

Week Fourteen: Somali Youth in Twin Cities

Weekly Focus: Response with Evidence

Weekly Skill: Writing Analytic Response

Lesson Summary: This week students will read an article about Somali Youth in the twin cities that addresses this unit's essential question, "What is the relationship between strength and adversity?" Students will then demonstrate comprehension of the article through a jigsaw activity. Finally, they will write an analytical response with evidence to the article.

Materials Needed: Computer and Projector, Handout, Somali Youth audio/slide show, note-cards

Objectives: Students will be able to...

- Read and comprehend a current event news story
- Demonstrate comprehension by answering questions and presenting information to group members
- Write an analytical response with evidence from the article to support a claim
- Use a personal story as evidence to support their own opinions

Common Core Standards Addressed: [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1](#), [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7](#)

Notes: This week will focus on the Responding with Evidence steps of the CARE model. You may wish to review this model with students.

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Activities:

Activity 1: Jigsaw Comprehension

Time: 60 minutes

- 1) Play the audio of the Somali Youth article and show slideshow. (10 minutes)
- 2) Hand out Somali Youth article with questions. Explain to students that this article is a summary of what they just heard.
- 3) Explain to students that because the article today is so long, we will have to depend on each other to be able to fully analyze and understand it. Today, each class member will be responsible for answering particular questions and then sharing their answers with their group. Have students count off by fours. Each student should remember their number. This will be their "Jigsaw" number.
- 4) Next, have the class form groups of four. Each group should be made up of a Jigsaw #1, #2, #3, and #4.
- 5) Individually, have students work to answer their comprehension questions about the article (Jigsaw member #1 will answer Jigsaw #1 questions, Jigsaw member #2 will answer Jigsaw #2 questions, etc.). They will be able to find the answers to their questions in the section of the article that is marked with their number. (15 minutes)
- 6) Have students leave their group and join with other Jigsaw members of the same number to compare and tweak their answers. (10 minutes)
- 7) Each group member is then responsible for returning to their group and presenting their information so that their group members can write it down as answers to the questions that they weren't assigned. (20 minutes)

Break: 10 minutes

Activity 2: Writing an Analytical Response

Time: 40 minutes

- 1) Complete the first analytical response as a class, selecting one of the individuals from the article listed in the directions. You may wish to ask students to highlight/circle examples of strength exhibited by the individual before completing the response with evidence as a class.
- 2) Have students complete the individual response with evidence on their own, choosing a different individual from the article.

Wrap-Up:

Time: 10 minutes

- 1) Hand out a note-card to each student. On the board, write this: "Facing adversity can help someone grow stronger." Have students write this on the front of their note-card. Explain to students that this is a claim. As with all claims, it needs to be supported with evidence. Whereas in the writing we just did, we used evidence from an article, now students will support this claim with a "story/example" from their own lives.
- 2) On the back of their note-cards, have students complete these two sentences that you will write on the board.
 A time that I faced adversity was _____.
 This made me stronger because _____.
- 3) Have anyone share who would like. Students should first read the front of their note-card and then their finished sentences.

Extension Activity: Personal Story**Time: 60 minutes**

- 1) Have students find a personal story online concerning an immigrant or refugee either in the United States or abroad who has shown "strength" in the face of "adversity." With their partners, students should then try to write a one paragraph response to this question: What adversity did the person you researched face, and how did it affect them?
- 2) Have students share their research and summaries with the class.
- 3) If time, have students return to the essential question: "what is the relationship between strength and adversity?" How have the stories they've looked at today influenced their thinking about this question?

Online Resources:

- 1) [Classroom Strategies: Jigsaw](#)

Young Somalis in Minnesota Beating the Odds

by Laura Yuen, Minnesota Public Radio

January 25, 2010

INTRODUCTION (Jigsaw Member #1)

St. Paul, Minn. — When you ask people to tell you a story of hope from the Somali community in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood of Minneapolis, they often point to a skinny teenager with glasses named Mohamed Jama.

"I used to be shy, but in 2007, I broke the glass," said Jama. "I learned how to speak properly with others. And it just happened -- voila!"

At 16, Jama -- or M.J., as his friends call him -- is the man of his house. He shares an apartment with his mom and two younger sisters in the high-rise complex, Riverside Plaza, also known as the Towers. The buildings are home to thousands of Somali families.

But just about every night of the week, you can find Jama at the Brian Coyle Community Center, located just behind the Towers.

Jama said mentors at the Coyle center helped him come out his shell. He does homework at the center, plays basketball, and helped raise money for a free clothing drive. He joined the neighborhood's youth council and started to take on big responsibilities.

Countless young Somalis like Jama in Minnesota are succeeding, despite grim statistics in their community. More than 82 percent of Somali-Americans in Minnesota are living in or near poverty. Somali adults are much less likely to have a high-school education, compared with other adults.

Yet hundreds of young Somali-American refugees graduate from Minnesota colleges every year. They're entering careers ranging from medicine, to engineering, to public policy.

The kids who rarely make the news are staying out of trouble, embracing their Somali heritage, and are giving back to the broader community. There are far more successes than failures.

FIGHTING NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS (Jigsaw Member #2)

Jama and his friends live in an area that is home to the largest concentration of Somalis in the U.S. And the Towers -- six buildings in faded colors -- have become the landmark for the neighborhood.

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His younger and much shorter pal, Salah Ali, is just 13. But he sounds like he has known his entire life what outsiders think of Cedar-Riverside.

"People say, 'Cedar is a bad place -- Somalians.' And they start comparing us to terrorists, like 9/11," Ali said. "They just look at us like, 'Why are those girls wearing headscarves? Why are gangsters all over the place?'"

Salah said he wants people to think his neighborhood is a good place.

The negative perceptions about the neighborhood are exaggerated, but not without reason. A Somali-American college student was shot to death in late 2008 just outside of the Coyle center.

The alleged gunman was a 16-year-old boy, of Oromo descent, who was upset because he wasn't allowed to play basketball. Two other young men were also killed that year in Cedar-Riverside.

Abdirahman Mukhtar, who runs the youth programs at the Coyle center, said young Somalis like M.J. and Salah face many more dangers than when he was a teen-ager here in the '90s.

Mukhtar points out that he had the benefit of Somali bilingual teachers in high school and the now-defunct General College, a gateway program at the University of Minnesota.

"When I was in high school, we did not have gang-related issues. We didn't know what the juvenile system was," said Mukhtar. "Nowadays, you have young people dropping out of high school. You have young people who are doing drugs. Teen pregnancies are a problem."

But one of the most visible problems in this neighborhood is inertia: Young adults outgrow the programs offered by the Coyle center and have nothing to do.

"The only thing I can do is keep them inside, so I can keep them away from getting them into trouble," Mukhtar said.

To Jama, the idle young men who hang out in front of the liquor store on Cedar Avenue are cautionary tales.

"I look at them. And it helps me because I don't want to end up like them. I want to be a better person living in this society, succeeding in life," Jama said.

Jama said his father is in Africa. He credits his mom with keeping him on track. She's the one who turns off the TV and prods him to read.

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ORDER IS IMPORTANT

As president of the youth council, Jama leads meetings with a firm hand. He says to make it in his world, order is important.

Mentors in the neighborhood look out for him, and he looks out for younger kids.

At a recent meeting, Jama sparred with Ali, the council's "spokesman," about firing one of his friends from the position of vice president.

"I don't think this vice president wants to work hard for her position," Jama said.

Ali stood up for her. "Just because she missed one day?" he said. "Presidents do miss meetings sometimes."

"I'm not trying to put her down," Jama said. "I'm trying to send her a message. When I tell her to come, she doesn't do it. I understand her family is a priority --"

"Family comes first," said Ali.

"Family comes first. So does the youth council," Jama said.

"No," Ali said. "Family comes first, friends second, and then --"

"Please," Jama interrupted. "If you want to defend someone, be their lawyer."

As the discussion continued, Jama kept pressing the younger kids, asking them if they were serious about taking the youth council "to the next level."

The adults in the room, including a couple of security guards, tried to suppress their smiles.

But Jama was right, in a way. Discipline and accountability can help move people up and out of poverty.

A FAMILY ON THE RISE (Jigsaw Member #3)

Raho Warsame ladled batter into a pan in the kitchen of her south Minneapolis townhouse. She was making canjeero, which is like a Somali pancake, for the first meal of the New Year. Her two grown daughters and teen-age niece watched from the kitchen table.

"I'm the breakfast-maker and I make my dough, because they're not good at it," she said, laughing.

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Warsame, who was a nurse in Somalia, moved her four children to Minnesota in the mid-'90s. Despite the challenges of being a single mom and refugee, she has sent three of her kids to college. They volunteer and are involved with the mosque.

Her family's first home was in the Towers. They lived on the 32nd floor, where Warsame used to plan for emergencies with military precision – running up and down the stairs.

"I used to train myself, saying, 'OK, if something happened with the elevator, and it was not working, how would you carry your children (to safety)?" Warsame said. "I used to run down and try to climb up."

Warsame's daughter, Maryan Yusuf, is a freshman at the University of Minnesota. She said her mother carefully monitored their daily lives, and it paid off.

"My mom, she's like a lieutenant. It's scary sometimes," Maryan said. "Even when I'm leaving her message, she says, 'Leave me the time you called, your name, the time you're done with the message.' I rarely leave the house without her knowing where I am."

Warsame, who was separated from her husband while fleeing the war, says it wasn't easy raising four kids on her own. There were days when she was exasperated.

"When you come home from work, you don't want to talk. You've done your day. But when you have children, you don't have a way out," Warsame said. "You have to go to school and say, 'How's my child doing? Why did he receive this grade? How can he do better?'"

Warsame took English classes and found a decent-paying job at the post office – resulting in a brutal schedule that required her to do her homework while riding the bus. She said she set goals for herself and clawed her way to self-sufficiency. Today, she's a property manager with a nonprofit housing group.

She says coming to Minnesota, where good jobs were abundant, was one of the best things she ever did for her family – even if they were ill-prepared for winters.

"We coped. Not wearing appropriate shoes, we kept falling down. We didn't break any bones, but we kept falling down," she said, laughing.

RAISING THE NEXT GENERATION (Jigsaw Member #4)

Abdirahman Mukhtar, the Coyle center's youth manager, recently helped round up a sea of kids holding signs to protest a recent suicide bombing in Somalia.

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Among the dozens killed in Mogadishu were students graduating from a medical school. They were young people, too, considered to be their country's best hopes.

In the Coyle center gym, Mukhtar zipped up the young protesters' winter coats and made sure they were properly bundled up for the cold.

At times, he tears up when he thinks of the peers he left behind in Somalia. He knows he's lucky. But the tradeoff, he said, is that there's a missing piece of him that will haunt him for as long as his homeland remains a war zone.

"We are the most fortunate and unfortunate generation. We are fortunate because we are here in America, getting an education. We have food and shelter," Mukhtar said. "But we are also unfortunate because if I want to go back to Somalia, I cannot do that, because it does not exist."

Mukhtar says for civil-war kids like him, the best they can do is help raise a young generation of Somali-Americans the right way. He pushes them to do their homework and to stay away from drugs. He says maybe one of these kids can help rebuild a distant homeland. But first, they have to beat the odds here.

Comprehension Questions

- 1) Who is Mohamed Jama, and how did the Brian Coyle Community Center help him? (Jigsaw Member #1)

- 2) What kinds of adversity do Somali-American refugees face? In what ways are they succeeding? (Jigsaw Member #1)

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- 3) What are some of the negative perceptions that Somali-Americans living in Minnesota face? (Jigsaw Member #2)

- 4) The article suggests that one of the biggest problems young Somalis face is “inertia.” What does this mean? (Jigsaw Member #2)

- 5) Who is Raho Warsame? What kinds of adversity did she face, and how did she overcome this adversity? (Jigsaw Member #3)

- 6) Why did Raho Warsame practice going up and down the stairs in her building? (Jigsaw Member #3)

- 7) Who is Abdirahman Mukhtar? In what ways does he help Somali youth overcome adversity? (Jigsaw Member #4)

- 8) Abdirahman Mukhtar says that Somali-Americans living in the Twin Cities are both fortunate and unfortunate. What does he mean? (Jigsaw Member #4)

Response with Evidence

With Class

Directions: Finish the paragraph below by providing evidence from the article you read that supports the claim. You should then explain how this evidence connects to the claim. You may choose to use *Mohamed Jahma*, *Abdi Rahman*, or *Raho Warsame* as your example.

The article "Young Somalis in Minnesota Beating the Odds," shows how many Somali individuals are finding strength in the face of adversity. One person in the article who showed strength was _____ . An example of an action (she/he) took that shows strength is _____

_____ .

This shows strength because _____

_____ .

In conclusion, _____

_____ .

Response with Evidence

Individually

Directions: Finish the paragraph below by providing evidence from the article you read that supports the claim. You should then explain how this evidence connects to the claim. You may choose to use *Mohamed Jahma*, *Abdi Rahman*, or *Raho Warsame* as your example.

The article "Young Somalis in Minnesota Beating the Odds," shows how many Somali individuals are finding strength in the face of adversity. One person in the article who showed strength was _____ . An example of an action (she/he) took that shows strength is _____

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In conclusion, _____

_____ .