awestruck crowd. We may not have



Watching Cuban man role a cigar in the Pinar del Rio region
Students, left to right: Beau Landis, Jane White, Vanessa VanBesien, Ceara McNamara.

understood the meaning of the lyrics or the music in general, but we recognized that this was art and we were entranced.

Later in the week we had lunch at the studio of an artist named Fuster. Fuster has a passion for mosaics, so much so that almost every surface on the entire property was covered in colorful tiles. Fuster had even made people and animal sculptures out of tile; needless to say we took many pictures posing with the mosaic creations. While there, some of us attempted to salsa dance with a Cuban couple. It may not have been real salsa, but it was sure fun to watch!

One of the last days of our trip, we took a long bus ride to Viñales and hiked into the hills to a small farm. We met with a farmer who explained and demonstrated how he grows his own tobacco, and rolls the cigars that he then sells. There we were, gathered around an old wooden table in the countryside of Cuba, watching a man assemble something that is illegal for Americans to buy or try anywhere in the world. It was like an art form for the

farmer. He carefully selected only the best leaves and cut them with surgeon-like precision.

During our trip, we also had the opportunity to visit other sites. We learned about an organic farm that breeds insects to eat the pests that destroy their crops, thus eliminating the need for pesticides. It was here that one brave student dared to taste the noni, a fruit sometimes referred to as the "vomit fruit," characterized by its cheesy stench. Not surprisingly, he didn't go back for seconds. On one of the last nights of our trip, Amircal, our guide, managed to arrange for a salsa dance instructor to come to the hotel and teach us how to salsa. It was one of the best nights, filled with laughter, dancing, and hilarious pictures.

This trip to Cuba was, in a word, spectacular. The fact that we were even allowed to go to Cuba was incredible. We had a great deal of fun and learned a great deal about Cuban culture. We feel so fortunate to have had this rare opportunity to visit Cuba, a country that has been off-limits to Americans for many years.



Lunch at the Fuster gallery and restaurant: Evan Smith, Katie Pulfer, Aimee Gibbons (teacher), Ceara McNamara, Jane White, Meg Farley, Beau Landis, Vanessa VanBesien, Blake Burnley, Andrew Huyck, Elliot Gordon.

Souhegan High Reunion News

SHS Class of 1996's Wonderful Gathering at Martha's Exchange Nov. 25

"We recalled halloween costumes from Mrs. Casale's first grade class and the new playground that was built at Wilkins as we entered 4th grade... Some of us spend a fair amount of time on playgrounds with children of our own now. Brian Early laughed with Peggy Silva as they remembered there were originally the "Souhegan 7", now 6, and Margaret Mitchell played the fiddle and sang which was an outstanding addition to the evening. We reminisced about our time spent with Dr. Bob, Bosman, Schlotz, and Gigi – and we tried to imagine how different things are now for current SHS students from when we entered in 1992." said Katie Scollin Flowers.



Class of 1996, the first to complete all four years at Souhegan High School.



Coreen Ancitl, Amy Seelye, Valerie Ancitl



Dave Conway, Laurel VanBuskirk, Paul Yuknewicz



Melinda Turner, Amy Wheeler, Katie Scollin



Brian Schlager, Brian Early



Katie Scollin, Paul Yuknewicz, Alison Ferraro, Michelle Giannotti

Nationally Known Comedians
Come to Amherst

11th Comedy Night
First Robotics

Souhegan High School

Team 138 Entropy
SHS Auditorium

Jan 14

Bake Sale

7 PM

Silent Auction



Chris Dimitrakopoulos



Dave Rattigan



Paul Nardizzi

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