

Worry Dolls



Kelley Fujii and Candace Desonier
Grade 7 Language Arts
Thurmont Middle School, Frederick County
240-236-5100

The worry doll project served to introduce the theme of determination to 7th grade language arts students. After learning about Guatemalan culture, the determination of indigenous people, and the Mayan worry doll legend, students were invited to make a worry doll in the tradition of the Guatemalan people. For reflection, students wrote poems explaining the Worry Dolls to their recipients, children in hospitals, where they would later be donated. As the legend goes, the children might then be free of worries as they cast their worries onto their own special worry doll. Best practices:

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project? This project focused on the issue area of health by addressing the fears of children while in hospitals. Our project was designed to help comfort the children and thereby, increase their chances for improved health.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to the school curriculum and curricular objectives? The project introduced the language arts theme of study: Determination. The issues of indigenous people were key to the preparation piece for this project. We studied background on Guatemalan culture. Also, this project brought a cross-cultural element to the study of language arts. A key curriculum piece in Frederick County Public School's focus on education that is multi-cultural. Finally, students wrote a poem as a reflection to explain the worry doll legend in their own creative way, thus focusing on a creative writing curriculum objective.

Best Practice 3: How did participants reflect on their experiences throughout the project? Students reflected during the preparation piece through a discussion that compared their worries with those of the people in Guatemala. Students reflected after the project by brainstorming what

others worry about in society, who would benefit from receiving a worry doll, how this project changed them personally. Finally, they wrote a poem to explain their worry doll to someone else.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project? Students determined where to donate the Worry Dolls. Student experts led others in the creation of Worry Dolls. A smaller group of students met to fully refine the dolls, type and attach the explanation cards, and make contacts for donations.

Best Practice 5: What community partners were worked with on this project? Children's hospitals and hospitals with children's wings.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project? Kelley Fujii gathered items purchased in Guatemala during personal travels and prepared a power point presentation for students. Craft supplies were bought and organized so that all students could participate easily. A plan for Worry Dolls was found in a multi-cultural art book.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project? Students learned about Guatemalan culture, the determination of indigenous cultures to survive and thrive, and the worry doll legend of the Mayans. They learned how to make a craft project and how to work with others effectively. They practiced their creative writing skills and quickly applied them to fully refining the project with an explanation label. Students learned the skill of putting themselves in someone else's shoes to "imagine" the concerns of others as well as their own.

