

Content Connections

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Equity

K-12

Teacher Learning



"Students are willing to struggle with unfamiliar language and abstract notions in science, math, and other content areas when they are motivated by interesting activities they and their families value."

(Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000, p. 26)

"Students come to the classroom with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understanding is not engaged, they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information that are taught, or they may learn them for purposes of a test but revert to their preconceptions outside the classroom."

(National Research Council, 1999, pp. 14-15)

What we learn in school can be incredibly influential when it is connected to what we know and do outside of the classroom. But many people have (at one point or another) felt a disconnect between themselves and school content, perhaps because they were absent when the teacher explained an important concept, missed the directions—or

misunderstood the whole point of the activity. If you have been in this position at least once, you know that it can leave you disoriented and discouraged, regardless of your age or ability as a student.

Unfortunately, there are circumstances beyond missing class or misunderstanding directions that can facilitate this same experience of disconnect. Consider the following:

- What if the lesson material was unintelligible to you because it had little connection to your understanding of the world and everyday experiences?
- What if a lesson was rooted in traditions, values, or interests you had never learned?
- What if the presentation of content in school assumed a [monolithic](#) way of experiencing the world (e.g., white, middle-class) that was neither universal nor superior?

Much like our opening examples, students experiencing disconnect via these circumstances may be disoriented, discouraged, and/or disengaged.

Many [minoritized students](#) in US classrooms experience this disconnect often, throughout their school day and week. This is especially true for students whose background, routines, interests, perspectives, values, traditions, or expertise outside of school are different from their teacher's, or different from what is presumed by the curriculum design. Because what we teach and the way we teach it typically privilege white and middle-class students over their minoritized peers (Rogoff, 2003), we must go out of our way as teachers to connect what we teach in the classroom with what diverse students know and do outside of school.

This difficulty with connecting content to diverse students actually presents a great opportunity for teachers—the opportunity to relate school content to students' lives outside of school, which is the foundation for the Content Connections dimension, the second dimension in the CASI-U's Life Applications domain. Some researchers refer to content connections as "[making meaning](#)" (Tharp, et al., 2000, p. 26) in the classroom, and it is a process that can ultimately benefit all students (as you will see later in the chapter).

The central question of this chapter is:

Central Question

How can I connect my instructional content and learning objectives with the everyday experiences of my students?

Our goal is to help you implement connected and communal interactions on a consistent basis to enhance meaningful participation for all students, especially those from minoritized backgrounds.

Specifically, after working through this chapter and practicing in your classroom (either by yourself or in collaboration with other teachers) you should be able to:

1. Identify what content connections are.
2. Explain some reasons why content connections are helpful for students.
3. Interpret actual teaching scenarios (including your own) according to the indicators of content connections.
4. Plan and implement lessons that connect instructional content to the everyday lives and experiences of all your students, especially those from minoritized backgrounds.

We also hope that working on content connections will help you feel a stronger desire to connect with your students and deepen your relationships with them. Take time to discuss the pros and cons of these possibilities with other teachers and administrators.

Why Do Content Connections Matter?

Benefits of Content Connections

- Appreciate content more and perform better
- Prevent student resistance or de-identification with school
- Allows students to become a resource in classroom community/access funds of knowledge
- Enable students to share their own experiences
- Increase excitement about learning material
- Promote intrinsic motivation
- Create more inclusive classroom
- Increase perceived value of school learning
- Enhance sense of belonging and academic identity
- Help students persist with difficult concepts
- Create a stronger sense of community

Connected content helps students value school. What educators teach their students should be important to their lives now and help prepare them for the future. Given that there are many students whose everyday lives are different (not better or worse) from the culture within the school, finding ways to connect curricular content to the lives of all students will help to make lessons meaningful in their lives, increase the worth they perceive in school learning, and increase their interest in the subject matter. Jere Brophy (2008) argues that students appreciate the inherent nature of school content more and perform better when they see connections between that content and their own lives and aspirations for the future. Seeing these connections helps prevent student resistance or de-identification with school.

Connected content helps students be invested. Connecting curricular content to students' lives allows them to become a resource in the classroom community as they teach and share their own experiences with others. Teachers afford these connections by demonstrating a genuine interest in what students know and do outside of school (see CASI dimension 8. Role Flexibility). By drawing on students' ["funds of knowledge"](#) (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2006), educators can keep students invested in school and interested in the subjects. Students are more likely to be excited about learning material that relates to their interests and their lives, and it also promotes intrinsic motivation and creates a more inclusive classroom. Connecting with what students know and do outside of school increases the value students ascribe to school learning and enhances their sense of belonging and academic identity at school (Brophy, 2008). Students are also more willing to struggle and persist with difficult concepts when the activities resonate with their interests and family activities (Tharp, et al., 2000).

Connected content creates community. Additionally, students who know each other and have seen the teacher connect learning to their everyday lives will create a stronger sense of community. All cultural practices and backgrounds are valued in connected classrooms.

Learning Check

Hopefully, we have convinced you that content connections matter. Based on what you've learned so far, which of the following statements do you think best defines content connections?

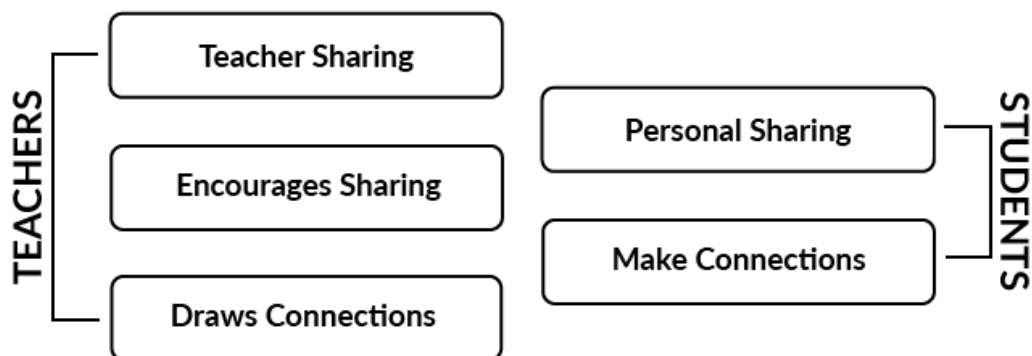
- ☐ Teacher and students connect content to previous lessons in the classroom.
- ☐ Teacher and students connect everyday experiences to content and objectives.
- ☐ Teacher and students share thoughts, ideas, and viewpoints based on content.
- ☐ Teacher and students share life lessons with each other throughout the day.

Looking Ahead

Before you move on:

- What do you think content connections will look like in classroom practice?
- If you were asked to evaluate how "connected" a lesson was based on a video recording, what would you look for right now?

The 5 Indicators of Content Connections



So, now that we've reviewed why Content Connections matter, where do you begin? What do content connections look like day-to-day, and how can you start practicing it within your current circumstances?

The [Classroom Assessment of Sociocultural Interactions \(CASI\)](#) divides Content Connections into five indicators:

Teacher Sharing, Encourages Sharing, Draws Connections, Personal Sharing, and Makes Connections. The first three are teacher-focused, and the last two are student-focused. We'll discuss each one in turn, giving you the definition, the rubric, and examples.

Teacher Sharing

To what extent do you share information about yourself with your students? Do you share how your everyday experiences and knowledge connect to what the students are learning?

	Disconnected (1)	Somewhat Connected (3)	Well-Connected (5)
2a. Teacher Sharing			
• Shares out-of-school experiences (e.g., family trips) and knowledge (e.g., hobbies)	The teacher does not share information about her or himself.	The teacher sometimes shares information about her or himself.	The teacher often shares information about her or himself.

Teacher Sharing Examples

Standard: Describe the natural resources in the United States, Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean. ([NGSSS.3.G.3.2](#)) (Note: at the time of writing, Florida used their own Sunshine State Standards for social studies.)

Context: Mrs. Gilles is a 3rd grade teacher in Florida with a mix of white, Cuban, and African-American students. Mrs. Gilles is teaching a unit on physical environment. She is helping her students learn how to conserve and protect natural resources by reducing, reusing, and recycling.

Teacher sharing (1): Mrs. Gilles shares a video that talks about the importance of natural resources. She explains that in order to preserve our environment and resources we must apply the three R's; reduce, reuse, and recycle. Mrs. Gilles then has students point out things they can reuse, reduce, or recycle in the classroom. She then has students create a poster and explain one item they will reduce, reuse, and recycle.

Teacher sharing (2): Mrs. Gilles shares a video that talks about the importance of natural resources. She brings in items from her home that she has either reduced, reused, or recycled. She then has students create a list of items they have either reused, reduced, or recycled in their own home and how its impacted their environment and natural resources.

Teacher sharing (3): Mrs. Gilles shares a video that talks about the importance of natural resources, and brings in items from her home that she has either reduced, reused, or recycled. Mrs. Gilles talks about a trip she took to the Amazon and the impact its deforestation had on her. She mentions that seeing a drastic change in the forest motivated her to reduce, reuse, and recycle paper.

Teacher sharing (4): Mrs. Gilles shares a video that talks about the importance of natural resources, and brings in items from her home that she has either reduced, reused, or recycled. Mrs. Gilles talks about a trip she took to the Amazon and the impact its deforestation had on her. She shares pictures and videos of her trip to the amazon forest and how it motivated her to reduce, reuse, and recycle paper.

Teacher sharing (5): Mrs. Gilles shares a video from her blog in which she talks about the importance of natural resources. Mrs. Gilles brings in items from her home that she has either reduced, reused, or recycled and talks about her trip to the Amazon where she was able to plant trees to improve the air and soil, both natural resources. She shares her own pictures of the Amazon forest and how its deforestation has motivated her to reduce, reuse, and recycle paper.

Learning Check

What can Mrs. Gilles do to help her classroom be more connected in regards to teacher sharing?

- ☐ Play a get-to-know-Mrs.-Gilles game at the beginning of the school year with her class.
- ☐ Have a sharing time each morning where she asks the students about any news.
- ☐ Include her real-life situations (related to the content) as hooks at the beginning of lessons to get the student' attention.
- ☐ Set a goal to share something about herself at least once a week.

Encourages Sharing

How do you encourage students to share about themselves? Do you ask follow-up questions? Do you discuss how their similarities and differences are important?

Note

- While encouraging students to share their thoughts is good practice generally, this indicator is particularly focused on encouraging students to share personal experiences, opinions, interests, or values.
- Affirming and acknowledging can be verbal or nonverbal, showing students that you notice and appreciate their sharing.

	Disconnected (1)	Somewhat Connected (3)	Well-Connected (5)
2b. Encourages Sharing	Teacher does not encourage students to share about themselves.	Teacher sometimes encourages students to share about themselves.	Teacher regularly encourages all students to share about themselves.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Asks students to share • Asks follow-up questions • Discusses similarities and differences as assets • Affirms and acknowledges sharing 			

Encourages Sharing Examples

Standard: Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.

([CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.2.D](#))

Context: Ms. Mona teaches in a 6th grade classroom that has a fairly equal mix of Latino, Black, White, and Pacific Islander students in California. For her language arts lesson, Ms. Mona needs to help students create a narrative that involves transition words and phrases to manage the sequence of events. She decides to use a cake recipe as an example to help students understand transition words and phrases.

Encourages Sharing (1): Ms. Mona shares with students that the recipe she's using is her recently-deceased grandmother's recipe. She puts the recipe on the projector and asks students to raise their hands when she gets to a transition word or phrase.

Encourages Sharing (2): Ms. Mona shares with students that the recipe she's using is her recently-deceased grandmother's recipe. She asks students to suggest transition words and phrases they can use, affirming that it's good to have different answers because it makes their work original.

Encourages Sharing (3): Ms. Mona shares with students that the recipe she's using is her recently-deceased grandmother's recipe. She asks students if they have any special recipes or meals in their family. She asks who created the recipes, and then has them point out transition words in her recipe.

Encourages Sharing (4): Ms. Mona asks students to bring in a recipe or directions for a meal their family likes to make. She then shares the transition words from her own recipe and has the students find the transition words in each other's recipes. She asks them why the recipes are important to their family.

Encourages Sharing (5): Ms. Mona asks students to bring in a recipe or directions for a meal their family likes to make. She then shares the transition words from her own recipe and has the students find the transition words in each other's recipes. She highlights how different students like different food, which means they can learn new foods from each other. She thanks them for sharing!

Learning Check

How could Ms. Mona encourage her students to share more about their everyday experiences outside the classroom?

Draws Connections

To what extent do you draw connections between classroom learning and your students' everyday experiences? Do you make connections to students' relationships, activities/responsibilities, hobbies/interests, and everyday expertise?

Note

- Keep in mind that there is a difference between a teacher drawing connections and a student making connections.
- The teacher can encourage the students to share about their lives without drawing a connection between the students' everyday lives and the content. However, oftentimes encouraging sharing will precede drawing connections.
- Content should be connected to students' individual lives and experiences.

	Disconnected (1)	Somewhat Connected (3)	Well-Connected (5)
2c. Draws Connections	The teacher does not connect classroom learning with students' out-of-school experiences.	The teacher sometimes connects classroom learning with students' out-of-school experiences.	The teacher often connects classroom learning with students' out-of-school experiences.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relates content to family or peer relationships • Links with out-of-school activities/responsibilities • Incorporates hobbies and interests into class activities • Draws on students' out-of-school expertise 			

Draws Connections Examples

Standard: Use addition and subtraction within 20 to solve word problems involving situations of adding to, taking from, putting together, taking apart, and comparing, with unknowns in all positions, e.g., by using objects, drawings, and equations with a symbol for the unknown number to represent the problem.

([CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.1.OA.A.1](#)).

Context: Mrs. Kobayashi teaches first grade in Minnesota. She has White, African American, and Asian (Hmong) students. She is working on representing addition and subtraction problems within 20 with her class. She decides to have the students work with manipulatives to build on their understanding of word problems.

Draws Connections (1): Mrs. Kobayashi projects three problems on the board and works through them with the class, demonstrating how to use snap cubes to represent the word problems. She breaks the students into groups of four and gives each group a bucket with snap cubes inside. Then she lets them solve ten more problems as a group. She gathers the students back together and they discuss what they learned in their groups as a class.

Draws Connections (2): Mrs. Kobayashi projects three problems on the board and works through them with the class, asking if any of them have used snap cubes before. Some students raise their hands and she has three of them come up to demonstrate to the class. Then she breaks the students into groups of four and gives each group a bucket with snap cubes in it. She has the students work in groups to solve ten more problems. She gets the students' attention and they discuss what they learned in their groups.

Draws Connections (3): Mrs. Kobayashi creates thirteen-word problems that are related to the jobs of her students' parents. She projects three of the word problems on the board and asks students if they have used snap cubes before. Some students raise their hands and she has a student demonstrate to the class. She then breaks the students into groups of four and has them solve the remaining ten-word problems. She gets the students' attention and they discuss what they learned.

Draws Connections (4): Mrs. Kobayashi creates thirteen-word problems that are related to the jobs of her students' parents and has the students bring in 20 small objects from home. She asks the students why they brought those objects and lets a few students answer. Then she models how to use manipulatives to solve word problems and breaks the students into groups of four to solve the rest of the word problems.

Draws Connections (5): Mrs. Kobayashi creates word problems that are related to the jobs of her students' parents and has the students bring in 20 small objects that tell about themselves or their family. She breaks the class into groups of four and has the students share with their group why they chose those objects. She then brings the class back together and lets some students share. Then she models how to solve some word problems and allows the students to solve the rest as a group.

Learning Check

What are some ways Mrs. Kobayashi can draw connections between the classroom content and her students' lives outside of school?

- ☐ Use data from the class survey to find students interests that are related to the lesson, then ask the students to share.
- ☐ Have students who play baseball in their free time help teach the rest of the class during PE.
- ☐ Compare the different relationships between parents and offspring in the wild to the relationship students' parents have with them.
- ☐ Have her students present their favorite activities to do with family to the rest of the class.

Personal Sharing

To what extent do your students share information about their everyday lives? Who shares? Do your students demonstrate an interest in others' experiences?

Note

- Though it is important for many students to share, having the same students share may not benefit the students who don't share.
- Students can show interest and concern for others' experiences through comments, sharing similar stories, and body languages.

	Disconnected (1)	Somewhat Connected (3)	Well-Connected (5)
2d. Personal Sharing	Students do not share information about their out-of-school lives.	A few students sometimes share personal information, but rarely demonstrate interest in others' experiences.	Many students often share personal information and regularly demonstrate interest in others' experiences.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family relationships• Activities and routines, roles and responsibilities• Interests and hobbies• Enthusiasm in sharing• Interest in and concern for others' experiences			

Personal Sharing Examples

Standard: Explain that many different groups of people immigrated to the United States from other places voluntarily and some were brought to the United States against their will (as in the case of people of Africa). ([MASS.SS.4.T4.4](#)).

Context: Mr. Silveira teaches 4th grade in a Title I public school in Boston. His classroom is diverse, including African American, Cape Verdean, Haitian, and Puerto Rican students. Mr. Silveira's class is learning about the reasons that people in the Eastern U.S. wanted to move West in the 19th century, including features of pioneer life on the frontier.

Personal Sharing (1): Mr. Silveira shows the students pictures of pioneers that lived on the frontier in the 19th century. He asks students to raise their hand if they have ever heard of the Gold Rush and then reads a short account from a pioneer that migrated West to Colorado seeking gold. Then students try to come up with other reasons why someone might have wanted to move West in the 1800s.

Personal Sharing (2): Mr. Silveira shows the students pictures of pioneers that lived on the frontier in the 19th century. He asks students to raise their hands if they have ever moved somewhere in their life. One student says that she moved when she was younger and her brother was a little baby. Mr. Silveira then describes the Gold Rush and has students think of other reasons someone would want to move West.

Personal Sharing (3): Mr. Silveira shows the students pictures of pioneers that lived on the frontier in the 19th century. He hands out paper to each student and asks them to draw a picture depicting a time when they, or someone they know, moved, and what they did to help. He then has a few students share their drawings in front of the class and describe where and why they moved.

Personal Sharing (4): Mr. Silveira shows the students pictures of pioneers that lived on the frontier in the 19th century. He asks students if any of them have ever been like a pioneer and moved. Many hands shoot up, and several students describe moving from Cape Verde and other areas. Based on follow-up questions, the students share what they did to help in the process and how their lives changed as a result.

Personal Sharing (5): Mr. Silveira shows the students pictures of pioneers that lived on the frontier in the 19th century and asks students if any of them have ever been like a pioneer and moved. Many hands shoot up, and Mr. Silveira asks them to share their experiences with their desk partners, including where they moved from and how the process changed their life. The students excitedly ask each other questions about what it was like in other countries and states.

Learning Check

How can Mr. Silveira recognize when his students share about their out-of-school lives?

Make Connections

To what extent do your students make connections between classroom learning and their everyday experiences? Do they connect lessons to their relationships, expertise, traditions, or interests?

Note

- Though as teachers you are most likely aware, students may share about their personal lives without making any connections to the content. This could be interpreted as personal sharing without needing to be included in making connections.

	Disconnected (1)	Somewhat Connected (3)	Well-Connected (5)
2e. Make Connections	Students do not make connections between classroom learning and out-of-school knowledge and experiences.	Students sometimes make connections between classroom learning and the out-of-school knowledge and experiences of themselves or their peers.	Many students often make connections between classroom learning and the out-of-school knowledge and experiences of themselves or their peers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • connect content to family relationships • connect content to out-of-school experiences • connect content to student expertise, hobbies or interests 			

Make Connections Examples

Standard: Plan and conduct an investigation to describe and classify different kinds of materials by their observable properties. ([OAS-2-PS1-1](#)).

Context: Mr. Henricksen teaches a 2nd-grade classroom in rural Oklahoma. Though his classroom is not very diverse, he often has one or two students whose parents are migrant workers. His class is working on describing the characteristics of different rocks. Mr. Henricksen decides to bring rocks from all over the United States into class and have his students guess where they are from.

Make Connections (1): Due to questions Mr. Henricksen asked, many students raise their hands and share stories. None of the stories the students share are related to rocks and their characteristics. One student shares how his little brother threw a rock at him the other day and it hurt. Another student shares how her older brother is mean to her all the time. The students guess where the rocks are from based on their own personal knowledge.

Make Connections (2): Due to questions Mr. Henricksen asked, many students raise their hands and share stories. Unfortunately, only one of the stories is on topic. A student shares how he collects rocks and tells the class what he knows about different kinds of rocks. The students mainly guess where the rocks are from based on their own knowledge.

Make Connections (3): Due to questions Mr. Henricksen asked, many students raise their hands and share stories. Some of the stories are related to rocks, but others are not. One student shares how his family went hiking on a trip last summer and describes the rocks they saw. Another student, however, hears that and shares how he stayed at a hotel and went swimming on his family vacation. The students use their collective knowledge to guess where the rocks are from.

Make Connections (4): Due to questions Mr. Henricksen asked, many students raise their hands and share stories. One student shares about a family trip that he went on last summer. That story reminds another student of an excursion she went on with her older brother in the area surrounding the town. The students use their collective knowledge to guess where the rocks are from.

Make Connections (5): Due to questions Mr. Henricksen asked, many students raise their hands and share stories. One student shares about a family trip that prompts another student to share about an excursion she went on with her older brother. One of the students whose parents' are migrant workers says the rocks are like his family and have seen many parts of the United States. Another student talks about how he collects rocks. Students use their collective knowledge to guess where the rocks are from.

Learning Check

What would be examples of Mr. Henricksen's students making connections between the content and their lives outside of school?

- ☐ Talk about how their moms like cake when doing a math problem where the topic is birthdays.
- ☐ While working on an informative text on lizards, one explains what her dad told her about Komodo dragons in Indonesia.
- ☐ Share how they are planning on going to Disneyland this summer while reading a book.
- ☐ Talk about a trip the family took to visit family in Guatemala while learning about a jungle habitat.

Content Connections Scenario: Miss Grant and Posadas

Each chapter in this book includes three versions of a teaching scenario to illustrate the dimension and its indicators. In this chapter, we return to our classroom with Miss Grant in Houston. Here is some context for her background, classroom and setting:

Miss Rachel Grant is a white female, fourth year, 4th-grade teacher at a Title 1 school in Houston, Texas. She is intellectually curious and committed to the school and the Latino community that she works in. Since moving into a small home near the school during her second year of teaching, Rachel has grown more interested in learning Spanish and integrating herself into the community; she thinks this might be helpful considering the multicultural, majority Latino demographics of her class.

As a part of this effort, Rachel is trying to include some books by Latino authors that are more connected to her students' lives.

Scenario Introduction

Our teacher has decided to read *Becoming Naomi Leon* by Pam Munoz Ryan to help teach some of the Grade 4 Reading: Literature standards:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.7](#)

Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.9](#)

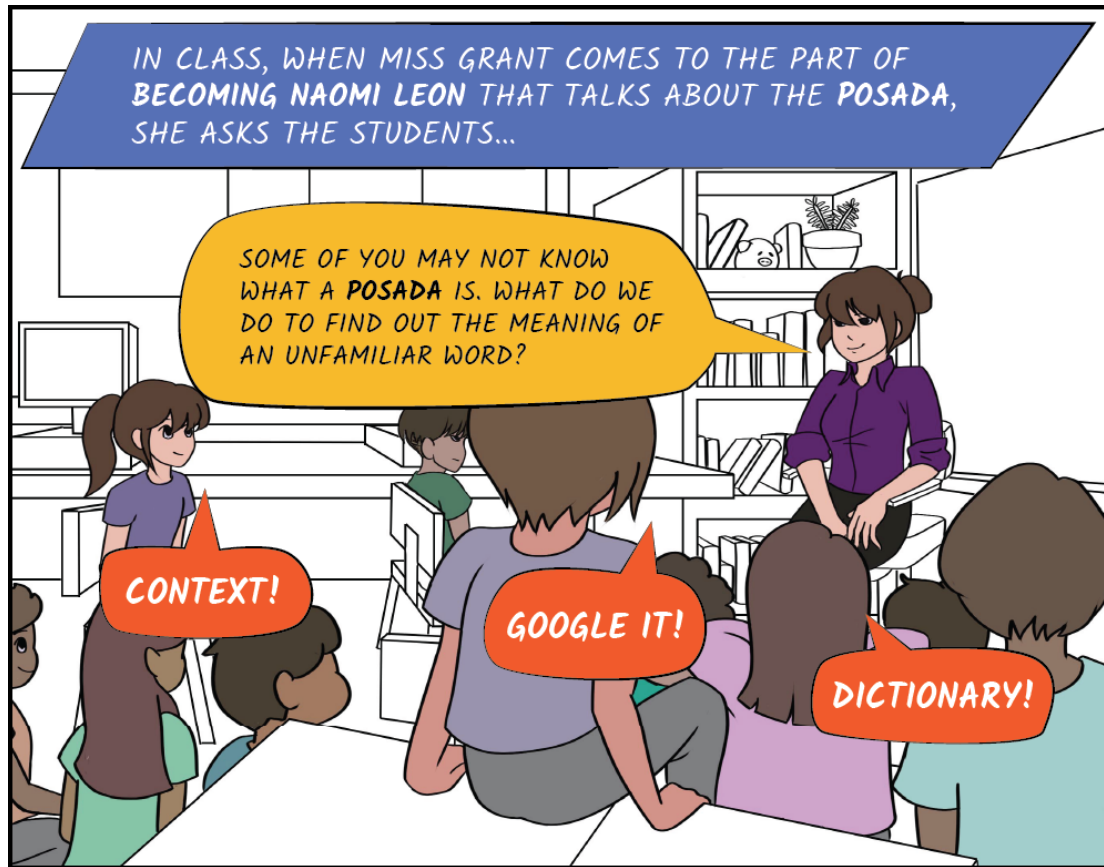
Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., the opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g., the quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures.

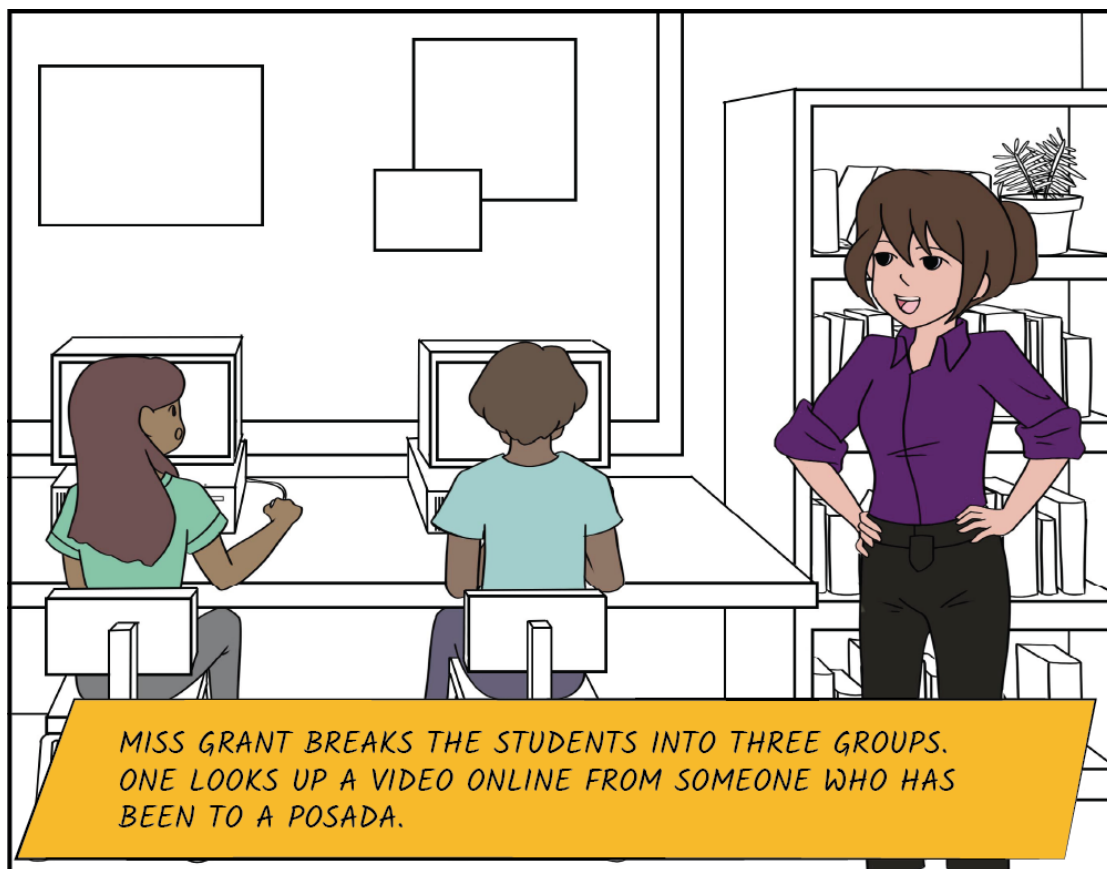
This is her first time using *Becoming Naomi Leon* in her classroom. As she's reading **Chapter 15** to prepare, she comes to a passage where the main character is participating in a *posada* in Mexico. Locals are handing out candles and other items associated with the celebration and several Spanish words are used in conjunction with the *posada*. Miss Grant recalls that several of her students are from Mexico or have Mexican heritage.

Note: Evaluating Teaching Examples

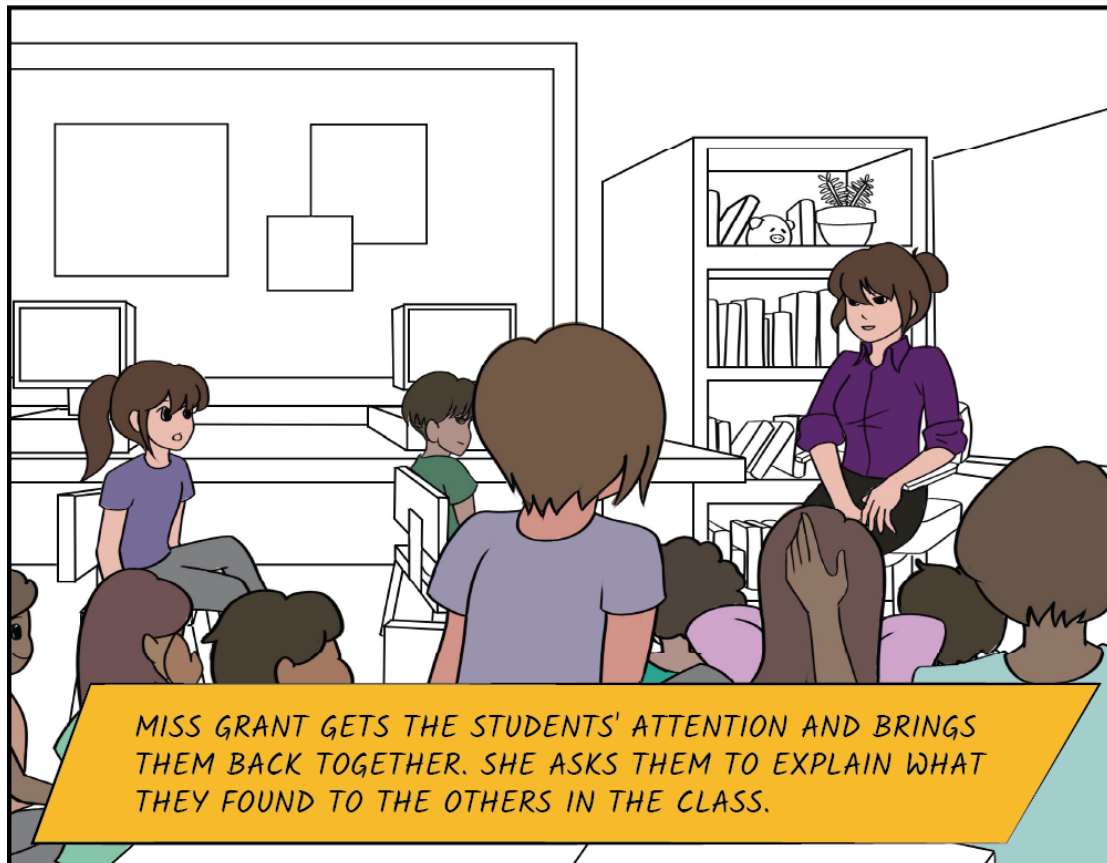
Remember that effective **generic** teaching practices and effective **cultural** teaching practices can be different. In our scenarios across this book, you will find teachers using effective **generic practices** without necessarily being highly **meaningful or socioculturally connected**. Our goal is not to replace effective generic practice; rather, we seek to show how culturally connected and equitable practices can be integrated with generic practice to make meaning in the lives of your students. Pay attention to the differences!

Version 1: Disconnected





THE THIRD GROUP LOOKS UP **POSADA** IN A SPANISH-ENGLISH DICTIONARY.





Version 1 Transcript

Version 1 Explanation

Why do we say this example is "*disconnected*"?

Teacher Sharing

Miss Grant is not observed sharing anything about herself or her life. (1)

Encourages Sharing

Miss Grant does not ask students to share or talk about similarities or differences. (1)

Draws Connections

Miss Grant draws a connection between a posada and a Christmas party which may be helpful for students who do not have a background in Mexican culture. However, it does not necessarily draw a connection for the majority of the students in the classroom. (2)

Personal Sharing

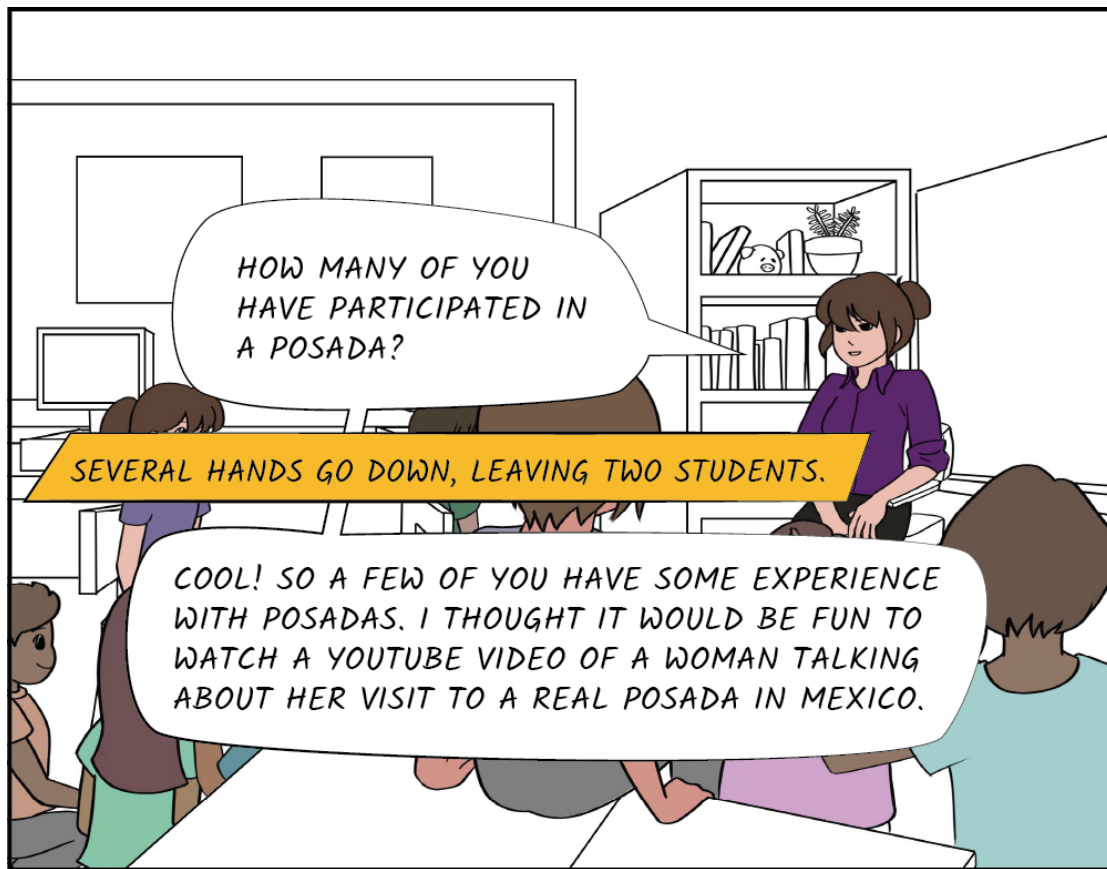
Students are not observed sharing about themselves or their lives outside school. (1)

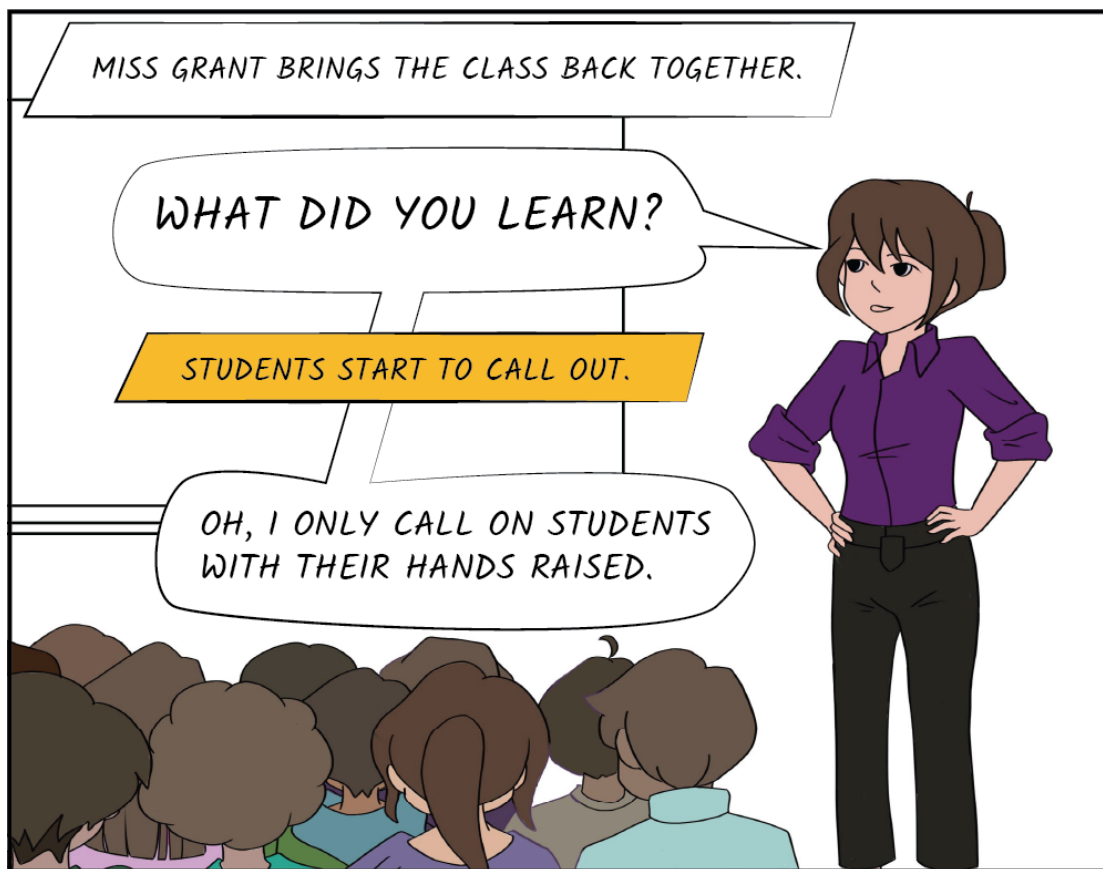
Make Connections

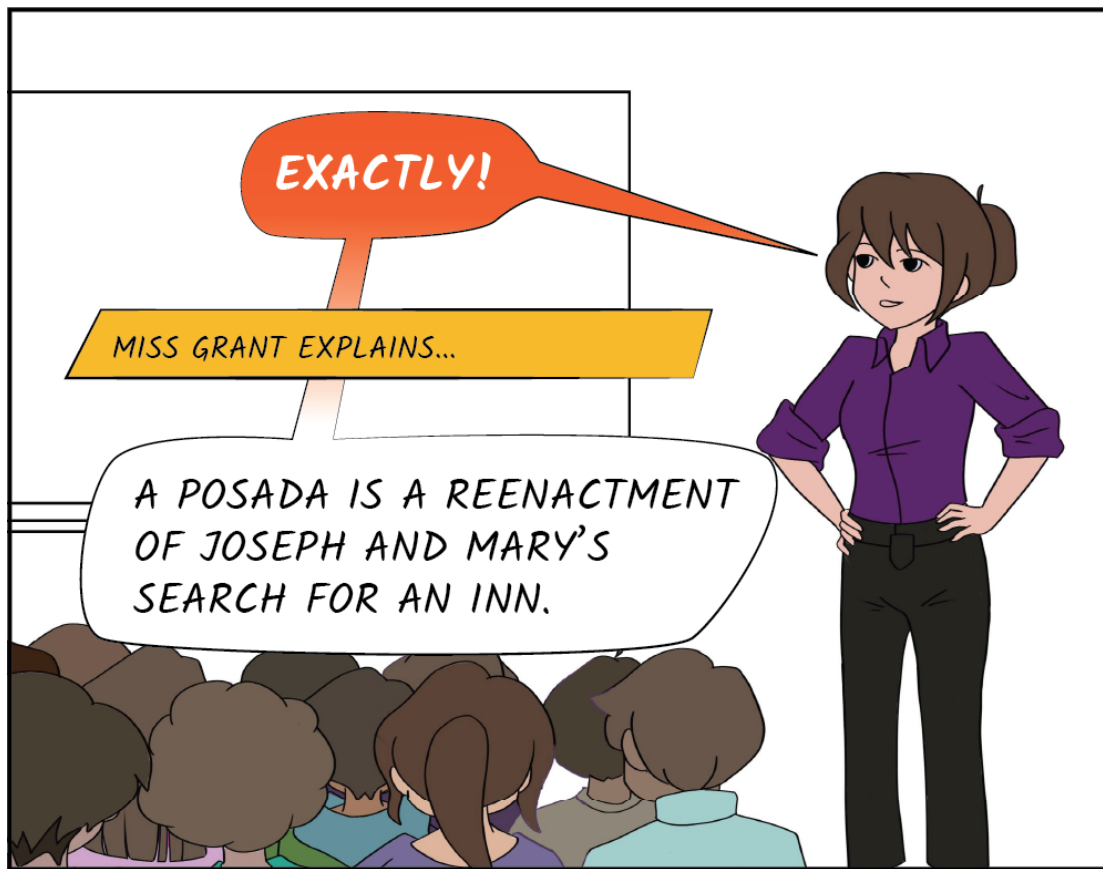
Students are not observed making connections between the content and their out-of-school experiences and relationships. (1)

Version 2: Somewhat Connected









Version 2 Transcript

Version 2 Explanation

Why do we say this example is "*somewhat connected*"?

Teacher Sharing

Miss Grant does not share anything about herself or her life. (1)

Encourages Sharing

Miss Grant asks students to share, but she does not have students compare similarities and differences that involve other cultures. This limits the amount of sharing and participation. (2-3)

Draws Connections

Miss Grant draws connections between a posada and students' experiences, but student sharing is somewhat passive. She connects the topic with out-of-school activities, but not responsibilities, expertise, or relationships. The connection between posadas and the "Joseph and Mary" explanation may be helpful to those who have participated in posadas and to those who have a religious background, but it does not necessarily connect to the majority of the students on its own. (3)

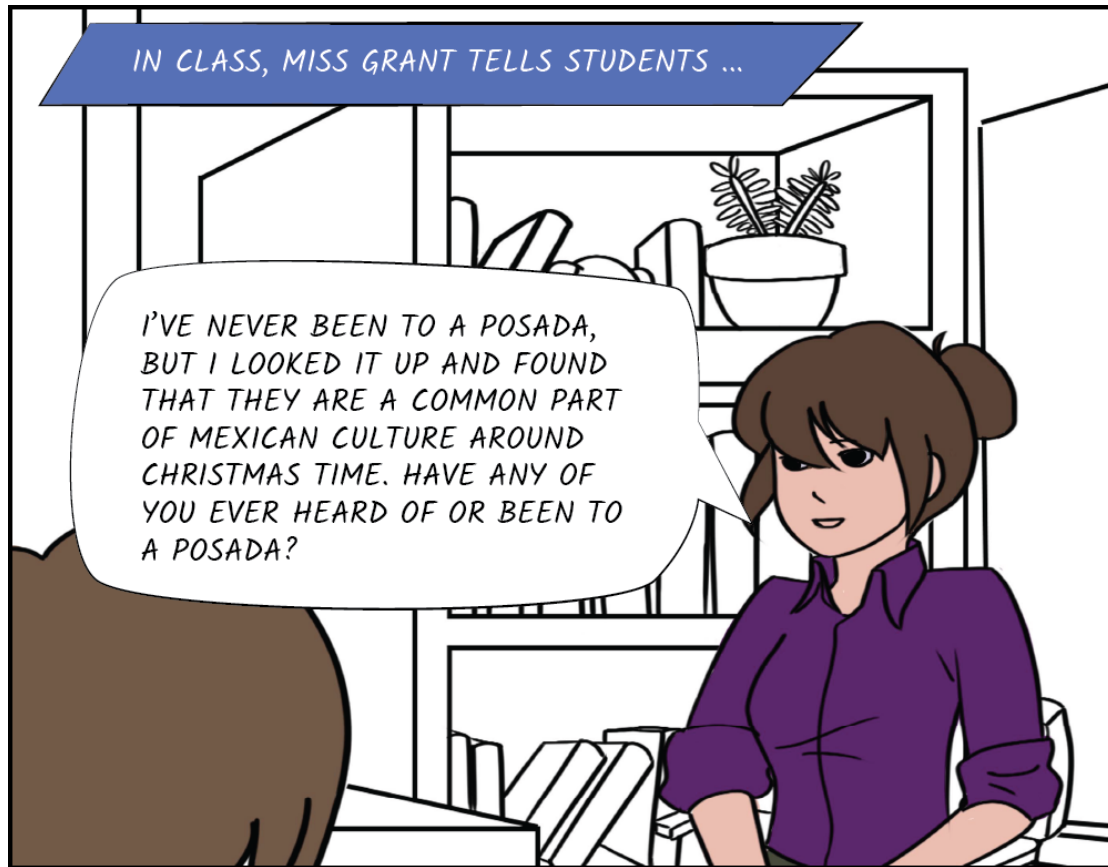
Personal Sharing

Students share about themselves with each other and talk about how content in a posada video relates to what they already know. They indicate who has participated in a posada by raising their hands. Interest in and concern for each others' experiences are not emphasized. (3-4)

Make Connections

Students who have participated or heard of posadas make some connections between the content and their out-of-school experiences. Invitations to connect do not necessarily direct them toward their expertise, hobbies, or interests, however. (3)

Version 3: Well-Connected



SEVERAL OF THE STUDENTS SAY THEY KNOW ABOUT POSADAS BUT HAVE NEVER BEEN. ONE BOY RAISES HIS HAND AND SAYS...

I WENT TO ONE A FEW YEARS AGO WHEN WE VISITED MY FAMILY.

JASON, WHAT DID YOU SEE AT THE POSADA?

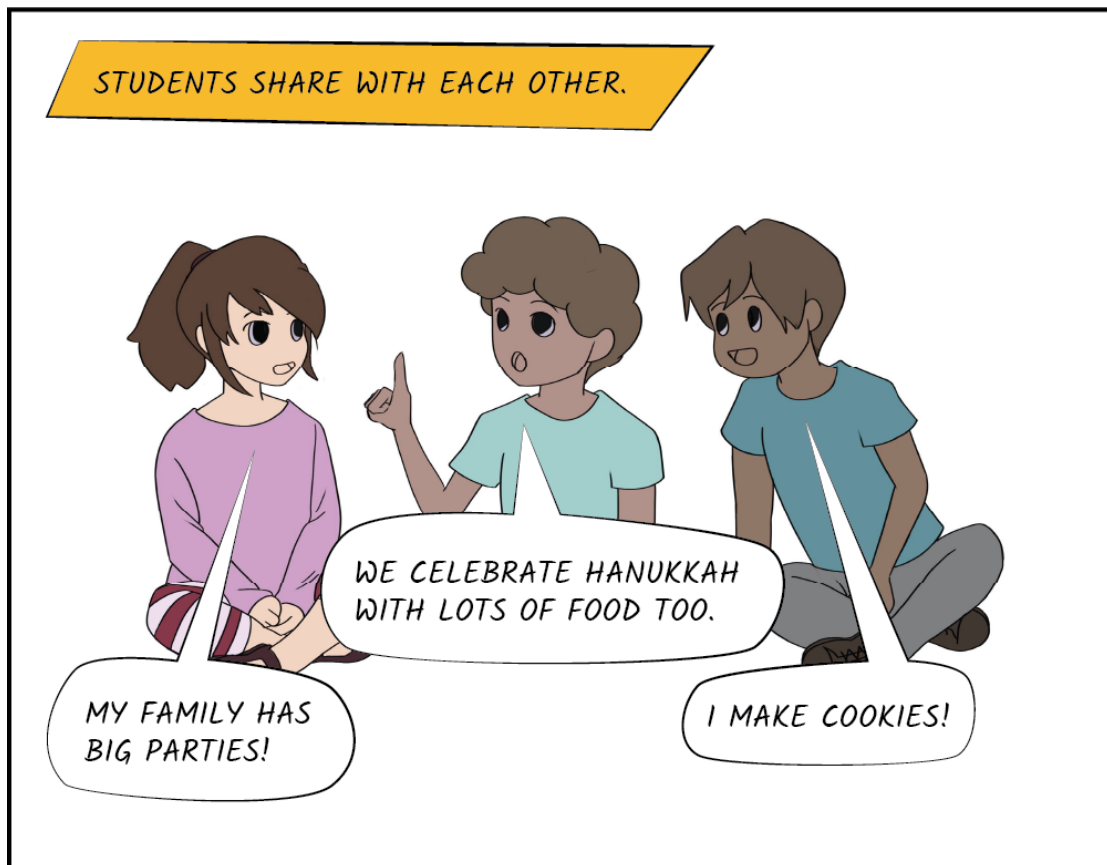
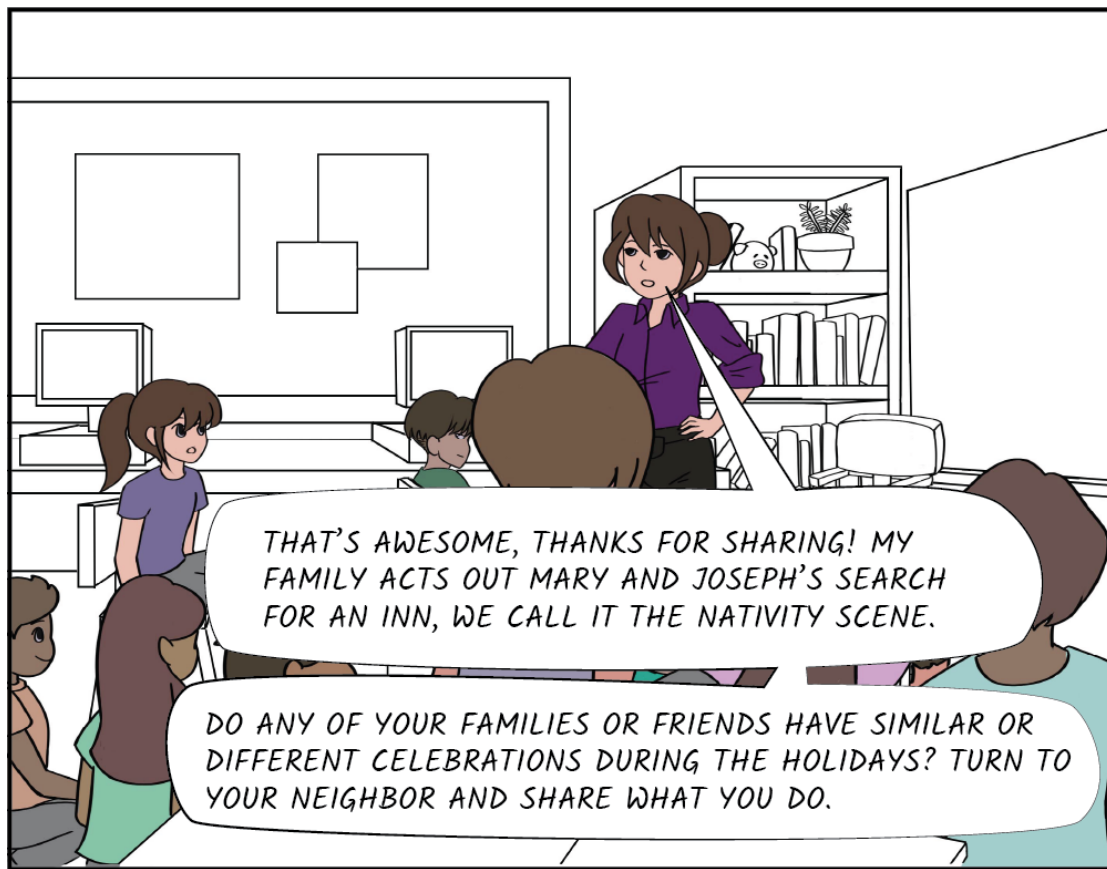
WELL, I REMEMBER PIÑATAS AND CANDLES AND A LOT OF FOOD.

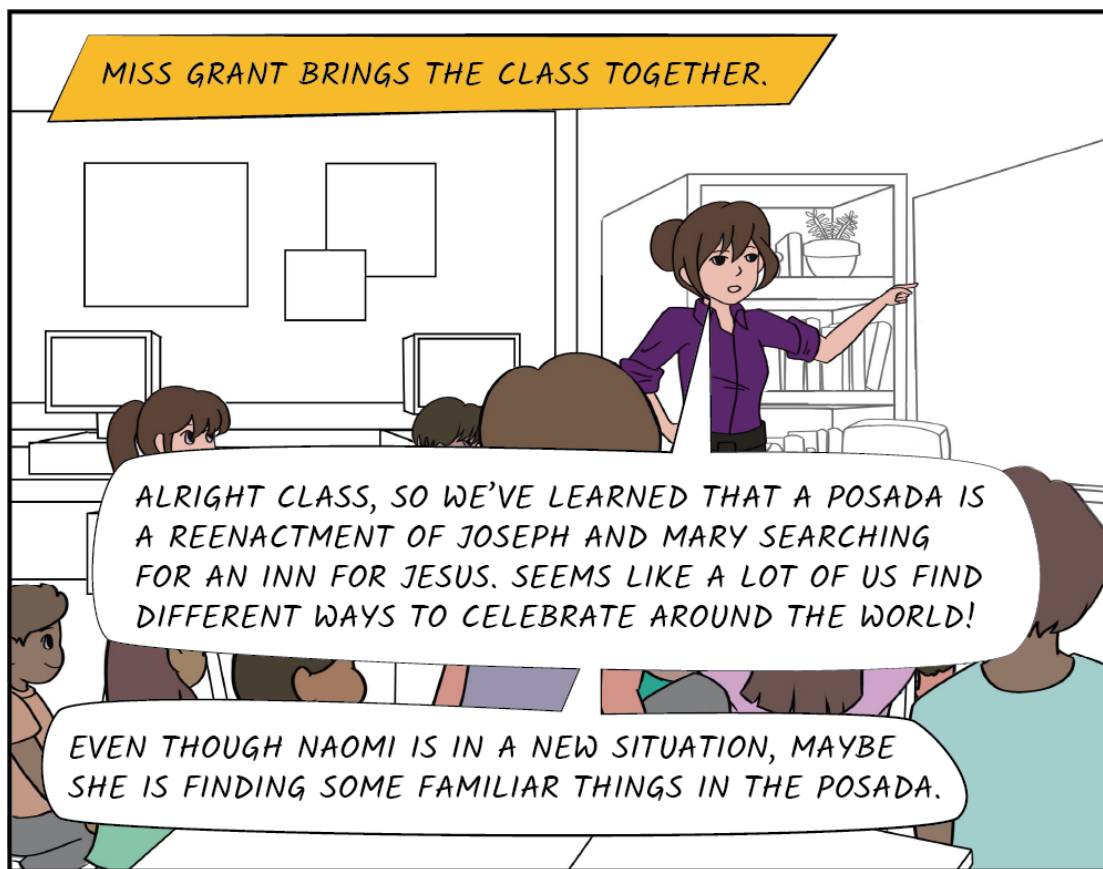
THAT IS REALLY INTERESTING!

THEN SHE CALLS ON ANOTHER STUDENT WHO SHE KNOWS HAS MEXICAN HERITAGE AND ASKS...

RAQUEL, DID YOUR FAMILY EVER TALK ABOUT POSADAS?

I'VE NEVER BEEN TO ONE, BUT MY MOM SAID ONCE THAT PEOPLE GO FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE LIKE MARY AND JOSEPH AND EAT.





Version 3 Transcript

Version 3 Explanation

Why do we say this example is "*well-connected*"?

Teacher Sharing

The teacher shares that she has never been to a posada herself, but goes further to connect the posada to her own family nativity tradition. (4-5)

Encourages Sharing

The teacher asks the students to share about their out-of-school experiences when she asks about the posada, both in general and to specific students. She also encourages them to share with other students. (4-5)

Draws Connections

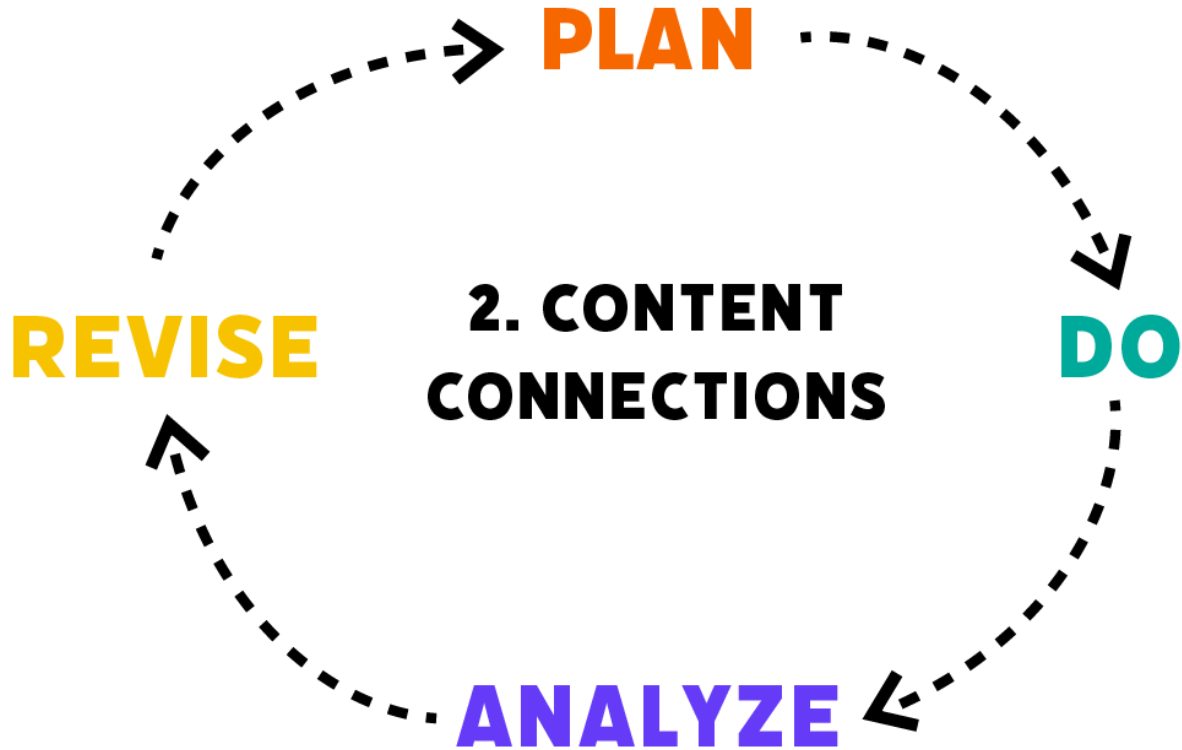
The teacher draws connections between students' out-of-school experiences, a posada, and the book. She acknowledges that she has never been to a posada, relying on the students' expertise to help the class learn. The teacher connects posadas to typical holiday celebrations in the United States for students who do not have a Mexican background. (4-5)

Personal Sharing

Students share their personal experiences, both publicly and with each other. Some students say what their parents have told them about posadas. A few students say they've never heard of one. Students share their family's holiday traditions. (4-5)

Make Connections

Students draw connections between the book and their lives. They relate the content of a posada to their experiences outside of school, their relationships, and what their parents have told them. They also connect a posada to some of their other holiday traditions. (4-5)



Practicing Content Connections: PDAR

Now that you have reviewed the theory, indicators, and examples of Content Connections, it's time to practice in your own classroom.

Below you will find PDAR guides to help you integrate what you've learned into practice, either by yourself or with other teachers.

If you have a Hypothesis account (or create one), you can sign in at the top right corner of this page. This will enable you to annotate and make notes for your PDAR plan. We have also included worksheets below that you can download, fill in, and share. Do what works best for you!

1. [Download PDAR Worksheet - Version A \(Google Doc\)](#)
2. [Download PDAR Worksheet - Version B \(Google Doc\)](#)
3. [Open Content Connections CASI rubric \(Google Doc\)](#)
4. Download Self/Peer Observation document ([Google Doc](#)) ([PDF](#))

PDAR At-a-Glance

Plan

1. Identify the upcoming lesson or unit you'd like to work on
2. Review the Content Connections indicators with your lesson(s) in mind
3. Identify your "look fors"—what you expect and hope to see
4. Plan your observations, alone or with others

Do

1. Work from your plan (try to reach your goals, but be flexible)
2. Consider recording multiple observations and multiple forms of data (scores, field notes, etc.)

Analyze

1. Record and review what happened, either solo or with your observers
2. Analyze how each indicator showed up in your lesson
3. Compare to your goals and predictions
4. Reflect on your overall experience

Revise

1. Revise your process (observations, data gathering)
2. Revise your direction (new goals? new lesson? new indicator?)
3. Identify your gaps (skills, knowledge, outside help)

PDAR In-Depth

Use the reflective questions below to guide you. You don't have to answer all of them—they are there to give you ideas and help you reflect.

(Take notes in the book or download one of the worksheets above.)

Plan

1. Identify lessons/unit you would like to apply content connections to
 1. What are your upcoming lessons?
 2. If you need inspiration, jump to our "Lesson Ideas" section below.
2. Review content connections with your lesson(s) in mind. Ask yourself:
 1. What experiences do I have personally that relate to the topic?
 2. What questions can I ask that would encourage sharing?
 3. What experiences do my students have related to this lesson?
 4. What interests do my students have related to this lesson?
 5. How might students' family/peer relationships relate to this lesson?
 6. How can I help students be enthusiastic about sharing?
 7. What connections would help students see the value of this lesson?
3. Identify your "look fors"— what you expect and hope to see.
 1. How would you like to change?
 2. What do you want students to experience?
 3. What do you expect to happen?
 4. How do you think the students will react?
 5. How do you think you will react?
4. Plan your observations
 1. Would you like a video or observation notes?
 2. Do you need any tools?
 3. When will you observe yourself/be observed?
 4. Will you do this study solo or with colleagues?

Do

1. Work from the plan
 1. Do you need to improve?
 2. What kind of notes should observers take?
 3. How long will your observations be? (15-20 minutes)
 4. How many observations before analyzing? (We recommend 3)

Analyze

1. Record/review what happened
 1. If using video, take detailed notes: what did students say and do? What did you say and do?
 2. If using colleague feedback, what did they observe students/you say and do?
2. Analyze each indicator (click here to see the [Content Connections CASI rubric](#))
3. Teacher Sharing
 1. What did I share about myself?
4. Encourages Sharing
 1. How did I encourage my students to share?
5. Draws Connections
 1. How did I connect the lesson to student hobbies, traditions, or expertise?
6. Personal Sharing
 1. What did my students share about themselves?
7. Makes Connections
 1. What connections did students make between the lesson and their lives outside of school?
8. Compare to your goals and speculations
 1. Did you meet the goals you set?
 2. Can you justify your interpretation with evidence?
 3. Were your predictions correct?
 4. Can you justify with evidence?
9. Reflect on your experience
 1. What changes did you notice in yourself or your students?
 2. Which indicators came naturally? Which were challenging?
 3. What happened that you were not expecting?

Revise

1. Revise your process
 1. Do you need to change your observation method? Did your video work?
 2. Were you able to gather good insights from the process?
2. Revise your direction
 1. Would you like to continue or stop CASI use for this dimension? Is it time to move to a new dimension?
 2. Would you like to continue with the same goals or revise them?
 3. What can you revise in your lesson plan to better incorporate CC?
3. Examine your gaps
 1. What skill or knowledge gaps keep you from applying CC in your classroom (e.g., do you know what cultures your students come from, or what their life outside of the classroom is like?)
 2. Who could you work or discuss with to improve?

Conclusion

When children arrive at school each day, they carry more than just the contents of their backpacks. Each child brings her or his everyday experiences into the classroom—routines, interests, social relationships, perspectives, expertise, values, and traditions—that influence how they see the world. These experiences may align with traditional white, middle-class values and instructional approaches, but for minoritized students they often do not. The way content is delivered in school (as well as the content itself) can seem very foreign. And that kind of sociocultural disconnect, the one between the world inside of school and the student's world of family and culture outside of school, can make it hard to learn.

Our goal with this chapter was to help you appreciate the value of Content Connections—the second dimension of the CASI—which asks teachers to make deliberate efforts to connect instructional content and objectives with the everyday experiences of *all* students. You learned what content connections look like through five dimensions: Teacher Sharing, Encouraging Sharing, Draws Connections, Personal Sharing, and Makes Connections. We hope that you feel confident explaining Content Connections to peers, parents, and administrators. Most importantly, we hope you feel confident elevating your theoretical knowledge of Content Connections into practical knowledge by practicing it in your classroom this week. Fortunately, Content Connections doesn't require huge changes to begin. Start with the lessons you already have!

As teacher learners, your learning process shouldn't end with reading this chapter: this is an introduction, a beginning. Practicing Content Connections in the classroom with the PDAR cycle, even one lesson a week, will uncover many opportunities and challenges we couldn't cover here. Adapt to your constraints; crucially, share what you're learning with other educators (and [with us](#), if you feel so inclined!) so that everyone can improve. Talk openly with your students about what's working.

Above all, keep asking yourself: *"How can I forge new content connections this week?"*

Resources and Ideas

Bilingual, Dual Lingual, and Multicultural Books:

- Scholastic's [Multicultural Books for Pre-K and Kindergarten](#)
- Scholastic's [Multicultural Books for Kids 6-10](#)
- CCBC's [50 Multicultural Books Every Child Should Know](#)
- Edutopia's [22 diverse book choices that represent students' lives](#)
- Mia Wenjen's [60+ Multicultural Books for Children](#) (her whole blog is worth exploring)
- American Library Association's [Bilingual Books for Children List](#) (organized by 13 languages!)

Get to Know Student and Family Cultures

- Home Visits (if allowed) to learn more about students' lives outside the classroom
 - What do you help your parents/family do at home?
 - What resources do students have in their community?
- Make a questionnaire
- Set up one-on-one interviews throughout the week while the rest of the class is working on something else
- Plan some possible questions to ask
 - What is your family like?
 - What is your favorite thing to do with your family?
 - Who do you live with?
 - Do you have any family traditions?
 - Do you have any chores or responsibilities at home?
 - What do you like to do in your free time?
 - Do you have a favorite holiday?
- Start the day with a morning meeting
- Plan activities that provide more information about the student
- Fun facts, spotlight, icebreakers

Lesson Ideas

- Choose books that connect to one or more students' cultural heritage
- Family tree assignment where students investigate their heritage
- Develop a lesson that is centered around one (or a few) students' expertise
- Making a traditional drink (or teach from a traditional recipe)
- Learn about a holiday
- Integrate cultural storytelling into lessons
- Use dance and vocalizations to memorize material
- Bring traditional instruments
- Invite parents to speak or present to the class

References

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National Research Council. (1999). [*How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*](#). Washington D.C.: The National Academies Press.

Rogoff, B. (2003). [*The cultural nature of human development*](#). New York: Oxford University Press.

Tharp, R., Estrada, P., Dalton, S., & Yamauchi, L. (2000). [*Teaching transformed: Achieving excellence, fairness, inclusion, and harmony*](#). New York: Westview Press.

Contact Us

We are constantly improving this resource. Have suggestions, resources, or experiences with the CASI you'd like to share?

Email us at CASIbookteam@gmail.com





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Brenton Jackson is a masters student in BYU's Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology. His work centers on applying open educational resources to equity problems in education, as well as studying distinctions of worth in design practice. Creating this online book about equitable practices for K-6 teachers is the focus of his thesis. A native Virginian and adopted Bostonian, Brenton enjoys astrophotography and writing music in his spare time.



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Jocelin Meza is from Texas and currently studies Elementary Education at BYU, with a minor in teaching English language learners (TELL). As a proud Mexican American, Jocelin focuses much of her studies on multicultural education and enjoys learning how to effectively incorporate engaging curriculum into the classroom. In her spare time, Jocelin loves to read and run.



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