

*“School Days, Good Old
Golden Rule Days”:
Intergenerational Sharing of
School Experiences and the
Creation of a Memory Desk*



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Activity, Time and Materials

ACTIVITY:

Residents in an elder care facility and elementary or middle school students will discuss and share memories of their school experiences through storytelling, singing, and reminiscence. A wooden school desk will provide the sculptural foundation for the creation of an artistic “memory desk” that incorporates the shared experiences of the participants. Participants, staff, and the participants’ family members will all share in the process of embellishing the desk with paint, collage, photography, graphics, and mixed media elements that convey individual as well as common school experiences. Each participant also will design and decorate his or her own chalkboard slate using a variety of paper and mixed media elements. The activity can be led by a teacher, artist, or activities coordinator.

TIME:

Eight and a half hours over six sessions, with each of the first five sessions being one and a half hours in length, and the sixth session being one hour in duration, depending upon the number of participants. (This activity can be an after-school effort. If this intergenerational interaction is to occur during school time, each of the first five sessions may be divided in half, with the number of sessions expanding to ten.)

MATERIALS:

- Stick-on name tags
- Wooden desk
- Acrylic paint (primary and secondary colors, plus white)
- 1" flat paintbrushes
- White spray paint (to prime desk before painting)
- Small cups
- Small sponges
- Rags
- Scissors
- Magazines
- Envelopes (letter size)
- Mod Podge (matte finish)
- Bubble wrap (smaller bubble size works best)
- Colored cardstock (primary and secondary colors)
- Colored pictures or photographs printed on white cardstock
(These images will be the main collage elements for the desk. They can be found in a variety of places, including non-copyright-protected photocopies from historical sources, archives, and Internet sites. Participants also are encouraged to bring personal photographs that they would like to share relating to their classroom experiences. Photocopies of personal photographs could be used as well.)
- Replica school chalkboard slates (approximately 6" x 8"), which are available at a variety of craft outlets

- Tacky glue
- Patterned/solid scrapbooking paper and wrapping paper
- Decorative elements for chalkboard frames, such as buttons and foam cut-outs
- The book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains*

“THREE PLAGUES” (LONELINESS, BOREDOM, HELPLESSNESS):

This activity is designed to provide an opportunity for young students and elders to learn, share, and develop a relationship of mutual appreciation and understanding. In this way, the project is purposely designed to help residents reflect upon their school years. It also provides young participants insight into how rural schools have dramatically changed through the generations, yet in some ways still remain the same. All the participants, both young and old, will find out that they have much in common. Sharing of their “school days” songs, games, and school rituals will provide an opportunity for the students and residents to learn and appreciate one another. This intergenerational activity provides the students with first-hand sources of knowledge (i.e., the elders) for their social studies curriculum research. The educational interaction with the students instills a sense of meaning and value for the elders as gatekeepers of knowledge, thus addressing a sense of helplessness.

Loneliness and boredom are addressed by bringing residents, students, staff, and family members together to sing songs, share

stories, and cooperatively work together to create a memory desk. Whether it is cutting out letters, tearing paper strips, gluing down photographs, or applying painted bubble wrap, everyone involved will make a contribution that is both significant and meaningful.

The sense of helplessness is further addressed by providing tasks within the project that are manageable across different motor skill levels and that can be achieved easily with little assistance. Pressing painted bubble wrap across the surface of the desk, which is integral to the textural layering of colors in this project, is just one example. Tearing paper strips, ripping around letters, and gliding acrylic varnish across glued down photographs are significant processes that generate a sense of contribution and can be done by individuals with limited motor skills. The artist, students, staff, and volunteers should assist with words of encouragement and individualized instruction as needed.

ASSOCIATED MEDICAL STUDY:

“As the population ages, older adults are seeking meaningful and impactful, post-retirement roles. As a society, improving the health of people throughout longer lives is a major public health goal. This paper presents the design and rationale for an effectiveness trial of Experience Corps™, an intervention created to address both these needs. This trial evaluates (1) whether senior volunteer roles within Experience Corps™ beneficially impact children’s academic achievement and classroom behavior in public elementary schools, and (2) impact on the health of volunteers.

“Dual evaluations of (1) an intention-to-treat trial randomizing eligible adults 60 and older to volunteer service in Experience Corps™, or to a control arm of usual volunteering opportunities, and (2) a comparison of eligible public elementary schools receiving Experience Corps™ to matched, eligible control schools in a 1:1 control:intervention school ratio.

“For older adults, the primary outcome is decreased disability in mobility and Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADL). Secondary outcomes are decreased frailty, falls, and memory loss; slowed loss of strength, balance, walking speed, cortical plasticity, and executive function; objective performance of IADLs; and increased social and psychological engagement. For children, primary outcomes are improved reading achievement and classroom behavior in Kindergarten through the 3rd grade; secondary outcomes are improvements in school climate, teacher morale and retention, and teacher perceptions of older adults.” [Abstract]

--Fried, L.P., M.C. Carlson, S. McGill, T. Seeman, Q.L. Xue, K. Frick, E. Tan, E.K. Tanner, J. Barron, C. Franqakis, R. Piferi, I. Martinez, T. Gruenewald, B.K. Martin, L. Berry-Vaughn, J. Dickersin, P.R. Willging, and G.W. Rebok. “Experience Corps: A Dual Trial to Promote the Health of Older Adults and Children’s Academic Success.” Contemporary Clinical Trials 36, no. 1 (September 2013): 1-13.

Cover photo: Memory desk created through the intergenerational exploration of school memories, from favorite classes to games played at recess, rhymes, and songs. Collage, paint, and text of personal reminiscences were used. The project was done in 2015 by instructors and artists David Paukert and Robert Kraft; Jennifer Parker, Executive Director of the Nelson County Arts Council, in Pekin, ND; elders at Aneta Parkview Health Center in Aneta, ND; and students from Dakota Prairie High School in Petersburg, ND.

Activity Plan

SESSION I (90 MINUTES):

1. The first session is designed to introduce all the participants to one another and begin a conversation centered on their experiences and memories of school. Explain that the group discussion will provide the foundational elements for the creation of an artistic memory school desk sculpture. After name tags are distributed and general introductions are made, the instructor should use a variety of prompts to spark recollection and conversation. School-related folklore from the book *Sundogs and Sunflowers: Folklore and Folk Art of the Northern Great Plains* should be read aloud by the person directing the activity and initiating the conversation. These texts will serve as discussion and memory prompts for both the elders and the students.

2. Pair the students with the elders. Explain that they will interview each other about their own individual school experiences. The students and elders will both ask and answer the same questions, so as to later make comparisons. The instructor should guide the interview process with readings from *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, as well as from distributed lists of printed questions. Set a time limit to discuss and answer each question, and instruct the students to write the responses from their paired elders on the sheets of paper with the list of questions.

Begin by instructing the paired students and elders to ask and respond to questions such as the following:

- “What is/was the name of your school?”
- To be asked of the elders who may come from different communities in the area: “In what town did you go to school?”
- To be asked of the students: “What school are you from and what grade are you in?”
- “Is/was it a rural school?”
- “What is/was your favorite subject?”
- “What is/was your least favorite subject?”
- “Who is/was your favorite teacher?”
- “What form of transportation do/did you use to go to school?”

3. After the first set of questions have been answered by each paired elder and student, the instructor should ask everyone to close their eyes and keep them closed throughout the next series of questions. Ask the members of the group to visualize or imagine their schools with the following questions:

- “What does your school look like? Is it made of wood, bricks, concrete?”
- “What does the playground look like? What is in the playground?”
- “What kind of materials and learning tools are in your classroom?”
- “Do you have desks, or tables and chairs? What do they look like?”

- “What kind of sounds do you hear in your school?”
- “What do you smell in your school? Is it musty or clean-smelling? Do you smell chalk or ink?”

Now ask for everyone in the group to open their eyes. The instructor should lead a short discussion comparing and contrasting the schools and classrooms of the elders to that of the students.

4. At this point, the instructor should inform everyone that they will now talk about games played at recess, counting-out and jump-rope rhymes, and nicknames. The instructor should ask the group, “When you start a game, how do you determine who is ‘it’?” Then, from page 264 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*, read aloud such counting-out rhymes as:

- “My Mother and Your Mother”
- “Bubblegum, Bubblegum”
- “Deedle Deedle Dumpling”

The instructor should now explain that lots of games, like “Red Rover,” “Grey Duck,” and “Simon Says,” are learned and played at school. Elaborate by stating that some games are unique to certain time periods, while others have continued in different variations across the generations. As prompts, read aloud from the “Children’s Games” section of *Sundogs and Sunflowers* (pages 258-261) such examples as:

- “Is the Black Bear Out Tonight?”

- “Fox and Geese”
- “Antee-I-Over”
- “Drop the Handkerchief”

The instructor should now ask if anyone has ever played jump-rope, afterwards reading an example or two of jump-rope rhymes from page 265 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*:

- “Cin-de-rel-la”
- “Spanish Dancers”

Move on to nicknames, with the instructor stating that people often are given nicknames in school by friends and family. Ask the group if they know of the word “hobo” and where that word might have come from. After a brief discussion, read ““Hoe-Boys’: Nicknames of a Generation,” including the nicknames in the associated photographs, from page 272 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*.

With the above contextual information in mind, instruct the paired elders and students to again interview each other. The elders should ask the students, and the students should ask the elders. As before, the students should write the responses of their paired elders on the sheets of paper next to the printed questions. Ask such questions as:

- “What is/was your favorite game to play at recess?”
- “How is/was it played?”
- “Do you know any counting-out or jump-rope rhymes? Can

you recite one for me?”

- “Do/did any of your friends or family call you by a nickname you like/liked? If so, what is/was your nickname?”
- “What is/was the story behind your nickname?”
- To be asked of the students: “Do you have a nickname or avatar name you use when playing computer games? If so, what is it?” (Computer nicknames and avatar names should be explained to the elders, who may or may not know what these are.)

5. Once the first and second set of interview questions have been answered, ask each student to introduce his or her elder partner and then share their responses with the group. (If time is short, select a few people from the group to respond.) The instructor should lead the group in comparing and contrasting school experiences, memories, and traditions. Are nicknames still used? How are the games similar or different? And so on. . . .

6. If there is time, the instructor could lead a discussion based on memory prompts associated with the question, “Are you old enough to remember?”

- Dunce caps
- *Dick and Jane* books
- Sock hops
- Black chalkboards
- Lunch pails
- Declamation day

- Ink wells
- Merry-go-rounds
- Teeter-totters
- The Three R’s
- Encyclopedias
- The classroom water cooler

This provides a great opportunity for elder participants to share memories and educate the students about their past school experiences.

7. End the session by singing favorite songs that were sung generations ago and still are sung today:

- “This Land is Your Land”
- “She’ll be Comin’ Round the Mountain”
- “You are My Sunshine”
- “You’re a Grand Old Flag”
- “God Bless America”

Lyrics to the songs may need to be given to the elders and students to help guide their singing. If you prefer to end the session by leading the group in a funny clapping game, refer to “My Boyfriend Tony,” on page 260 of *Sundogs and Sunflowers*.

SESSION 2 (90 MINUTES):

I. The person directing the activity should review the topics discussed in Session 1 and explain to the participants how those topics will relate to creating a memory desk sculpture. Participants will work together to compose a list of twelve to fifteen words and/or phrases that identify key school experiences and memory topics as discussed in Session 1. These topics may include such things as recess, homework, spelling words, traditions, games, teachers, nicknames, rhymes, and song titles. The words or phrases will be used as collage elements to be added to the desk.

Elders and students will be paired and assigned to find and cut out letters from magazines that make up the words or phrases assigned to them. Each letter should be in a different font than the letter next to it, and should also vary in both size and color, like a ransom note. Once letters are found, they will be placed in an envelope that is labeled with the word or phrase to be spelled out and applied to the desk. If some of the letters are torn instead of cut, they can be later reshaped before gluing them onto the desk.



Letters cut from magazines by an elder at Aneta Parkview Health Center in Aneta, ND. (Photo by Rod Fuglestad.)

2. After all the words or phrases have been completed, participants will be given pre-cut strips of colored cardstock. The person directing the activity will demonstrate how to tear off the edges of the paper, so there are no straight sides remaining. These pieces of paper are important elements in tying the collage design together. The torn pieces of paper may vary, having different sizes, lengths, and colors. They should be collected and placed aside until needed.

3. Next, the person directing the activity should discuss and demonstrate painting techniques that are integral to the color and design of the desk.

In the model featured herein, the directing artist chose a colorful palette of warm colors (red, orange, and yellow) and cool colors (blue, green, and violet). Each area of the desk (seat, top, and back) should be painted as individual surfaces. Introduce the student participants to a technique of blending three corners of each surface with warm colors that meet in the middle, eventually blending into an area of cool colors in the fourth corner. This rainbow effect completes a smooth transition of colors across the surface of the desk. Brushing, sponging, and stamping are all techniques used in the application of paint to the desk. Once one surface is complete, participants can go on to paint the next surface. After the three main surfaces are completed, the rest of the areas can be painted by the elders using solid colors, so that no primed white areas are showing.

The person directing the activity may want to divide the participants into three groups: one group assigned to cutting out



Note the blending of warm and cool colors. Painted by students from Dakota Prairie School in Petersburg, ND. The students interacted in the sharing of school experiences and the creation of this desk with elders at Aneta Parkview Health Center.



Richard Lavoy, at the Aneta Parkview Health Center in Aneta, ND, painting the primed areas of the desk.

letters, another assigned to tearing paper strips, and a third assigned to painting the desk. Student participants should again pair with senior residents to work together in completing each task.

4. Conclude the activity by sharing the completed efforts of each group and explain how all three steps will be integrated in the following session.

SESSION 3 (90 MINUTES):

1. This memory desk project provides the opportunity for participants to complete one group project (the desk sculpture), as well as an individual project (slate). In this session, the person directing the activity should begin and lead a discussion on the importance of the black chalkboard, which was used for generations as a learning tool in the classroom. As times changed, traditional blackboards evolved into green boards in the 1940s; white boards in the 1980s; and the computerized, interactive white boards we use today.

2. Each participant will be given a replica chalk slate. The person directing the activity will demonstrate ways to decorate the wooden trim on the slates using various types of solid-colored and patterned scraps of paper. Participants should refer to the letter-cutting activity completed in Session 2 and personalize their slates by cutting out the letters of their first names and applying them to the slates. A variety of tiny foam cut-out shapes, buttons, and beads should be provided to help the participants embellish their frames.



Slate decorated by an elder at Aneta Parkview Health Center in Aneta, ND.

3. After directions have been provided on how to complete the slate project, two to three participants should return to the desk and begin applying the words and torn paper elements completed in Session 2 to the desk using liquid Mod Podge. A small group of participants should work on the desk, while the rest of the group continues working on their own individual slate projects. Have a different small group work on the desk periodically, applying letters and torn paper pieces, until all or most participants have had the chance to be involved with both projects.

SESSION 4 (90 MINUTES):

1. The person directing the activity should discuss the accomplishments made by participants in Session 3 and review any needed instructions for continuing those steps. In this session, visual images will be applied to the desk. The artist should distribute a picture to each participant that reflects in some way a school memory, experience, or subject discussed by the group in the previous sessions. These pictures are to be compiled and supplied by the person directing the activity. If an artist is not directing the plan, the person directing the plan should work with an artist to take advantage of his or her expertise.

2. Approximately fifty or more images should be used in this session. Those images may incorporate such memories as the map in front of the teacher's desk, children jumping rope at recess, or writing exercises on the chalkboard. Each participant should be asked to show the group his or her picture. This may prompt additional memories and discussion by the participants before the picture is

applied to the desk. Participants and the artist should work together in placing the picture, using Mod Podge, on the desk to develop an interesting visual flow. Once all of the participants have attached their images to the desk, a second set of pictures are to be distributed, shown, and glued down to the desk. Continue this rotation until it is determined that enough pictures have been used to create a strong visual statement.



Mod Podge applied to the top of a desk by Merle Schatzke at the Aneta Parkview Health Center in Aneta, ND.

3. Over the course of the first three sessions, many of the elder participants and students will have shared a variety of their own personal school memories and experiences. A list comprised of a single memory from each elder and student should be compiled by

the person directing the activity and read aloud to the group. Each should be a single statement, only one or two sentences in length. These memories should be printed on white cardstock and added to the desk in Session 5.



Detail of artwork on desk. Note the cut-out letters to form words; the strips of colored, torn paper; the school-themed images; the rainbow painting effect; and the stippling using bubble wrap. (Photo by David Paukert.)

SESSION 5 (90 MINUTES):

1. At the beginning of the session, each student is to be given a copy of one of the elder's memories or experiences that were discussed in Session 4. Each student should read it aloud and apply it to the desk. The elders too may be given a copy of one of the student's memories or experiences and apply it to the desk.

2. Additional decoration should now be applied to the desk using painted bubble wrap. The stamping pattern from the bubble wrap will add a textural and unifying element to the collage. Elder participants should select from three or four colors to be used, as well as determine the placement of the bubble wrap stamping on the desk. This tactile application can effectively be completed by all participants, including those with limited motor skills. Assistance can also be provided as needed.



Bubble wrap used by an elder to add a stamping effect to the desk.

3. If any of the participants have not yet finished decorating their slate chalkboards, they should be encouraged to continue working on them at this time. To complete the project, each elder should be asked by the person directing the activity to think of one word that best describes his or her hopes and dreams for bettering our world. Each participant should then write that particular word using chalk on the slate. Assistance should be provided, if needed.

4. Announce to all of the participants that a reception will be held revealing the sculptural memory desk. Set a date, time, and place. Ask everyone in attendance to invite their friends and family members.

SESSION 6 (1 HOUR):

1. Hold an unveiling of the desk followed by a reception. This is a time devoted to celebrating the completion of the project and the collaboration shared by both students and elders. School memories, experiences, songs, games, and rhymes should be shared by all, including the elder care facility staff. If possible, cookies and punch could also be provided. Conclude the reception with a group photograph of everyone who participated.

OPTIONAL SUGGESTIONS:

1. It is fun to document the activity. A small scrapbook of candid pictures taken throughout the week by staff, students, and family members can be made and displayed alongside the desk. This documentation will provide visitors with a greater insight into how the project was created and who was involved in the process. These images can be a part of Session 6.

2. The person directing the activity may want to provide an opportunity for student participants to journal about their experiences working with the project. Time can be provided to discuss the journal entries and answer any questions or concerns that may arise. Writing prompts may help students to freely express how they are feeling about the project and their efforts to collaborate with the elders. If appropriate, some of the journal entries can be shared at the closing session.

3. If you want to expand on exploring school experiences between generations in Session 1, consider discussing “snow days” or “storm days.” For many people on the Northern Great Plains, snow days are those days on which school is canceled due to dangerous blizzard conditions. Many children hope for snow days as a time to stay home from school and have fun. Interview questions could be formed around favorite things to do during/memories of snow days. If the students involved are middle-school age, the following readings from *Sundogs and Sunflowers* can be used as discussion prompts:

- “The Winter of 1997” (page 68)
- “The Sacrifice” (pages 76-77)
- “The Human Chain” (page 79)

4. Note that there is a separate intergenerational activity plan in this compilation of plans that brings together schoolchildren and elders around an exploration of nicknames. That plan is entitled “What’s in a Name?” A teacher might want to consider using that plan as a supplement to the preceding memory desk activity.



Memory desk created through the intergenerational exploration of school memories, from favorite classes to games played at recess, rhymes, and songs. Collage, paint, and text of personal reminiscences were used. The project was done in 2015 by instructors and artists David Paukert and Robert Kraft; Jennifer Parker, Executive Director of the Nelson County Arts Council, in Pekin, ND; elders at Aneta Parkview Health Center in Aneta, ND; and students from Dakota Prairie High School in Petersburg, ND.

AUTHOR • DAVID PAUKERT:

David is an artist, art educator, photographer, and businessman. He taught secondary art education in North Dakota public schools for twenty-nine years. Upon retiring from full-time teaching in 2008, he has been a visiting artist-in-residence at the Larimore (ND) elementary school. In 2014, he joined the roster of visual artists in the North Dakota Council on the Arts' *Artist in Residence Program*. He continues to provide art education enrichment instruction to schools throughout the state of North Dakota. Born and raised in North Dakota, David has great appreciation for photography and the rich heritage and beauty of the prairie. In 1991, he began Pastime Prints, a business devoted to marketing his photography in the form of notecards, prints, and gift items. In 2013, David published the book *Visions of the Prairie: My North Dakota Journey*. This book contains over one-hundred prairie images, covering a span of twenty years of traveling the North Dakota back roads. Also included in the book are short personal anecdotes and poetry entries by Terry Jacobsen, an organic farmer from Wales, ND. David and his wife, Amy Jo, reside in Michigan, ND, where they operate Heritage Arts Gallery and Gifts, an artists' cooperative that features the work of over fifty North Dakota artists and heritage craftsmen.

(All photos by Jennifer Parker, Executive Director, Nelson County Arts Council, Pekin, ND, unless otherwise identified.)

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