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## **“Hometown History” Setting for Interdisciplinary Planning**

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## “Hometown History” Setting for Interdisciplinary Planning

Bridget K. Coleman, Lauren E. Stephens, and Timothy Lintner

Looking for a novel approach to interdisciplinary planning? Try using state history! Every town has a place of mystery. Every house has a story to tell. Those places can spark an interest that leads to interdisciplinary teaching and learning. Using local history, teachers can engage students in meaningful learning experiences that are relevant to their students. Operating under the premise that teachers can and should strive to develop curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory (NMSA, 2010), Lauren Stephens began her research inquiry of Edgewood, a house that has served as a historical centerpiece for many years in many ways. This article will share the example of how Edgewood, now known as the Pickens-Salley House and situated on the campus of USC Aiken, inspired an integrated, themed curriculum.

### Edgewood: The Unifying Theme

The idea for an integrated curriculum unit stemmed from the 2009 USCA-produced docudrama titled *Edgewood: Stage of Southern History*. The video provides captivating stories of plantation life, the Civil War, the women’s suffrage movement, and the civil rights era. Intriguingly, the stories are told from the unique perspective of the Edgewood house.

Built in 1829, Edgewood (the house), has served as a “stage” for many historical events and time periods in South Carolina. All of the southern states, and in particular South Carolina, played a large role in each of these historical events and time periods, and the docudrama drives this point home. Additionally, Edgewood served as the residence for several famous historical figures, many of which were women. The lives of Lucy Pickens, wife of Colonel Francis Pickens (a civil war officer), and Eulalie Salley are investigated in detail through the film. The docudrama not only highlights the importance of Edgewood’s role in the rich history of South Carolina, but it also illustrates her crucial influence in the shaping of American history (<http://www.edgewoodfilm.com>). The ebbs and tides of these historical events are narrated by the house herself – Edgewood. “I have a memory...I have a story... I have a name...”

The film is divided into two parts. The first part of the docudrama centers on the life of South Carolina Governor Francis W. Pickens and his influential, third wife, Lucy Petway Holcombe Pickens. The second half of the film depicts the story of Eulalie Salley, a prominent woman in Southern society who stumbled upon and refurbished a forgotten and dilapidated

Edgewood. Eulalie was a strong proponent of equality and women's rights. When the Great Depression hit the country, Eulalie sold many of her possessions in an effort to keep the house. After having been relocated twice, Edgewood now permanently resides on the campus of the University of South Carolina Aiken.

### **Making the Case for Integrated Studies in the Middle Grades**

Historically, educators such as John Dewey, Howard Gardener, and Benjamin Bloom have emphasized the value of contextual learning. Beane (1997) advocates a unified curriculum with meaningful connections to students' lives. An integrated curriculum can provide students meaningful opportunities to connect learning in and out of school (Vars, 2001). Other research suggests that student learning is enhanced because an integrative curriculum is more compatible with the way the brain works and promotes the development of critical thinking skills (Caine & Caine, 1991).

The Association for Middle Level Education (2010), formerly the National Middle School Association, charges teachers and schools to provide students an education that will "enhance their healthy growth as lifelong learners, ethical and democratic citizens, and increasingly competent, self-sufficient young people who are optimistic about the future and prepared to succeed in our ever-changing world" (p. 3). An integrated learning experience addressing student interests, providing opportunities to complete more detailed work on such topics, and laying the foundation for the students to take personal action through a variety of activities is the most efficient and

effective method of meeting this goal (Virtue, Wilson, & Ingram, 2009). According to Elizabeth Hinde (2005), "when teachers are knowledgeable about content areas and integrate them effectively, students' achievement increases" (p. 108). This data combined with the general realization that all aspects of life are interwoven with one another clearly indicate that an integrated, interdisciplinary curriculum is the best practice for successfully educating this generation of students (Campbell, Mumpire, & White, 2000).

An integrated curriculum has several important goals or objectives, namely to establish and understand the connections between different subject areas, to develop the ability to think critically and openly, to enhance problem-solving skills, and to encourage the student to view himself as a part of a larger picture/bigger community (Campbell, et al., 2000). Another characteristic of an integrated curriculum is the fact that it gains credibility and authenticity from local resources simply by relating the material to something with which the students are familiar (Virtue et al., 2009).

Using Edgewood as the unifying theme, lessons were developed across the four core academic disciplines (Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies) for eighth grade South Carolina academic standards. The unit plan has a multidisciplinary or parallel design model (Jackson & Davis, 2000) whereby specific subject area lessons are connected through a common theme. A team of teachers across content areas can address specific content area standards using the activities that relate to the docudrama. Lessons explore the house in various ways through the content areas. Since history was a

primary focus, lessons naturally included historical events of the time. In English language arts, related literature, writing prompts, and vocabulary are emphasized. The travels of the house as it was transported to different locations were brought out in math through calculating measurements. Science topics include moon phases and the impact of the southern climate.

### **Edgewood Curriculum Overview**

The curriculum unit was the result of several stages of careful planning and development. First, Lauren researched the time periods and the historical events that surrounded the house through the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Many of these events were briefly described in the docudrama; however, outside research from additional sources allowed for a more thorough understanding of the time. Taking the time period and docudrama timeline into consideration, the South Carolina Social Studies standards were chosen which correlated to the docudrama. After selecting the eighth grade history standards and indicators which were most closely reflected in the docudrama, she considered the other content area standards and topics that would interest middle grades students.

### **Social Studies**

Within the realm of social studies, Lauren initially wrote an overview of the topics covered in the film, summarizing the two parts of the docudrama. She included a complete timeline of events from the early 1800s through World War II so as to provide a clear picture of this historical period. Following the summary are twenty discussion questions, all of which correlate to the social studies standards.

These questions are grouped into one of three categories. The curriculum contains seven writing-based questions that ask the students to describe or imagine a scenario or event. The five in-class questions are designed for use with Venn diagrams or t-charts and ask the students to compare/contrast or list information. Eight questions are designated as discussion-based questions and may be most effectively used in a discussion circle model or small groups of students facilitating cooperative learning. The discussion-based questions ask the students to reflect upon the characters and their actions and offer their opinions (e.g. “Would YOU have done that?”).

The aim was to provide students with a clearer picture of history as it relates to them and to illuminate how the history of this region ties into national history. The unit was designed to demonstrate the connections between events in the past and those of the present. If students realize that the very location where they live has such a vibrant history, perhaps that knowledge will serve to ignite a new interest and passion in them.

Before watching the film, the students should possess a basic understanding of nineteenth century slavery in the South, both from the perspective of those subjected to slavery and that of plantation owners. Additionally, the students should be aware of the events surrounding the Civil War including nullification and associated tariffs, the secession of South Carolina from the Union, Reconstruction, and women’s suffrage. Students should also have a working knowledge of twentieth century events such as the Great Depression, Pearl

Harbor, and the development and dropping of the atomic bomb.

After students have developed a basic understanding of the events preceding and following the Civil War, it would be appropriate to share the film and the suggested activities. The unit plan addresses several South Carolina Social Studies Standards including those related to the major social, political, and economic developments that took place in South Carolina and the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century, the American Civil War, and the Reconstruction.

Other social studies activities include creating a truncated timeline of events (a complete timeline for the period is included in the unit), a scrapbook of the life of one of the characters residing in or around Edgewood, or constructing a family tree through tracing one's ancestry. One specific example is the Two Hundred Year Timeline with an overview of the historical events from circa 1800-2000. Using the dates provided in the film, students create a timeline of events, beginning with Edgewood's construction in 1829, following characters such as Colonel Francis Pickens, Lucy Pickens, Douschka Pickens, Eulalie Salley, and others as they live out their lives in and around Edgewood. Notable events could include the Pickens' trip to Russia, the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation, the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> Amendments, the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor, and the end of World War II. The timeline would end with the relocation of Edgewood to her permanent home on the University of South Carolina Aiken campus.

### **English Language Arts**

Written and verbal communications are emphasized through the writing-based and discussion-based questions. In the Civil War Journal, students pretend to be a Southerner living during one of the time periods captured in the Edgewood film. Each student chooses a social status (i.e. slave, plantation owner, soldier, child, etc.) and creates a personal journal for his or her character. Other writing-based and discussion-based questions include:

- If your house, like Edgewood, could talk, what stories would it share?
- Imagine you were growing up during the time of the Civil War. Compare and contrast your life today with what it would have been like during that time.
- Throughout the film, it becomes obvious that women and African Americans often suffered unrelenting oppression. Can you recall a time when you felt oppressed? What emotions did you experience? How did you respond?
- Consider the differing viewpoints of two individuals, such as a plantation owner and a former slave, living in the South during the Reconstruction. Compare and contrast their points of view regarding events such as the passing of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, or Fifteenth Amendments, the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, or the formation of the Red Shirts.

In the activity, "The House Speaks," students determine the point of view for Edgewood. In small groups, students make a list of the advantages and disadvantages of using this point of

view. Then, each student selects a different point of view and writes a paragraph about a segment of the movie from the new perspective.

Another English language arts activity engages students through vocabulary. Students are provided a list of unfamiliar words that are used in the film and are asked to circle the words they do not know as they hear them used in the docudrama. At the end of the film, the teacher assigns a couple of the words to each student to look up in the dictionary before sharing the definitions with the rest of the class. Another activity in this discipline asks either individual students or pairs of students to create a travel brochure to encourage tourists to visit the Pickens-Salley house. A scoring rubric for the brochure is provided in the unit.

### **Math**

Mathematics is used to investigate the travels of Edgewood. Have you ever seen a house move? Moving a house is no easy task. Edgewood was relocated two different times. The first time, the house was moved by mule-drawn sleds for a distance of thirty miles. The second time it was moved, the house was divided into sections and trucks pulled each of the sections a distance of three miles. The mathematics activities engage students in exploring the house through a variety of topics including calculating unit conversions, dilations of two-dimensional figures, and ratios, rates, and proportions. In the activity “Traveling Treasure,” students use distances from the travels of Edgewood and calculate unit conversions for each time the house was relocated.

### **Science**

Much of life in the South during the nineteenth century revolved around the changing seasons, as plantation owners relied on their fields, crops, and harvest for their livelihoods. Therefore, the changing of seasons was immensely important in the day-to-day operations of a plantation. Keeping with the unifying theme of Edgewood, the science lessons contain a variety of instructional strategies including student sheets, modeling activities, and an experiment. The experiment allows the students to simulate the Earth’s axial tilt and changing seasons through the use of a globe and lamp. Other topics include distance/time graphs and sound and light waves. In the “Phases of the Moon” activity, students explore the phases of the moon through biting off varying amounts of mini Moon Pies. Students also learn about topographic maps through creating their own topographic map with clay, toothpicks, string, and markers.

### **The Edgewood Curriculum Unit**

Part of the legacy of the Edgewood curriculum unit is its dissemination on its own website. Teachers here in South Carolina and across the country can access and download the curriculum in its entirety by visiting [www.drmclient.com/edgewood](http://www.drmclient.com/edgewood). The website has activities for students and additional information and resources for parents. A list of documents, books, magazines, and websites where additional information can be found is provided to supplement the lessons and activities with outside sources.

Edgewood is open year-round to visitors. Contact information is included should a teacher wish to set up a field

trip tour of the Pickens-Salley house or schedule a visit to the university's Ruth Patrick Science Education Center (RPSEC) for a supplementary class on light waves or topographic maps. Additionally, a traveling trunk sponsored by the Center of Excellence in Middle-level Interdisciplinary Strategies for Teaching (CE-MIST) located at the RPSEC was created with supplementary resources and supporting classroom materials. A text set was created to complement the Edgewood curriculum which includes children's literature, historical fiction and non-fiction, and a class set of novels. The unit provides straightforward, teacher-friendly materials with student sheets and project rubrics.

### **Discovering Your Own Place of Mystery**

Like Lauren, teachers and students can learn about places of mystery in locations that interest them. Any historical monument could act as a catalyst to connect planning by teachers with engaging student activities, while integrating academic standards. A team of teachers could implement the common theme and each develop curriculum standards using the common theme. Individual teachers and teams of teachers can use a location or state history to plan an interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning. Using a graphic organizer (Appendix) may be helpful to teachers in planning an interdisciplinary unit.

Key in the design of an effective, interdisciplinary curriculum is authenticity and contextualization of the activities and lessons, which must share the common theme while simultaneously maintaining real-life applications. In other words, the students want and need

to know how these past events are directly related or connected to their lives. Students should be encouraged to ask questions and research ideas they find intriguing.

### **Conclusion**

This unique way of exploring history is powerful for students. The opportunity to learn history – and in this case, math, science, and English, as well – in such an applicable way makes the information come alive for students. Students enjoy the process of learning and exploring when they see the relevance and meaningful connections. This integrated curriculum unit is a means to that end, a method of engaging students in the big picture of history while simultaneously affording them the opportunity to discover that their own unique history is not so far removed from this “ancient past.” Ultimately, we hope the unit will have a legacy of exciting students about history to the extent that they want to research and learn about their own history and their own places of mystery. It has been said the past is the key to the present. So find your own place of mystery and begin exploring!

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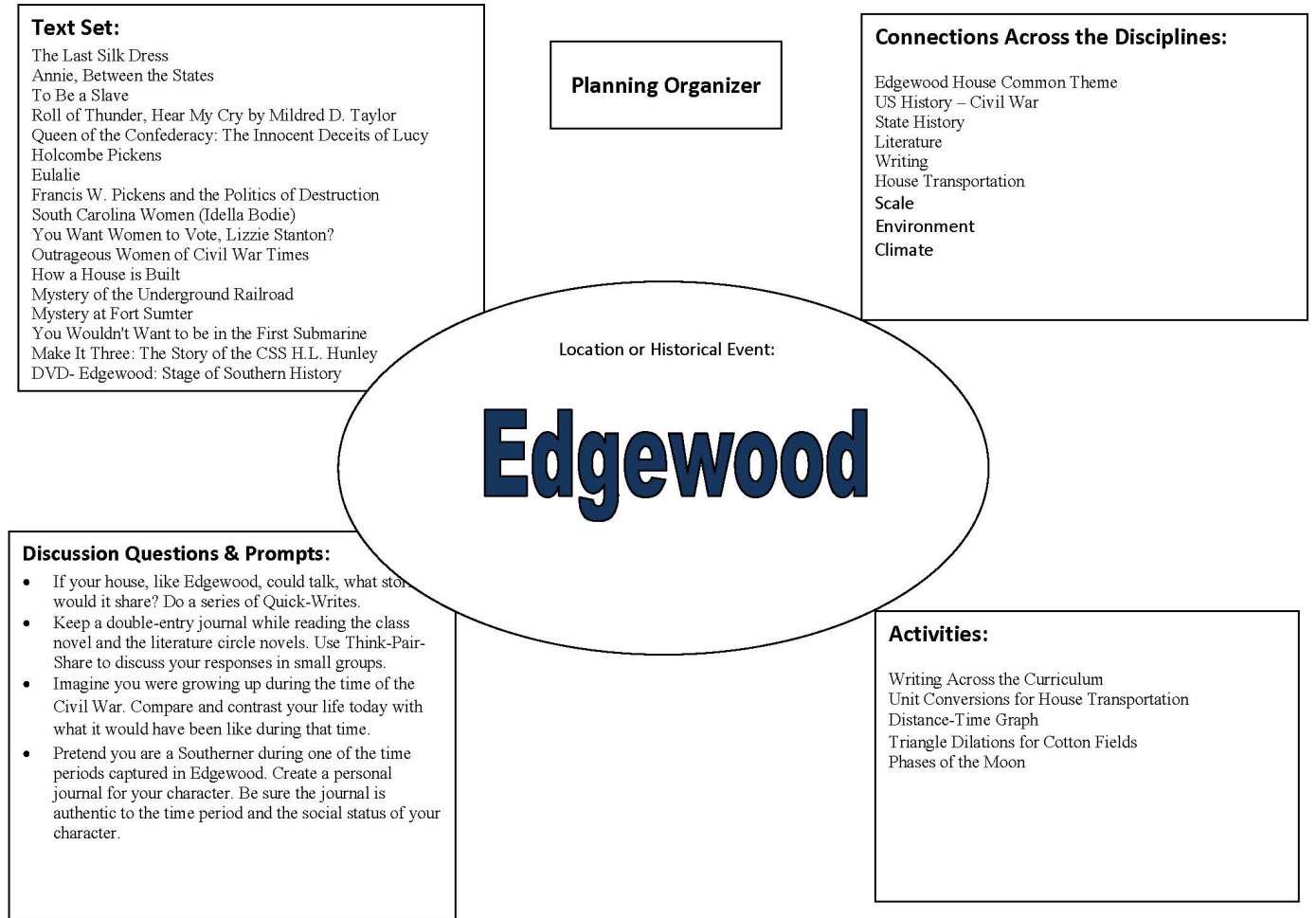
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## Appendix



***Every town has a place of mystery!***



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