

Cultures of Innovation: Intersection of Social Studies and STEAM in East Africa, Summer of 2023

Curriculum Units

These lesson plans will contribute to teaching various topics through an African centered approach crafted by the educators participating in the Fulbright Hays Group Projects Abroad in Kenya. Please use the resulting lesson plans as you see best in your classroom or learning environment.

**The content of these curriculum units were developed under a grant from the Fulbright-Hays [Group Projects Abroad \(GPA\)](#), [U.S. Department of Education](#) in partnership with the [Center for African Studies](#) at the University of Pittsburgh. However, this content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, or the Center for African Studies and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.*

Faison Affirmation Project

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I'm here not to learn about Africa, but to learn from Africa. That statement was lifted from the journal I kept during my trip through Kenya in July 2023. Throughout this paper, I will insert excerpts from that journal. Most of the journal excerpts included are reflections that served to inspire or guide my work detailed in this paper.

As an educator I make no assumptions about shared understanding of common terminologies. Therefore, I will devote space to introductory explanations of select key terms and concepts. Each definition is a work in progress. The latest iteration is influenced by Africa, in general, and Kenya, in particular.

Education

Education is the process by which a people transmit content that refines and reproduces the best of themselves. The content of education should liberate people from the restrictions of their environment. Content can be information, knowledge, understanding or wisdom. Education can be formal or informal. Formal education can be lessons, ceremonies, or rituals. Of these three, lessons are least effective in that they are episodic. Rituals are most effective because they are reoccurring. Also, rituals usually call for active participation.

Sage Philosophy

Accumulated wisdom makes up Sage Philosophy. Sage Philosophy is the expressed thoughts of wise members of a given community. Sage Philosophy

is deeply rooted in African Culture. Those expressed thoughts serve as cardinal beliefs and wisdom of a community, providing guidance of all life matters.

The Faison Affirmation Project had three intents:

- *Affirming Identity: to see yourself as part of a legacy that is adequate to meet the challenges on our quest toward freedom*
- *Building Community: As we continue to think about education as a pathway to liberation, we turn our focus to connection as the antidote. We intend to facilitate our students connecting horizontally (with peers and community) and vertically (legacy and nature).*
- *Cultivating Agency: The third of our intents is to cultivate agency. We hope our students grow to be actively responsible for their community of self. Agency in the primary grades evolves into activism as they mature into adolescents. Ancient Egyptians used the term “Serudj Ta” to refer to the act of restoration. They believed that humans are co-sustainers and co-repairers of the multiverse that is made up of Divine, natural and social elements.*

Harambee

July 9: Why is “harambee” everywhere? It’s on the flag and the national seal...I wonder what it means here? (in Kenya).

Harambee in Kenya means “Let’s pull together”. It is the philosophy that drives the community to work together to solve its’ problems at the local level. President Jomo Kenyatta called for “Harambee” as he warned Kenyans that the national government had no resources to help local communities.

In America “Harambee” refers to an event or gathering. The event or gathering is a gesture of solidarity and includes rituals that promote unity. Our Affirmation Project definition of Harambee is: Let’s come together. This definition refers both to the adults coming together to co-create the Affirmation Project, as well as the morning gathering of the grade level community that became our ritual.

The parts of our Harambee celebration include:

- Narratives
- Songs
- Books
- Proverbs
- Recognitions

Narratives

Narratives are oral and written literature with an emancipatory intent. Narratives answer: Who we are? What is our origin? What are our inspirations? They are also counter stories, visionary stories, resistance stories to unlearn the untruth.

These narratives may be books, songs, myths, folk tales and/or proverbs, along with any other part of the written/oral text tradition originating in Africa.

Songs

Every morning, we begin our affirmation harambee with a song. Songs are important and can be a form of narrative. The songs are designed to invoke a spirit of self and communal worth. Examples of songs we use are listed below.

We created an original affirmation song titled “Faison Affirmation Song”. This is a link to the video made with Faison students:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-le2MkafVZc>

These are other videos we use to affirm identity:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qe_5XP5wslo

“The Affirmations Song” by Snoop Dogg

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTGiKYqkOgY>

“Young, Gifted and Black” by Nina Simone

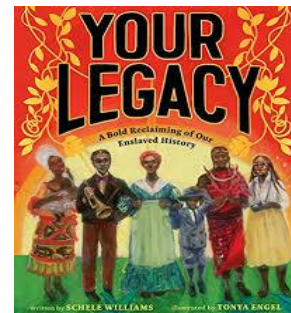
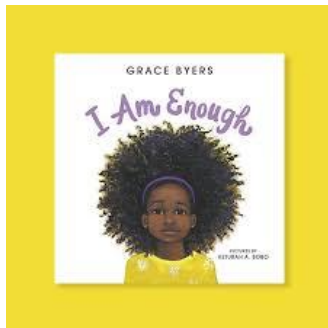
Books

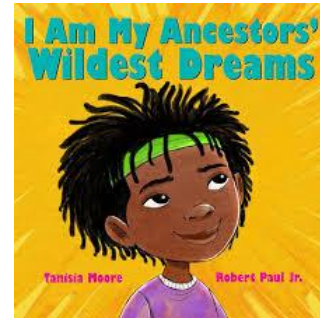
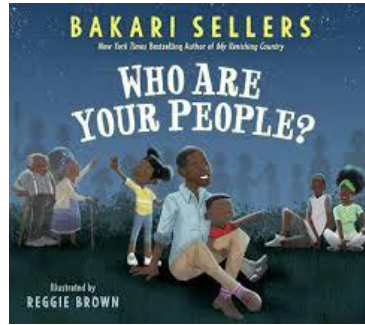
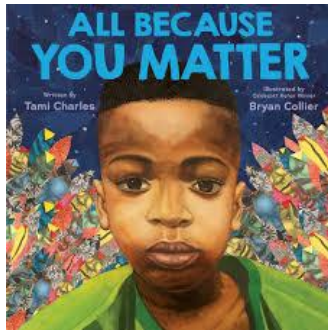
The idea of including books into our affirmation project comes from Chike Akua. He says that our criteria and intent for including books should be to “reintroduce the mother wit, wisdom and traditional morals and values that have centered and sustained us for generations” (Chike Akua, 2005).

Picture Books

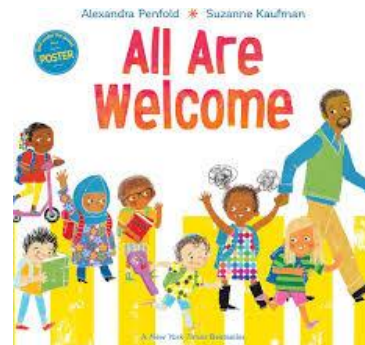
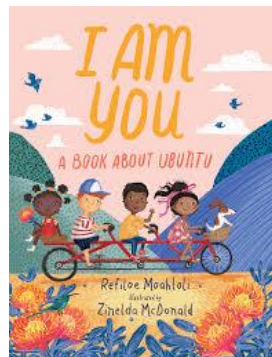
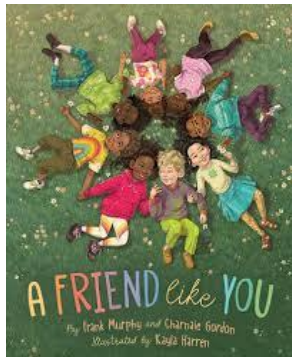
Picture books serve as an important anchor of our Affirmation Project. We use picture books during the morning harambee, as well as during the day in the classroom. We have used the following resource as a guide to help select picture books: <https://socialjusticebooks.org/guide-for-selecting-anti-bias-childrens-books/> .

Example of books used to affirm identity are:

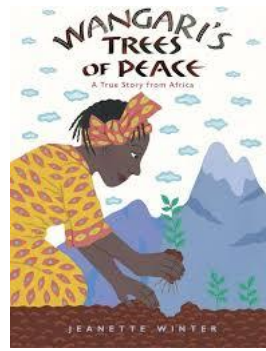
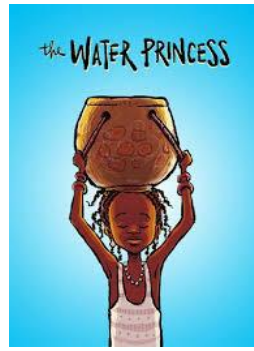
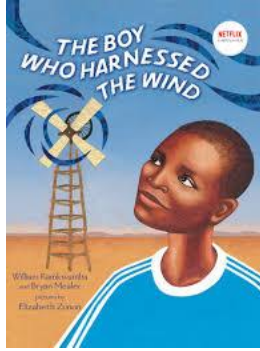




Examples of books used to build community are:

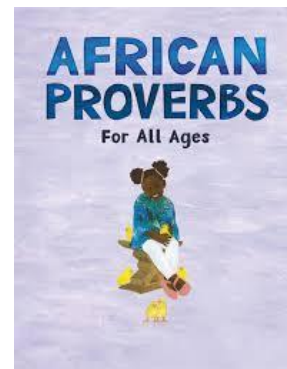
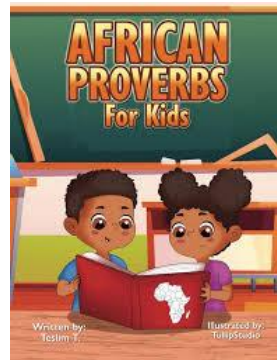
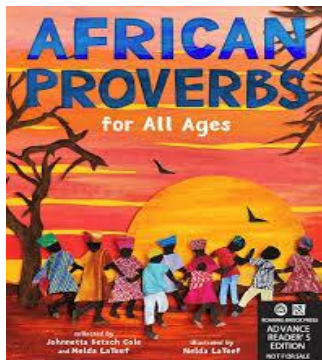


Examples of books used to cultivate agency are:



Proverbs

Another component of our morning harambee is proverbs. We have a proverb of the week. The weekly proverb is introduced by a teacher at the beginning of the week. The following days the student will recite the proverb as a group and may offer an explanation of how the proverb applies to our lives today. There are many sources of proverbs. Our main source of proverbs are as follows:



Proverbs are chosen because they assist in our efforts to affirm identity, build community or cultivate agency.

Some examples of proverbs we have used include:

- There are no shortcuts to the top of the palm tree.
- No matter how full the river, it still wants to grow.
- Knowledge without wisdom is like water in the sand.

Recognitions

Recognitions are public acknowledgements of actions that align with our efforts to affirm identity, build community and cultivate agency.

Recognitions facilitate a sense of collectivism. Individual behaviors are embraced by the collective. We move from “I did” to “we are”.

The recognition component of our morning harambee has two important effects. First, the public recognition increases desirable behaviors at the individual level. The social approval and reinforcement increases self-esteem. Secondly, public recognitions, especially peer recognitions, foster a sense of belonging. It is a public way for us to acknowledge we are making progress towards our group goals. This helps foster higher group esteem.

Call-and-response is a form of interaction between a speaker and an audience in which the speaker’s statements are punctuated by a response from the listeners.

This is how we use the call and response format for our recognitions:

Speaker: I have a recognition!

Group: Recognize!

Speaker: I have a recognition!

Group: Recognize!

Speaker: I would like to recognize Damian for wearing his black history T-shirt.

Speaker: I have a recognition

Group: Recognize

Speaker: I have a recognition

Group: Recognize

Speaker: I would like to recognize Zola for inviting me into the group to eat lunch yesterday.

Wrap-up

This effort began as a project. It grew into a routine and became a ritual. Every product is the result of a process even though the process never ends. Every process results in a product even if the process never ends. In this equation the Faison Affirmation Project is the process while agentic students are the product. The hope is that this project becomes an institution that re-occurs.