How Do We Help the Victims of War?

Grade Cluster - 6 - 8

NETS-S- 5 - Digital Citizenship

Quick Look:

Vermont middle school students work on an interdisciplinary unit to help Afghan children by sending them school supplies. They communicate with Vermont National Guard members who are stationed in Afghanistan to assess the needs in nearby Afghan towns. The students elicit support and donations from local community members, businesses**,** and organizations to gather supplies and send them to National Guard members who distribute them.

Scenario:

Several members of the Explorer Team, a multi-age grade 6 - 8 team, have parents or other family members who belong to the Vermont National Guard and have been, or are being, deployed to Afghanistan. The war and conditions for the military are continual topics of discussion in social studies. The teacher decides this is a perfect lead-in to a study of other cultures and religions, a major focus for the year. Students soon realize that there are "normal" people who are affected by the war, that not all the people in Afghanistan are terrorists**,** and that villages have been totally destroyed by the war. They want to know what they can do to help the victims of the war, especially other school-aged children. They decide they would like to communicate with children in Afghanistan but wonder if that is even possible.

Justin's dad, who is an officer with the Vermont National Guard, has just returned from Afghanistan. Justin asks him to come in to talk to the class. Before his visit, the students use *a visual organizer* and the classroom *SMART Board* to brainstorm interview questions about ways of life in Afghanistan, including topics such as education, religion, fine arts, traditional dress, and modes of communication. (6b) The teacher suggests that students study these concepts in relation to American culture, as well as comparing the way of life for people in the cities of Afghanistan to those of the people in the small villages.

During the interview with Justin's father, students ask about communication via the Internet. Students are surprised to learn that any form of electronic communication could be intercepted by terrorists, that the terrorists use the Internet as a way to share information using key words in e-mail, and that the terrorists are believed to use *steganography,* a form of embedding information in messages. Some of the students decide to begin a side project to study these digital tools on their own. (5a, 5b, 5c) After the interview, all students realize that poverty reigns in the country and want to know what they can do to help.

The group studying education finds out that the schools in Afghanistan lack resources. They find several *blogs* and websites, many for charitable organizations, which appear to have raised funds and materials to send to schools and children in Afghanistan. They become excited about contributing to these individuals and/or organizations. However, when they use a website reliability checklist the class created earlier in the year, they determine that all of these sites are either out of date or insecure. (5a) The team members soon agree that the best way to contribute would be to start their own fundraising effort, to collect their own school supplies, and to ship them directly to Vermont National Guard members for distribution in Afghanistan. They elicit the help of the entire class in this project. (5d)

The students decide to develop *wikis* to share what they learn with the general public (5b, 5d). As the small teams of students continue their studies of culture, they collect pictures from the Internet to use on their wikis. The teacher soon realizes that many of the younger students are just copying and pasting picture from wherever they find them, without crediting sources. A class discussion ensues about copyright and proper use of pictures and other media. The teacher works with the students to teach them how to use websites such as *Creative Commons* to find pictures that are either copyright-free or have usage rights that allow posting with proper citation. The older students work with the younger students to teach them about crediting sources. (5d) Next, the students set up a private *Flickr* account, and invite their friends and family members who have been stationed in Afghanistan to share their pictures. Having just learned about citation of resources, they also ask the people posting to note any citations they want used with each picture. (5a, 5d)

Many students want to know if they can get pictures from troops currently stationed in Afghanistan. Justin's father suggests they contact an officer in the Vermont National Guard who can answer this question. The officer, unable to visit the class, agrees to do a *Skype* interview. When the children mention putting pictures on the Internet, the officer cautions them about how this might endanger the lives of the troops. An ensuing discussion about the public nature of the Internet leads a small group of students to do a side project to share with others about safety on the Internet. They describe the officer's concern about the possible endangerment of soldiers should they use pictures from troops currently stationed in Afghanistan. (5c, 5d) The students work with the officer to find a safe way to get pictures from their family members currently stationed in Afghanistan and agree to only post pictures that will not reveal any identifying information or landmarks. (5a) Students also take on the task of educating their family members about how the use of the Internet for communication could endanger Vermont troops and what measures to use to ensure their safety. (5d)

The students develop a front page for their *wiki* that describes their project to collect and distribute school supplies to schools and children in Afghanistan, including links to each group *wiki* that compares and contrasts culture in Afghanistan to American culture. The topics become very emotional as students realize the extent of poverty and how there is widespread discrimination against females. Some students decide that *podcasts* or *digital stories* would be more effective than just pictures and text. (6b) When the *wikis* are complete, including *podcasts*, *digital stories*, and pictures, students contact each of their school and town webmasters requesting links to their *wiki* space. Next they contact their local newspapers and television stations. Reporters come to the school to interview them

and the project soon becomes a community-wide effort led by the students on the Explorer Team.

When it appears that donations might come in from a larger audience, a community member knowledgeable about digital security helps the group of students interested in security and *steganography* expand their knowledge by working with them to develop a safe method of collecting funds via the Internet. (5b, 5c) Other groups of students emerge to help with collection and shipping of supplies. Math classes study the most efficient way of shipping the materials. Tech-ed students explore the creation of lightweight, sturdy shipping containers. A school-wide picnic is held on a Saturday to collect supplies, to prepare them for shipping, and to recognize the leaders of the project.

The supplies are shipped off to Afghanistan and distributed by our troops. Videos of happy Afghan children are sent home to the Explorer Team, ample reward for a project well done.

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Student Standards – The following NETS-S are noted in the scenario:
>   5. Digital Citizenship – A, B, C, D
>   6. Technology Operations and Concepts – B

Teacher Standards – Teachers who teach this unit address the following NETS-T:
>   1. Facilitate and Inspire Student Learning and Creativity – A, B, C, D
>   2. Design and Develop Digital-Age Learning Experiences and Assessments – A, B, C
>   3. Model Digital-Age Work and Learning – B, D
>   4. Promote and Model Digital Citizenship and Responsibility – A, C, D

Content Grade Expectations

The scenario writer has identified the following content grade expectations that s/he felt might be assessed in this scenario. In most of these scenarios, there may well be opportunities to assess other or additional content grade expectations across a variety of disciplines. If you are interested in developing a unit or lessons based on the following scenario, and you don't see any grade expectations in your content area, we encourage you to capture the ideas presented in the scenario and make it your own by adding components that address the grade expectations you are most interested in assessing.

H&SS5-6:13 Students analyze how and why cultures continue and change over time by…
- Identifying expressions of culture in the U.S., and the world through analysis of various modes of expression such as poems, songs, dances, stories, paintings, and photographs
- Identifying how location influences cultural traits

H&SS5-6:13 Students act as citizens by…
- Describing and defining the rights, principles, and responsibilities of citizenship in the U.S.
- Giving examples of ways people act as members of a global community

- Demonstrating positive interaction with group members
- Identifying problems and proposing solutions in the local community, state, nation, or world.
- Explaining their own point of view on issues that affect themselves and society; being able to explain an opposing point of view
- Describing how an American's identity stems from beliefs in and allegiance to shared political values and principles, and how these are similar and different to other peoples.
- Establishing rules and/or policies for a group, school, and/or community, and defending them.