Understanding our families : a curriculum for six-year-olds

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UNDERSTANDING OUR FAMILIES

A Curriculum for Six-Year-Olds

by

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Abstract

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by Sarah Boltz

This Independent Study presents a social studies curriculum on families designed for six-year-olds in a New York City charter school. At the age of six, children are beginning to form their self-concept. This stems from one’s ethnic identity, which is largely influenced by family customs, traditions, beliefs, and home language. By researching their own families, children have the potential to develop a better self-understanding. The topic was also chosen because it creates a space for children to share their family stories. This sets the stage for children from backgrounds other than that of the majority to cross cultural boundaries.

The author designed this curriculum using the “Modified Understanding by Design” format. This format requires the curriculum designer to structure the entire curriculum around a few carefully chosen learning standards. The two standards serving as the basis of this curriculum were selected from the New York State social studies standards for first grade.
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Rationale

When speaking to the families of students in my class at Manhattan Charter School to gather background information, I discovered that children identifying as Jewish have families coming from Israel, Russia, Ukraine, Estonia, and Poland. There are also children whose families originate from Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Haiti, Honduras, Peru, Venezuela, Spain, China, South Africa, and the United States. As a middle-class Irish American teacher, my first thought was, “What an incredible melting pot in my classroom!” In an attempt to appreciate this diversity, I had each student in the class share the country that his or her family originated from.

As I got to know my students better, I realized that there were several children in my class struggling to cross boundaries. Some were still trying to learn the language of the classroom, Standard American English. Some were coming from cultural backgrounds so different from that of the majority that there existed the question of how to communicate and interact with others. I became curious about their frame of reference and perspective on what took place in school. Just like visiting another country, these children
from different backgrounds were noticing differences and trying to understand them. I wondered what they were noticing.

I realized it was going to take more than sharing where we all come from to get these students to feel as comfortable in the classroom as the children that share the same cultural perspective as myself. The children in my classroom needed to not only hear how their own stories were different or alike from their peers, but also to feel that these similarities and differences were valued. By looking at our own stories and beginning to develop the understanding that we do naturally tend to place judgment on things outside of our own cultural experience, we can then begin the process of transforming this judgment into an appreciation for different ways of doing things.

These concerns led to the desire to write a curriculum for my Integrative Master's Project based upon a significant takeaway I received from a course I took at Bank Street. In a required course, Foundations of Modern Education, I studied with Frank Pignatelli. We read and discussed the beliefs of progressive educators, such as Allen (1999), Beane (2001), Cochran-Smith (2004), and Pignatelli (2005). They all emphasize that it is the civic responsibility of teachers to build learning communities that help
children of all backgrounds cross boundaries. They encourage teachers to build these democratic learning communities by making space for each child's story to be heard. This idea of democracy held great appeal for me as the teacher of a very diverse classroom trying to create space for every child to feel like a community member with an active role in the classroom.

In need of an approach for writing this curriculum, I selected "Modified Understanding by Design" based on the work of Wiggins and McTighe (2005). Dr. Harriet Lenk, my mentor for this independent study, developed this version. With this approach, the curriculum designer must work backwards by first identifying the standards and what understandings students will acquire, how this understanding will be assessed, and then how this understanding will be achieved through lessons and activities.

The complex topic of children exploring the traditions, customs, and beliefs of their own families and those of their peers is well suited to "Understanding by Design". I really wanted children to understand themselves and each other on a deeper level, and appreciated the way that this approach slowly builds understanding in a very targeted way through inquiry. I chose to use the "Modified" version because, unlike the original version, it requires the designer to consider who the learners are. As this
curriculum is designed for a very diverse group of students that are also to be learning about themselves in this unit, it seemed essential that I also understand as much about this group of children as possible.

I chose the topic of families for this age group because, as mentioned earlier, I wanted to create a space for children to share their stories and learn about themselves and each other. At this age, children are developing their self-concept. A child’s family heavily influences this self-concept. Therefore, understanding one’s family increases understanding of self.

As the well-known adage goes, “Necessity is the mother of invention”. My students were in need of space to tell their own stories, and, ultimately, this was the inspiration for designing this curriculum. By using the topic, families, commonly taught in schools with children in this age group, this curriculum serves to build understanding of our families, ourselves, and each other.
Modified Understanding By Design Curriculum

Basic Information

Title: Understanding Our Families

Unit Topics: This unit covers several topics related to families. Students investigate their family stories, and why they are important. Family traditions and beliefs are researched and discussed. In addition, the diversity of family structures and ways of life in our community are identified.

Curriculum Designer: Sarah Boltz

Summary: This four-week unit focuses on a significant aspect of the children's lives in their families. Through a variety of activities, students will learn about their families. They will learn that families pass down stories that reflect knowledge and traditions, and that each family's story is unique. Students will also learn that families have different ways of living, communicating, celebrating, and believing. The activities in this unit include family portraits and stories, sharing favorite family meals, a read aloud about a special artifact that tells one family's story, family interviews, and family members coming in to share a special skill or activity with the class. For the culminating activity, students will work in groups to produce a skit in which one group member takes the rest of the group to his or her home to share a family holiday tradition.
School and Student Demographic Information:  
* names changed to maintain confidentiality

On a diverse, bustling block of the Upper West Side sits Manhattan Charter School. This neighborhood is noted for its diversity. Government housing sits aside luxury buildings. On a walk down Amsterdam Avenue, a main avenue in the neighborhood, one will pass a vegan café, a New York-style pizza spot, an Indian restaurant, a Mediterranean café, a Southern French bistro, an upscale Chinese restaurant, an American diner, a kosher deli specializing in bagels, and the list goes on.

People from other neighborhoods often visit the Natural History Museum and Children’s Museum of Manhattan. Most notably, the arts are a big piece of the Upper West Side, and on its outskirts resides the world-renowned Lincoln Center. High buildings, some of them residential and some of them for commerce, shape the skyline that many admire from across the Hudson River. There are various entry points to Central Park, many of them with a playground just inside the park.

In between two heavily trafficked avenues of the Upper West Side is Manhattan Charter School (MCS). It is located within District 3 in a large Department of Education building that also houses four high schools.
Another large elementary school building is located across the street.

Like the Upper West Side, MCS has a diverse student body. When speaking to the families of students in my class at MCS to gather background information, I discovered that children identifying as Jewish have families coming from Israel, Russia, Ukraine, Estonia, and Poland. There are also children whose families originate from Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Haiti, Honduras, Peru, Venezuela, Spain, China, South Africa, and the United States. Approximately one-third of the students identify as African American.

MCS is also diverse in socio-economic status. Children from government housing live just around the corner from children living in upscale apartments. According to John Clark, the Business Operations Manager at MCS, thirty-six percent of students qualify for free lunch, four percent for reduced lunch, and sixty percent pay for their lunch (J. Clark, personal communication, December 5, 2011). These statistics are determined by the household income that families report on a lunch form that all New York City public school parents fill out in the beginning of the school year. These percentages of free, reduced, and full-price lunch reflect the variance in the household income of the school population.
The learning needs of the students at MCS are also quite diverse. According to Susan Thomas, the Student Achievement Coordinator responsible for all data, testing, and special education services at MCS, this population consists of nineteen students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Ten students are classified as English Language Learners (ELLs), most of whom are receiving speech and language services at this school (S. Thomas, personal communication, December 5, 2011).

MCS is a small school with plans to grow. Each year, a grade will be added until the school reaches eighth grade. Currently, it serves one hundred and sixty-five students in kindergarten and first grade. All students are chosen through a random lottery, though children in District 3 are given preference (J. Clark, personal communication, December 5, 2011).

The ratio of faculty members to students is exceptionally high. MCS employs two school leaders, a principal and a leadership resident, as well as an operations and office manager. There are five support staff members that provide mandated special education services for children that qualify, ten kindergarten teachers, and four first grade teachers. Each classroom has one assistant teacher and one lead teacher. The average class size is
twenty-one students for kindergarten, and twenty-nine for first grade.

The mission of MCS, created by the founder of the school, is based on the premise that all children can be successful if given a high-quality, free public education, and aims to have every student go to college. The curriculum at MCS is mostly inquiry-based, but more traditional than it is progressive. It is inquiry-based in that there is very little teacher-led direction instruction, and most of the learning takes place in the context of inquiry. However, the curriculum is fixed, meaning that there is no space within it to allow for the children to choose a topic of study that may hold interest for them. Balanced literacy, TERC Investigations math, inquiry-based science, Chess, Art, Sports, Blocks, and project-based social studies are the main components of the curriculum.

The classroom for which this curriculum was specifically designed consists of thirty students spanning in age from five to nine years old. There are, in total, fifteen girls and fifteen boys. Most of the children in the class are six or seven years old. However, two five-year-old students began the year in kindergarten, and were placed in this first grade classroom after their teacher noticed that they were quickly performing well above the benchmark in kindergarten. A nine-year-old student - a boy much larger
in stature than his peers - has been evaluated and diagnosed as having dyslexia, and this is his third year in first grade.

There are five children in this class with Individualized Education Plans. Their developmental variations include: receptive speech and language disorder, dyslexia, a learning disability, and ADHD. In addition, one student graduated out of services (an ELL), and another (also an ELL) is currently being evaluated for services.

The range of academic performance among the children in this class is wide. This is best reflected in their Fountas and Pinnell reading levels, which range from Level E (beginning of first grade) to Level R (end of fourth grade). Most children in the class fall somewhere between Levels I and L; the benchmark for end of first grade is Level J. There are also four children who, according to their parents, took an assessment prior to attending MCS, and were classified as "gifted." Within the classroom, these children perform well above grade level across content areas, and frequently contribute ideas reflective of higher-level thinking to classroom discussions.

There is a large range of personal interests among this group of children, but topics that are particularly popular include sharks, dinosaurs, building construction, teeth, cars, scabs, Michael Jackson, and airplanes/flying.
Typical for this age, many of these interests are reflective of a six-year-old's current experience. For example, children of this age frequently lose their teeth. Naturally, this creates a fascination with teeth, why they fall out and how they grow back in.

**Child Development**

At the age of six, children are beginning to form their self-concept, or as Cole and Cole (2005) define it, “...the way in which children come to conceive of themselves in relation to other people” (p.361). A six-year-old girl in my first grade classroom this year repeatedly asked to do small jobs around the classroom that her peers often struggled with, such as re-shelving leveled books in our classroom library. Her classmates eventually took notice of her exceptional ability to organize and categorize materials, and gave her the title, "Class Librarian." This child’s identity began with the utilization of her own gifts, but was enhanced by the response she received from her peers and teachers.

Phinney’s (2001) study revealed, “In a society populated by many ethnic groups and races, children’s developing sense of their own ethnic identity is an important social issue” (p. 369). She defines ethnic identity as “a subjective sense of belonging to an ethnic group and the feelings and
attitudes that accompany this sense of group membership” (Phinney as cited in Cole and Cole, 2005, p.369). Ethnic identity may play a major role in a child’s development of their self-concept. Therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to create a safe and nurturing space to discuss the feelings and attitudes children possess about their own ethnic group as well as those of their peers.

The following example highlights the important role ethnic identity plays in a child's self-concept. During “Black History Month” this past school year, my students and I watched a short informational video on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Following this, a student made the comment that she felt she might not be as smart as some of her friends because she is “so dark.” As the conversation unfolded, many children also expressed negative feelings and confusion about their ethnicity. A Jewish girl coming from a family that migrated from Israel said that she felt “Black History Month” was unfair. She wondered why we didn't have “White History Month”, or “Jewish History Month”.

Although there are very serious and important reasons why Americans honor African American history, a six-year-old may not necessarily understand the cultural significance of this history. This is why there must
be a “safe space” inside of the classroom to air these perceptions; whether or not they are real or imagined is not pertinent. It is important to consider the implications these perceptions have on the development of a child’s self-identity.

As defined by Cole and Cole (2005), a family is “a group of people traditionally defined by shared ancestry (blood relations), shared residence, and/or marital ties” (p. 406). It is from this group of people that children get their identity (Phinney, 2001). Families pass on traditions, stories, language, religion, belief systems, a way of life, and the list goes on. Families are perhaps the first place, then, to begin when delving into this sense of ethnic identity.

**Rationale**

In this rationale, I explain why this topic is appropriate for all six year olds. I also articulate why I have chosen particular methods and activities. Most importantly, I provide a discussion of the theoretical importance of this topic.

Lucy Sprague Mitchell (2001) suggests that when planning curriculum “the dominating logic should be focused on the children’s experiences, not the
subject matter”. This is why students study their own families in this unit, not the general idea of family. Their families are their lived experience.

Partner conversations are conducted prior to the whole-class discussion, as this ensures that all children have the opportunity to share and prepare their thinking. Vygotsky (1935) emphasizes that children internalize ideas by first experiencing them in a social setting (Vygotsky cited in Doolittle (1995), p. 3).

For children to truly understand a concept, they must experience it for themselves. Students will learn by doing. They will seek out and retell their family stories and articulate likenesses and differences between their family portraits, for example. They will find answers to as well as generate their own questions. Their “learning ...[will] be rooted in ... experience,” and “arouse an active quest for information” (Dewey, 1998, 1938, p. 96).

In this study, students begin by investigating their own family stories. This idea is supported by Pignatelli (2005) who proposes that this helps build community as children listen to one another. Pignatelli (2005) also suggests:

The process of engaging in this civic education begins with students telling their own story to get in touch with experiences that make them unique. Out of these stories, a student comes to know what self-interests he/she can bring to a public forum where others, too, share their own personal
stories, nourishing a collective interest. A sense of both ‘me’ and ‘us’ as members of/in a public space emerges (p. 57).

Sharing their stories also increases each child’s self-awareness as they begin to hear their own voice. When children are more aware of who they are, they are more equipped to capitalize on their individual strengths. Each child has something to offer to his or her classroom community.

Darling-Hammond (2002) asserts that we must first “…find out what we have in common, [which] requires that we begin communicating from the vantage points of our separate experiences” (p.3). This philosophy is very similar to Pignatelli’s (2005). Darling-Hammond stresses the importance of individuals being given the space to share their own stories. Like Pignatelli, she also suggests that listening to one another aids in the healthy construction of a classroom community. She (2002) explains,

Far from encouraging separatism, acknowledgement of diverse experiences helps create new associations that helps us ultimately to build the common ground on which a more inclusive and powerful community can rest. Crossing boundaries is essential to social learning (p.3).

In summary, many progressive educators, including Allen (1999), Beane (2001), Cochrane-Smith (2004), and Pignatelli (2005) emphasize that it is the civic responsibility of teachers to build these learning communities that help
children of all backgrounds cross boundaries. For some children, the distance will be short. Others have several boundaries to cross. Speaking a home language that differs from the language spoken at school requires code switching, as does having a different cultural frame of reference.

Cochran-Smith (2004) states that "Our present educational system is dysfunctional for disproportionately large numbers of children who are not part of the racial and language mainstream" (p.46). In response to this, the process of crossing boundaries needs to be purposefully facilitated within the classroom.

A one-size-fits-all approach will not work in the diverse classroom; it's not enough to just teach the lessons back to back with little regard to who the learners in the classroom are. Each child's story needs to be heard in order for the whole child to be educated, thus the need for curriculums such as this that make space for these stories to be told, for boundaries to be crossed.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Stage One-Desired Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Established Goals:</strong> (Standard/Skills) (G)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Families pass on knowledge, customs, language, traditions, etc. (&quot;New York City K - 8,&quot; 2008-2009).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Families are important units that reflect the diversity of a community, and can be a variety of structures (nuclear, extended, etc.) (&quot;New York City K - 8,&quot; 2008-2009).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Essential Understandings:</strong> (U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students will understand that ...</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Our diverse and unique family stories include the important knowledge, customs, language, and traditions that our families have passed on to us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There are many different ways that families live, interact, celebrate traditions, believe, etc. in our community.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Essential Questions:</strong> (Q)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How can we find out the purpose our family stories serve, and why they get passed on from one generation to the next?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How can we find out all the ways that our families reflect the diversity of our community?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge:</strong> (K)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Students will know...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• where their family stories come from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• the customs and traditions in their families</td>
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<tr>
<td>• the holidays celebrated in their families</td>
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<tr>
<td>• the country or countries their families originated from</td>
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<tr>
<td>• the religion (if applicable) their families identify with</td>
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<tr>
<td>• the language(s) their families speak at home</td>
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<tr>
<td>• the jobs their family members do</td>
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<tr>
<td>• the variety of structures a family can consist of, including nuclear, extended, etc.</td>
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</table>
• families come from many different countries
• families speak many different languages
• families celebrate different holidays
• families have different customs and traditions
• families identify with different religions
• different jobs are held in different families
• family can be our blood relative(s), the person or people that we live with, the person or people that married into our family, and/or the person or people that take care of us

Skills: (S)
Students will be able to …

• generate authentic questions for the purpose of doing research
• interview another person for the purpose of obtaining specific information
• create a plan for finding the answers to their questions
• record the answers to their own questions through writing or sketching
• orally tell a meaningful story from their family with a coherent beginning, middle, and end
• compare and contrast their own family stories and portraits with those of their peers
• consider other points of view with respect to family traditions/ways of life
• identify the country or countries their families originate from on a world map
Stage Two-Determining Acceptable Evidence

Culminating Task:

**Empathy - Skit** - For the culminating activity, students will work together in groups of four to create skits based on one group member’s family tradition during a holiday. The teacher will introduce this activity by walking students through a holiday tradition she celebrates with her own family, stopping periodically to have students monitor their own reactions to the teacher’s family’s tradition. The following questions will help stimulate thinking:

- **Do you celebrate this holiday?**
- **If you do, does your family do anything the same or different from what my family does?**
- **If not, do you celebrate something else instead?**
- **Have you ever heard of this holiday/tradition?**
- **Are you learning anything about this holiday from my family’s tradition?**
- **Is there anything I have shared that you’ve had a strong reaction to? Dislike/like?**
- **Why do you think you had a strong reaction? (Like/dislike?)**
- **Why do you think this holiday/tradition is important to my family?**

Students will then share out in a whole-class discussion a holiday that is very important to their family, and what traditions they have for this holiday. The teacher will assign groups and groups will meet to decide which group member will share their family’s holiday for the skit. Students will work on their skits in groups for two days. The teacher will inform each group that their skits should include:

- **your reactions to the holiday traditions you experience at your classmate’s house**
- **your reaction to the holiday they are celebrating (Do you celebrate it? If not, do you celebrate something else instead? Have you ever heard of it? Are you learning anything from “visiting” your friend’s house on this holiday?)**
- **how your classmate explains the holiday traditions to the rest**
of your group

• what you like about this celebration/what you don’t really like - why you might not like it
• why this holiday is important to this classmate’s family
• how your opinion about this experience shifted from the beginning to the end of your “visit” at your friend’s house

Students will perform these skits for their families and the class. The teacher will assess evidence of the Essential Understandings by asking the Essential Questions in a whole-class conversation the day after the skits are performed.

On-going formal and informal evidence: (OE)

**Explain** - *Family Portraits* - Can the student articulate likenesses and differences between their family portraits and those of their peers?

**Interpret** - *Family Stories* - Can the student explain where their family story comes from, and why/how the story has remained in their family?

**Application** - *Read Aloud: The Keeping Quilt* by Patricia Polacco - Can the student explain why the quilt was so important to Anna’s family?

**Perspective** - *What is your family’s favorite meal?* - Can the student understand that there are many different ways to answer this question, and that one family’s “yum” does not have to be their “yuck”? Can the student understand that it’s okay to have different tastes, and that each family has unique traditions that are special to them?
### Stage Three-Learning Plan

#### Week One: UbD Multi-day Lesson Plan

**Monday:**

(10 minutes) **Launch** - Show students a picture of your family, and share with them a memorable family story or tradition.

"Students, I would like to share with you a special photograph. This is a picture of the Christmas tree my five siblings and I decorated each year before Christmas with my mom. It looks a bit different than the typical Christmas tree, doesn’t it? I still have yet to see a tree like this in any other home, but it wasn’t until I was about your age that I realized most families that celebrate Christmas have green trees in their homes. In my home growing up, we decorated a white tree with white lights, pink pearls, silver tinsel, pink candy canes, and hundreds of different pig-themed ornaments that my mother had collected over the years. On top of the tree, my older brother Josh would place a porcelain pink angel. While decorating the tree, we would listen to the Muppets Christmas album on my mom’s record player. This family tradition is one of the sweetest memories I have of my family. Do you have any traditions that your family does each year?"

Ask students to share out a few things about their own families. Tell students that we are beginning a new unit of study on families, and introduce the following Essential Questions:

- **How can we find out the purpose our family stories serve, and why they get passed on from one generation to the next?**
- **How can we find out all the ways that our families reflect the diversity of our community?**

(15 minutes) **Work time** - Either alone or with a partner, have students make a list of things that they already know about families. Offer students that struggle to write either the option to work with a partner, or a paper choice with fewer lines and a box for sketching. While circulating the classroom, offer the following prompts to stimulate thinking:
What people does a family consist of?  
(Possible response: mom, dad, stepmom, stepdad, grandma, grandpa, aunt, uncle, brother, sister, niece, nephew, cousin)

What do families provide for us?  
(Possible response: food, clothes, a home, a bed, love, hugs and kisses, education, they make us behave, they make us do our homework, vacation)

Why are families important?  
(Possible response: They give us things we need. They make us feel safe.)

How are families the same or different?  
(Possible response: Some families have more/less people. Some families live in apartments, some live in houses. Some families speak different languages/come from other countries.)

What are some special things that you do with your family?  
(Possible response: Go to the park, go on vacation, go to the movies, play card games, play video games, eat dinner, cook together)

What roles do people play in families? Who is responsible for all of the different chores (i.e. washing the dishes, cooking, taking out the trash, laundry)?  
(Possible response: Mom does the laundry, dad does the cooking and vacuuming, grandma does the laundry, dad pays the bills, mom pays the bills)

(10 minutes) Share - Bring the class back to the meeting area and have students share out some of the items from their lists. Make a large graphic organizer with columns for each of the items students write responses for and chart their responses. Then, discuss ways to go about finding the answers to the Essential Questions. Ask:

• How can we find out where our family stories come from?
• How can we find out all the different ways of life in our
<table>
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<th>Community?</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tuesday/Wednesday:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(30 minutes on each day) <strong>Individual Activity:</strong> Students create family portraits. Introduce the activity by referencing lists of family members that students made in response to yesterday's question, <em>&quot;What people does a family consist of?&quot;</em> On white paper, students will draft their portraits. When they feel ready, they can use paint, marker, colored pencils, crayon, or paper scraps to further illustrate their portraits.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Thursday:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(5 minutes) <strong>Table Share:</strong> Students share their family portraits with the peers sitting at their table. (Prompt for table discussion: How are our families similar and different from one another?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(10 minutes) <strong>Whole-Class Share:</strong> Each table presents their portraits as a group, and shares key points of their table discussion. [See Stage 2]</td>
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<td><strong>Friday:</strong></td>
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<td>(30 minutes) <strong>Family Experience:</strong> A family member of a student comes in and shares a special experience with the class. The family member may share a unique skill or piece of their professional background with the students. Some examples of this might be: a firefighter family member comes in and does a fire safety presentation, a television producer family member working in political news comes in and speaks with the children about the upcoming presidential election, a professional musician family member comes in and puts on an interactive performance for the children, a theater or television actor family member comes in and does an animated read aloud or interactive skit with the class, a museum educator family member leads the class on a tour of the museum.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(10 minutes) <strong>Class Discussion:</strong> Following the Family Experience, the class meets for a discussion and begins generating a chart titled, &quot;New and Interesting Ideas About Families&quot;.</td>
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### Week Two: UbD Multi-day Lesson Plan

**Monday:**
(15 minutes) **Family Stories:** Share another story from your family with the class. Explain to students that tonight they will go home and ask a family member to share a special family story with them. They will also ask where this family story came from, and why the story has remained in their family. [See attached handout to send home to families.]

**Tuesday:**
(30 minutes) **Individual Activity:** Students use writing and/or illustrating (i.e. sketching, painting) to depict the family stories they collected from their families. Provide a few different paper choices: paper with many lines and a small sketch box, paper with a sketch box and some lines for writing, paper with only a few lines and a large sketch box, and plain paper without lines.

**Wednesday:**
(15 minutes) **Table Share:** Students share their family stories with the peers sitting at their table. (Prompt for table discussion: Discuss where your family stories come from. How they are each unique or similar? Why do you think this story has remained in your family?)

**Thursday:**
(25 minutes) **Read Aloud:** Read Patricia Polacco's *Lightening in a Jar*. After reading, ask students to discuss what questions they have about the book. Allow students to discuss and answer each other’s questions in a circle conversation. If the conversation stagnates, the teacher might ask, “Why were the stories in this family special to them?”

**Friday:**
(30 minutes) **Family Experience:** A family member of a student comes in and shares a special experience with the class. The family member may share a unique skill or piece of their professional background with the students. (See Week 1 for examples)

(10 minutes) **Class Discussion:** Following the Family Experience, the class meets for a discussion and adds on to the chart titled,
“New and Interesting Ideas About Families”.

**Week Three: UbD Multi-day Lesson Plan**

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<th>Monday:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Favorite Family Meal:</strong></td>
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<td>(10 minutes) <strong>Launch:</strong> Share with students one of your family’s favorite meals, and why this meal is so special to you. Have students think about some of the favorite foods their family likes to share together.</td>
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<td>(20 minutes) <strong>Individual Activity:</strong> Students illustrate and write about their favorite family meal and why it is special.</td>
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<th>Tuesday:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Favorite Family Meal:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>(15 minutes) <strong>Table Share:</strong> Students share illustrations of their favorite family meals. (Prompt for table discussion: Is it okay to have different tastes? Does another person’s ‘yum’ have to be my ‘yuck’? Is there one right way?) [See stage 2 for ways to check for understanding.]</td>
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<th>Wednesday:</th>
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<tr>
<td>(25 minutes) <strong>Read Aloud:</strong> Read <em>The Keeping Quilt</em> by Patricia Polacco. Invite students to think about why the quilt was so important to Anna’s family while listening to the story. [Read half of the story and stop to discuss. Ask students what questions they have about Anna, the story, the quilt. Write these questions down on chart paper. Ask students to make predictions about how the story might end. Write these predictions down on chart paper.]</td>
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<th>Thursday:</th>
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<tr>
<td>(10 minutes) <strong>Read Aloud:</strong> As a class, review students’ questions/predictions from the day before. Finish reading <em>The Keeping Quilt</em> by Patricia Polacco.</td>
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</table>
| (15 minutes) **Class Discussion:** As a class, go through each student-generated question and discuss. Confirm or deny predictions that were made. Also ask, “Why was the quilt so important to Anna’s family?” (It was passed through generations of her family, and its’ pieces each told stories that held great...
meaning to her family.) [See Stage 2]

(15 minutes) **Individual Activity:** Draw some sort of artifact, or significant object, that has remained in your family for quite some time.
*You may consider encouraging students to bring in artifacts from their family. In this case, send home a letter explaining the activity to families.*

**Friday:**
(30 minutes) **Family Experience:** A family member of a student comes in and shares a special experience with the class. The family member may share a unique skill or piece of their professional background with the students. (See Week 1 for examples.)

(10 minutes) **Class Discussion:** Following the Family Experience, the class meets for a discussion and adds on to the chart titled, “New and Interesting Ideas About Families”.

<table>
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<th>Week Four: UbD Multi-day Lesson Plan</th>
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<td><strong>Monday:</strong></td>
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<td>(20 minutes) <strong>Introduce skits:</strong></td>
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<td>Explain to the class that we will</td>
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<td>begin working on our culminating activity - - creating skits with our friends based on one group member’s family tradition during a holiday. Walk them through a holiday tradition you celebrate with your own family, and stop periodically while sharing to have them monitor their own reactions to your family’s tradition. The following questions will help stimulate thinking:</td>
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<td>• <em>Do you celebrate this holiday?</em></td>
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<td>• <em>If you do, does your family do anything the same or different from what my family does?</em></td>
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<td>• <em>If not, do you celebrate something else instead?</em></td>
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<td>• <em>Have you ever heard of this holiday/tradition?</em></td>
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<td>• <em>Are you learning anything about this holiday from my family’s tradition?</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>• <em>Is there anything I have shared that you’ve had a strong reaction to? Dislike/like?</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>• <em>Why do you think you had a strong reaction? (Like/dislike?)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>• <em>Why do you think this holiday/tradition is important to my</em></td>
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</table>
Now, have students share out a holiday that is very important to their family, and what traditions they have for this holiday. Assign groups and have groups meet to decide which group member will share their family’s holiday for the skit.

**Tuesday:**

(35 minutes) **Skit:** Students work on their skits in groups.

Explain to students that their skits should include:

- *your reactions to the holiday traditions you experience at your classmate’s house*
- *your reaction to the holiday they are celebrating (Do you celebrate it? If not, do you celebrate something else instead? Have you ever heard of it? Are you learning anything from "visiting" your friend’s house on this holiday?)*
- *how your classmate explains the holiday and accompanying traditions to the rest of your group*
- *what you like about this celebration/what you don’t really like - why you might not like it*
- *Why this holiday is important to this classmate’s family*
- *How your opinion about this experience shifted from the beginning to the end of your “visit” at your friend’s house*

**Wednesday:**

(35 minutes) **Skit:** Students continue to work on their skits in groups.

**Thursday:**

(35 minutes) Students perform skits for their families and the class [See Stage 2 to check for understanding and Appendix for handout to send home to families]

**Friday:**

(20 minutes) **Culminating Class Discussion:** The teacher will assess evidence of the Essential Understandings by asking the Essential Questions. The Essential Questions are:

*How can we find out the purpose our family stories serve, and why they get passed on from one generation to the next?*

*Understanding may be articulated at various levels, and may*
sound something like:
• We found out why our family stories are important by asking our families about these stories. It helped to share them with the class and see what other people’s stories were like.
• The stories keep information about our families so that kids can hear what happened a long time ago.
• The stories keep being told because it’s fun to hear about things that happened to our parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles.
• The stories have words in them in the language that our parents/grandparents speak.

How can we find out all the ways that our families reflect the diversity of our community?
Understanding may be articulated at various levels, and may sound something like:
• When we shared our stories with each other in class, we learned that some of our family stories are very different.
• We found out through these stories that some of us celebrate the same holidays but do it in different ways, and some of us celebrate different holidays.
• Making our family portraits and sharing them helped us see that there are many different kinds of families.
• When we talked about our favorite family meals, we noticed that some foods our families eat come from a special country. Also, a lot of us love the same kinds of food.
• When some of our family members came in to our class to share something special with us, we got to see parents that do different jobs. We learned that some families know a lot about certain things (i.e. music, art), and that each family is an expert in something special.
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<td><strong>Resources for Children</strong></td>
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Applications

This curriculum is aligned to two New York City first grade social studies standards. These standards address the concept of family. Thus, it is intended for six and seven-year-olds. At this age, children are beginning to form their self-concept, and family plays a significant role in this process. Understanding one's family is, therefore, of great importance to children of this age. It is also important that content be connected to their current lived experience. When children share learn about their own families and share information pertaining to their peers' families, this makes the idea of families a concrete idea connecting to the here and now.

This curriculum is especially well suited to the diverse classroom. The topic of families creates a space for children to share their family stories. This breeds the opportunity to listen to one another, noticing individual similarities and differences. In turn, each child's story is valued and children are made to feel like part of the classroom community. This sets the stage for children from backgrounds other than that of the majority to cross cultural boundaries.

The "Modified Understanding by Design" format was used to design this curriculum. This format requires the teacher to first understand who the
learners are in her classroom. The teacher then must take time to understand what depth of understanding looks like with respect to the learning standards that every element of the curriculum is built upon. It is essential the teacher spends time in advance thinking about how understanding of these standards will be achieved through the lessons and activities, as well as how this understanding will be assessed. By considering how depth of understanding will be assessed, the teacher will be able to facilitate the build-up of understanding throughout the unit.
In Social Studies, we are beginning a unit on families. We will be exploring the following questions:

- How can we find out the purpose our family stories serve, and why they get passed on from one generation to the next?
- How can we find out all the ways that our families reflect the diversity of our community?

Throughout this unit, your child will be asking you various questions about your family. He or she will also ask you to share an important family story that has remained in the family for more than one generation. For example, this may be a story about something funny that happened to a family member, or about a long-held family tradition. It would be helpful if your child is prepared to share this family story with the class by (insert date).

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact us at (teacher phone number) or (teacher email address).

Sincerely,

(teacher names)
Greetings Manhattan Charter School First Grade Families!

Come join our class for the culminating activity of our family study. We will be performing skits based on family holiday traditions.

When:

Where:

Questions? Contact (teacher) at (teacher phone number) or (teacher email address).

We hope to see you there!