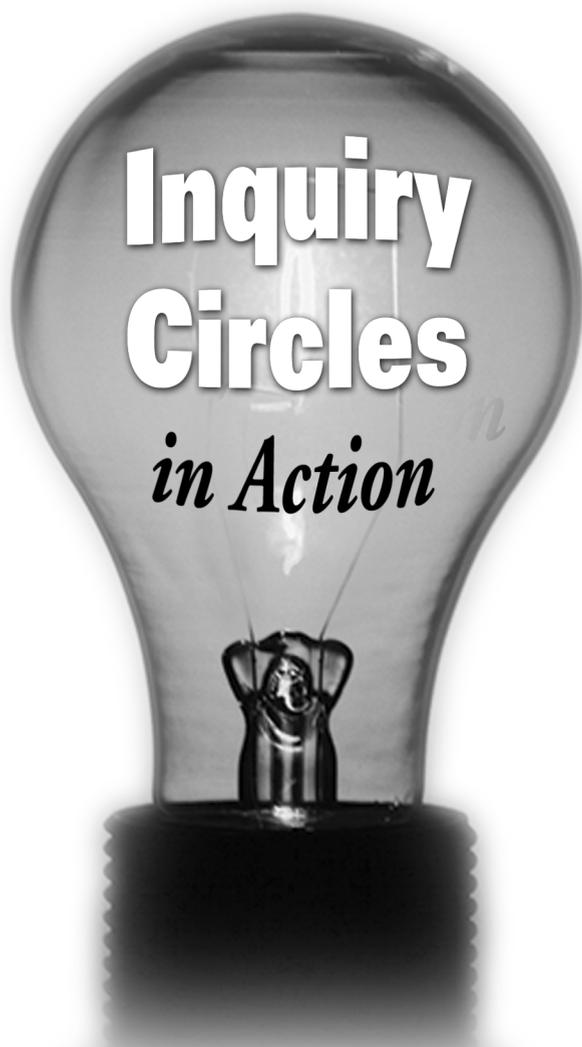


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INTERMEDIATE

INQUIRY: *Slavery and Child Labor*

—HOLLY OCCHIPINTI AND MICHELLE SCHIRMER, OAKLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, OAKLEY, CALIFORNIA

January is African American History Month, and in most American schools, this ushers in a unit on Martin Luther King and other figures in black history. The Oakley Union School district is no different, and fourth-grade teammates Holly Occhipinti and Michelle Schirmer wanted to give kids a genuine appreciation of Martin Luther King and the African American experience. They hoped that as kids began to study slavery before and during the Civil War, they would make connections to related contemporary issues around the theme of slavery and discrimination, helping them to recognize how historic events and ideas thread their way through time and impact our lives even many years later.

Ascertaining Background Knowledge

Holly and Michelle knew that one of the best ways to engage kids in a new inquiry study is to have them interact with compelling images, whether these show polar bears struggling to swim from one shrinking ice floe to another, capture meteors careening through space, or depict aspects of human slavery. So to prepare for the unit, Holly went to Google Images (<http://images.google.com>), clicked on *Images* in the upper-left-hand corner of the screen, and typed in *Civil War slavery* to find a plethora of striking images that represented different aspects of slavery.

Some were stark and disturbing: handcuffs; the filthy, crowded interior of a slave ship; a whiplashed, scarred human back. Others were more confusing, especially for kids who lacked the background knowledge about the topic: a slave auction, an abolitionist speaking in church, a copy of the Emancipation Proclamation. But Holly believed that all of these images would intrigue the kids and draw them into the topic. She printed them and pasted them onto large, individual posters with space ready for kids to place Post-its after jotting their thinking. On the first day of the unit, the posters were set up around the room.

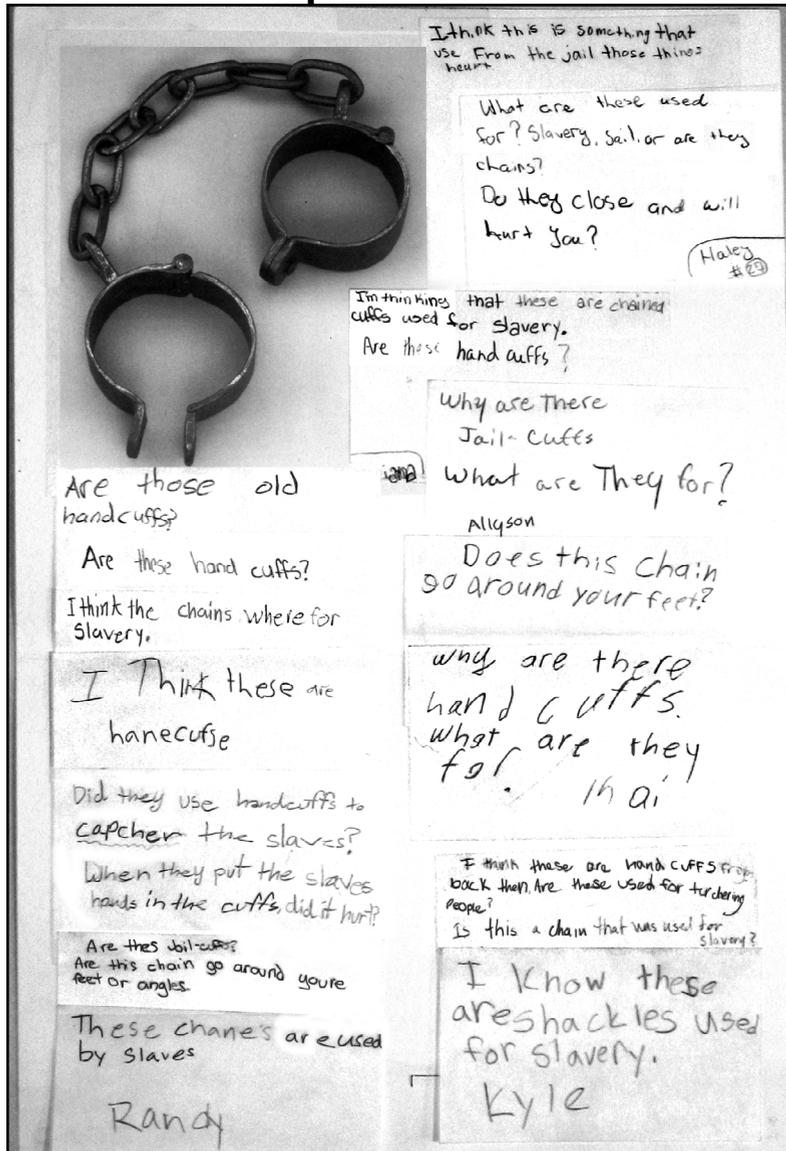
Holly and Michelle began by gathering both of their classes around them and leading a short discussion about their expectations. At this point, their primary objective was to ascertain how much background knowledge the kids had about slavery and the African American experience. They let the kids self-select into groups of five or six, and then suggested that they move from one poster to another, view the image, write their thoughts on Post-its, and place them on the posters near the images. They hoped this interactive viewing would prompt lots of thoughts and, most importantly, lots of questions.

Kids wandered group by group from one poster to another and jotted their thinking on Post-its with their names or initials. Holly and Michelle understood that it is imperative that we know the baseline background knowledge of individual kids as well as the whole group when we launch a curricular inquiry project. When



See Lesson 11, "Turn and Talk," p. 126.

they read the Post-its later, they found that about 60 percent of the kids had some background knowledge about these images and could connect them to slavery. About 10 percent had a great deal of background knowledge, and about 30 percent of the kids had practically no knowledge at all about slavery, the Civil War, or the historical African American experience.



At the conclusion of the forty-five-minute period, Holly and Michelle gathered the kids back together in a large group and had them turn and talk about their thoughts and questions. After a vibrant discussion, Holly and Michelle asked: "Knowing what you know about your teachers, why do you think we would put these images out in the classroom for all of you to view?" One child who had the background knowledge to understand what these images represented suggested that perhaps they were going to be studying slavery. Holly and Michelle concurred and explained that they were embarking on a study of African American history and that they wanted everyone in the class to get educated about slavery and the African American experience, so they could better understand why we now honor Martin Luther King and other historic black figures. They hoped that when they finished this inquiry, everyone would better understand where Dr. King's dream came from and why he was so passionate about equality for all. "Education is the only way that we can begin to understand," Holly stated emphatically.



See Lesson 7, "Stop, Think, and React to Information," p. 122.

Thinking About Information and Building Knowledge

Holly and Michelle now had a good grasp of the knowledge base of both individual students and the class as a whole. They recognized that the next step was to build all of the kids' background knowledge so they could learn more and ask more thoughtful questions, which would lead to a more fulfilling inquiry. The next week

found Holly and Michelle continuing to build background knowledge by sharing information in many different forms and having kids interact with it. They gave each student a research notebook with pockets to collect and hold all of their work. They showed a video on the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Kids gathered with clipboards as the teachers stopped the video at various points and had them turn and talk and jot their thoughts, stopping, thinking, and reacting to the video just as they would a piece of text a teacher might read. In their discussion, they found that even though the Constitution called for equality, it was written by white men, many of whom were slave owners. In fact, the kids discovered that the original Constitution did not guarantee equality to all, not to African Americans, not to Native Americans, not to women. Kids were stunned by this discovery, and a thoughtful discussion of the nature of constitutional amendments ensued. The kids learned that it was the amendments that attempted to secure equality for all. Holly and Michelle were delighted that the kids' questions had prompted such a big idea. What a bonus that these kids now had a better understanding of the Constitution as a result of their interaction with the images and the video.

Asking and Answering Questions

To follow up, Michelle conducted an interactive read-aloud with *Now Let Me Fly* by Dolores Johnson, a powerful picture book about the life of a woman who was captured as a child in Africa and became a slave on an American plantation, where ultimately her family was broken apart when members were sold to other plantation owners. This fictional account provides a quite thorough, albeit frightening, overview

of the tragedy of human slavery. Michele modeled her thinking, shared her inner voice, and then asked kids to write down their reactions as she continued reading the story. By the time they finished their discussion, they had synthesized their thinking into a big question: How and why did slavery begin in the United States?



See Lesson 2, "Listen to Your Inner Voice," p. 117.

Did these auctions cause conflict?

THE SLAVE TRADE

In colonial times (the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), America was rich in natural resources such as good farmland, but it did not have the number of workers that were needed to grow crops. Although there were some poor Europeans who paid for their journey to America by their labor, the increasing wealth came mainly from African slaves. These slaves were thought to be the cheapest and most reliable source of labor possible, partly because their skin color set them apart from their masters and made escape more difficult for them than for European servants. Also, they did not die from "Old World" diseases such as measles, which had killed many Native Americans when they caught it from white people.

The work of African slaves helped to make America rich. Some slaves were free men, and their help was badly needed because it was difficult to lure skilled European workers to America. The slaves also taught their owners many of the secrets of cotton and rice cultivation, without which they could not have made money from their farming.

Right: A slave dealer's business card, wallet, and letter with details of a sale.

Slave Dealers

The transportation of African slaves into the United States ended in 1808, but the children are grand-children of slaves in America were not given their freedom, they and their children were sold slaves.

Because there were not new slaves arriving from Africa, people who captured slaves had to go to the Americas, and a large market developed in the number of plantations in the Upper South (Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and North Carolina) declined and lawmakers in those areas no longer needed as many workers. They began to sell slaves of their children. The slaves then sold the slaves to plantations in the Deep South, where the number of plantations was rapidly growing.

Left: A notice advertising a slave auction. Among several slaves advertised for sale is "A Negro woman, accustomed to all kinds of housework. It is a good plain cook, and excellent dairy maid, washer and iron. She has four children, and a girl of about 13 years of age, another of seven, a boy about five, and an infant 11 months old. One of the buyers to be had with the mother, the others separately if it best suits the purchaser."

Kaylee's responses to the "Slave Trade" article.



See Lesson 5, “Annotate Text and Leave Tracks of Thinking,” p. 120.

To help them keep that question in mind, Holly wrote it at the top of a chart. She then followed up with a section from a nonfiction title, *Daily Life on a Southern Plantation 1853*, by Paul Erickson, which she believed would give kids quite a bit of information related to their big question. She made copies so kids could jot their thoughts and questions right on the pages. After Holly modeled reading a few paragraphs with that question in mind and annotating her thinking, she sent kids into their inquiry circles with instructions to read the piece together, keeping that question in mind, have a discussion about slavery, and jot their thoughts and questions in the margins. Each group struggled to comprehend the idea that humans were sold. When they discovered that there was an actual slave trade, where people made money by selling other people, they were appalled (see Kylee’s annotations reproduced here).

To gain further understanding, one group went online to find more images. Another focused on maps of free states, slave states, and agriculture. Each group read anything they could get their hands on. As they talked, read, and viewed to answer why slavery had happened, they slowly began to understand that some Africans betrayed and sold other Africans for money, that ship captains were paid a good deal of money to transport Africans to America, and that plantation owners bought slaves so they could increase their own wealth by using an unpaid labor force. The kids came to realize that money was at the center of the issue of slavery. This was a big idea that almost none of them had understood before this exploration. When we teach with the big ideas in mind, kids learn to uncover them.



See Lesson 10, “Synthesize the Information,” p. 125.

Demonstrating Understanding: Summarizing and Synthesizing Information

From that point on, kids continued to immerse themselves in Civil War slavery topics and themes, reading, talking, and viewing extensively. Haley’s reaction to the video is shown here. Thinking that it might be helpful for the kids to have a more personal experience with the time and the circumstances of slavery, Michelle and Holly had them form picture book literature circles where they read and responded to books about kids in slavery—books like *Minty: A Story of Young Harriet Tubman* (Alan Schroeder), *Henry’s Freedom Box* (Ellen Levine), *Almost to Freedom* (Vaunda Micheaux Nelson), *Nettie’s Trip South* (Ann Turner), and *Journey to Freedom: A Story of the Underground Railroad* (Courtney C. Wright). (See responses to picture book literature circles on the following page.)

Holly and Michelle are big fans of picture book lit circles for a variety of reasons. First, most fourth-grade lit circle groups can finish a thirty-two page picture book rather quickly and thus start talking about the entire book soon thereafter. Second, even though they are short, many contemporary picture books give kids plenty of big ideas and themes to think about. And finally, book groups often end up reading every one of the available picture books since the time commitment is so much less than a novel.

Haley # 27
Valkyrie # 28

Reaction

Underground Railroad Video!

What were they?

ABOLITIONIST - People who fought against slavery

Was Nat Turner a slave? Was he ever caught? or did he escape?

Fugitive - A run away slave.

Who was the president back then did they have one? Why didn't they stop this?

Was everyone caught or did some hide?

Maybe they would beat people if they didn't tell where they ran away to. (other people)

Conductors? - persons in a certain place who helped fugitives

Stations? - a place where fugitive slaves went on the underground railroad.

It must of been pretty risky to escape.

William Still -

1937 - Is that guy against slaves or wants to help?

Was it only black people who helped save the slaves or was there white people to? I know I would help!

Thomas Garrett - (Quaker) (Plain) did not like slavery all about equality

John Brown - brave guy

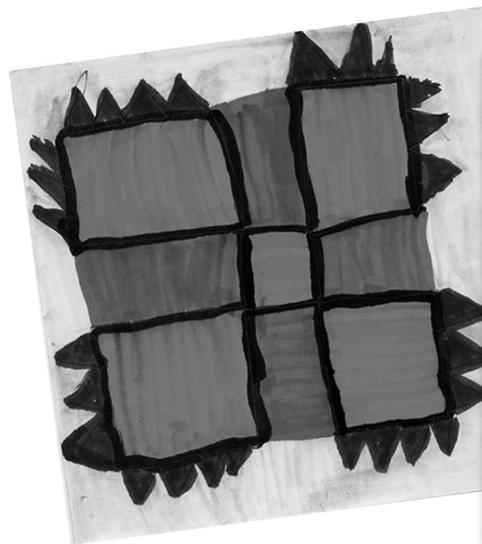
White people helped alot

* abolitionist - person who fought against slavery

Throughout that week and the following one, the kids continued to expand their understanding of slavery. Holly did a think-aloud with Bettye Stroud's *The Patchwork Path*, a book that explains how Underground Railroad conductors sewed codes into quilts that helped slaves escape. Fascinated with the codes and quilts, one small group designed and drew their own quilt squares and wrote brief comments to demonstrate their understanding (one of their quilt squares is shown below). Another group wrote letters from the perspective of a slave who could read and write (see Kylee's letter on the following page).

So what did these lessons, readings, responses, and experiences have in common? What was the shared thread running through all of them? The answer: interaction—interacting with images, videos, texts, the teacher, and, most importantly, with each other. Holly and Michelle's goal of building background knowledge about slavery succeeded because they modeled their own thinking and learning and fostered student-to-student interaction. It was interaction that led kids to the discoveries they made and the insights they gained. Their content

knowledge soared because their teachers filled the room with great resources that engaged the kids, caused them to think deeply, and encouraged interaction.



"The Underground R.R."

By Mariana Reis

The Underground R.R. was not an actual railroad. It wasn't underground either. The meaning is "secret". Slaves would escape from their plantation and go north to freedom. After 1850 they couldn't just go to another state they had to go to Canada. Sometimes it was in underground tunnels though. The R.R. used codes to get to a safe house. A safe house is a house that the people that own the house keep fugitive slaves. Some of the codes are a quilt on the porch or a lantern in the window. That's what I think is fascinating about The Underground Railroad.

Thinking about Minty

George Mondragon #16
Minty is too young to be in the fields, she's only eight years old. At what time do they eat. I think that an overseer might be a more of a chief.

George Mondragon #16
I'm learning about minty having a hard time being a young slave. minty wants freedom for her and her family. Who wouldnt?

George Mondragon #16
I think minty said loneliness. where does minty sleep? where will minty go if she escapes? ~ may be she'll find a house to sleep ~

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Name Kyle # 11
The Journey to Freedom ~ A Story of the Underground Railroad-
by Courtni C. Wright

Choose a sticky note that represents your deepest thinking and place it in the box. Then expand on your thinking.

why was the male slave more money? Is it because he is more stronger?

Text/Quote or describe what was happening in the poster
The slave owner read a wanted poster to the slaves and said "Don't you try to run off now!"

Question: Why were the mens laves 500\$ dollars and the woman and children only 350\$ dollars?

Thinking: was it because the men were stronger and able to carry more stuff?

Was your question answered? no If not was there enough evidence in the text to support your thinking? no What was the evidence?

Picture book literature circle responses.

January 8, 1742

Dear Sally,
It's hard not to leave a sister anymore. I hate to say I told you so, but if you hadn't tried to escape, you would still be here where you're safe with me. Tonight I am kitchen duty all by myself. I'm thinking about poisoning the master's dinner, so I can escape! Today I got whipped for giving the master his tea too late. I'm lucky one of the old house servants taught me how to read and write, otherwise I couldn't write to you at all. Oh no masters coming, gotta go bye!

Sincerely,
Kylee

Kaylee's letter from the perspective of a literate slave.



Child Labor: A Related Inquiry Emerges

By the end of the second week, to take stock of where they were, Holly and Michelle gathered the whole class together for a guided discussion. The conversation focused on many aspects of slavery, but the discussions were more thoughtful because the kids were better able to personalize the slavery experience, having read so many books from the perspective of children in slavery. They co-constructed an anchor chart where they listed personal feelings and experiences they would have if they were trapped in slavery: sadness, hunger, poverty, confusion, fear, anger, hopelessness, emotional and physical pain, loneliness, invisibility, and cruelty all came into play.

After giving them the opportunity to share these emotions and feelings publicly, Holly asked them, “Now that you have talked to each other, heard stories, read books in lit circles, watched videos, written responses, and generally built a lot of knowledge about slavery, what do you still wonder about it? Do you have any lingering questions?” Eric blurted out, “Is there still slavery today?” Murmurs of “That’s what I was wondering, too” and “Darn, he took my question!” filled the room. Both Holly and Michelle noticed that there didn’t appear to be a single child who did not wonder about this. These thoughtful teachers were gratified, because one of their goals with history topics is for kids to relate historic information to contemporary issues.

A truly great thing about curricular inquiry is that kids are far better prepared to ask deep, expansive, important questions because they have built the necessary background knowledge around a topic. You simply can’t ask a very good question about something you know little about. But when the whole class studies a common topic in an interactive way—working in small groups, jotting thoughts about the text, viewing images and videos and responding to them—they really learn about it. Now that this group of fourth graders had a pretty thorough grasp of Civil War–era slavery, they could connect it more seamlessly to contemporary life. And so began their related inquiry to discover the answer to their biggest question so far—is there slavery today?

The next day, Michelle and Holly facilitated a discussion on human rights. Michelle began by asking kids to turn and talk about what rights slaves had. After a few moments, kids concurred that slaves had no rights on plantations or even under the Constitution, that slaves were considered to be the property of their owners. Holly unfurled a large poster with the title “What Are Your Rights?” She asked them to turn and talk about that question. The general consensus on rights was unclear. Although the kids knew they were not property, they really didn’t know exactly what their rights were. After all, they were kids! What rights did they have? Mostly they knew what they couldn’t do: they couldn’t vote; they couldn’t drive; they couldn’t drink alcohol; they couldn’t even leave school in the middle of the day without permission.



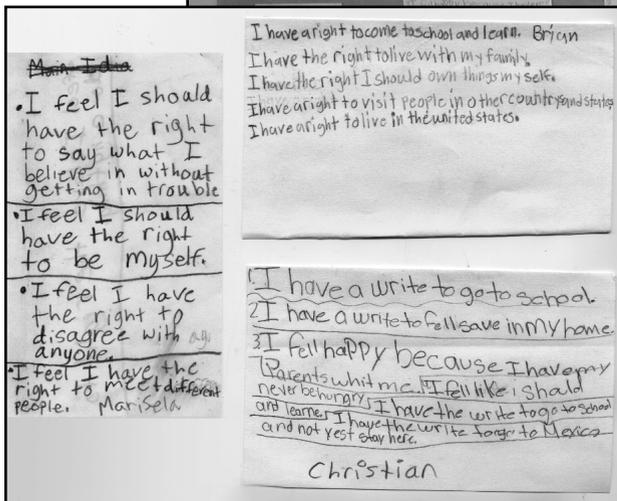
See Lesson 11, “Turn and Talk,” p. 126.

So Holly chose to read *For Every Child: The Rights of the Child in Words and Pictures*. Published in association with UNICEF, this book presents fourteen of the fifty-four principles adopted at the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Those rights include a child's right to a name, to survival, and to education. They also include the right to protection against exploitation, abuse, and the forcible separation from a parent. In sum, the convention on children's rights declared that kids had the right to be safe.

As she read the book aloud, Holly had the kids stop, think, and talk. As they shared their personal stories, several kids expressed their own lack of safety. Some began to reflect on rights they did not have because of family income levels or broken relationships. When one child shared, "I feel I should have the right to deny



Students' written beliefs are added onto the large chart. (Below, see a close-up of a few of their Post-its.





See Lesson 5, "Annotate Text:
Leave Tracks of Thinking,"
p. 120.

foster care," the students were able to talk about how helpless they feel as children in a world controlled by adults. Obviously, this saddened Michelle and Holly, and they hoped that their investigation would give some kids more tools to control their own lives. After reading the book aloud, Holly and Michelle asked the kids to write down what they believed were their rights on Post-its and place them on the large chart (pictured on next page).

The book mentioned that there are kids in the world who are not allowed to go to school because they have to work. The fourth graders seemed puzzled, so Michelle asked them, "How many of you have heard about child labor? What do you think that is? Turn and talk about that." Holly and Michelle soon discovered that the kids knew next to nothing about child labor, although several did believe that child labor was some sort of slavery since kids were forced to do it and not allowed to go to school.

"Since you are all so interested, we are going to study how slavery looks today. It doesn't necessarily look like it did during the Civil War, but I think you are right that there is still slavery. And it will help us a lot to understand slavery now if we think about slavery back then," Holly added. The next day, the teachers followed up by having the small groups choose among three articles on child labor from *The Comprehension Toolkit* (Harvey and Goudvis 2005) and *Toolkit Texts* (Harvey and Goudvis 2007). The kids read and annotated the articles and then discussed them in their inquiry circles. Spirited discussion ensued—and the students were outraged. (See an annotated article from *Toolkit Texts* on the next page.)

"There is slavery today. Child labor is slavery!" Martha announced as the kids nodded in agreement.

"It seems as if we are getting an answer to our big question about whether there is slavery today. So what other questions do you have, now that you know this kind of child slavery exists today?" Holly prodded. Questions poured out and Holly recorded them on an anchor chart:

When and how will child labor stop?
Can we stop child labor?
Why do adults let it happen?
Why do humans get treated like this?
How long have children been working like this when they should be in school?
Who teaches kids to do what they do when they work?
Why doesn't the government stop this madness?
Why is there such a thing as child labor?

global? does that mean all over the world?



As Americans, we are also connected to global child labor, directly and indirectly. About 70 percent of child labor takes place in agriculture. This includes the harvesting of bananas in Central America and cocoa beans for chocolate in West Africa and the picking of coffee beans and tea leaves in Latin America and Africa. Some of these agricultural products end up on our supermarket shelves. For better or for worse, we are connected to some of the most unacceptable forms of child labor.

Besides agriculture, what other forms of child labor exist? The list is long, and we can only cite a few categories, to give an idea of the scope of the problem. Some children are used to promote unlawful activities such as the drug trade. Some children are kidnapped and forced to become child soldiers. Others are abducted to perform labor similar to slavery, such as working as servants in other people's homes. Other children, especially those orphaned by HIV/AIDS, are left to fend for themselves on the streets. These are the children who labor from dawn until dusk in dangerous conditions and live without knowing where their next meal will come from.

These 246 million children suffer from some of the cruelest human rights violations on a daily basis.

Adapted from an article by Chivy Sok

Handwritten notes around the text include: "Farmily", "Dangerous", "there might be child labor", "Drug", "I don't know how or what is wrong", "Children should not be soldiers! Could be killed", "So Bad", and "We have to stop child labor".

Not only are children working rather than going to school, but it is not uncommon in Africa to find children doing dangerous work, such as welding.

Child Labor through the Years

- 1974** The United States Congress created the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act.
- 1989** The United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The convention asks that all member nations protect their children's rights.
- 1995** Twelve-year-old Craig Kielburger founded Free the Children, an international organization of children who help other children.
- 2001** The international global movement Say Yes for Children began to gain millions of members worldwide.
- 2004** The first Children's World Congress on child labor is held in Florence, Italy. A follow-up session is held in India the following year.
- 2006** As many as 250 million children are being held in bondage and working as slaves around the world.



Handwritten notes at the bottom of the page include: "We have to stop child labor", "1974 #2", and "2/28/08".

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Holly and Michelle suggested that kids form groups around a question that interested them, either from the anchor chart or of their own choosing. Five groups coalesced around the following questions:

- What are the basic rights needed for survival?
- What are the necessary human rights?
- Why might someone be denied basic human rights?
- Why is there slavery today?
- What can we do about modern slavery?

Holly and Michelle reminded each group to keep their own question in mind, as well as the final question on the list: What can we do about modern slavery? Pointing out that the active use of knowledge is the goal of studying, questioning, and learning, they stressed that the culmination of thoughtful inquiry may well involve taking action.

Over the next week as kids worked together in inquiry circles to

research and answer their questions, Holly and Michelle continued to share texts, materials, and websites of interest and to facilitate discussions about books, videos, and images with the whole class when they came upon resources they thought all kids should hear or read. They shared a study of child labor done by the International Labor Organization (known as the ILO study), which found that there are 246 million child laborers worldwide. Kids wrote their reactions and questions to the ILO study. Holly and Michelle modeled and then facilitated child labor/slavery role plays so each inquiry circle could engage in a role play related to its study. Each day at the end of the period, the inquiry circles came together to share new ideas and questions with the whole class. Sharing sessions provide great opportunities for new learning. During one sharing session, Kylee explained that she saw a connection to Civil War slavery. "I just realized something. Child labor is all about the money! That's what we learned about Civil War slavery. Slavery happens because people want money. Child labor happens for the same reason." Michelle and Holly, recognizing Kylee's connection as an important insight,

guided a discussion to make sure that all the kids had a chance to think about what Kylee had said. Curricular inquiry gives teachers the chance to shine a light on big ideas as they emerge from kids' thoughts and questions.

Taking Action

After the kids got a serious handle on child labor and modern slavery and answered their own questions, Holly and Michelle co-constructed an anchor chart with the class to address the larger question for all to consider: what can we do about modern slavery? Having learned about the realities of child labor in the world, these fourth graders were ready to do something about it. The teachers shared several different ways to take action.

Activism—Doing something specific

Awareness—Educating others

Aid—Contributing your own resources

Holly and Michelle called these three components an “action path” and gave specific examples of all three. Then they suggested the kids work together to decide by which path they would actively use the knowledge they had gained. Most chose to offer aid. One group decided to have a bake sale and donate the money they earned



to a foundation they located on the Internet that supports efforts to oppose child labor throughout the world (International Labor Rights Forum, www.labor-rights.org). Another group planned a car wash to raise money and donate it to the same organization. And, as we recounted in Chapter 5, yet another group made sandwich boards explaining the problem of child labor and asking passersby to learn about the issues, to think and care about exploited children.

But even after taking these actions, the kids wanted to do more. Join us at the website and see

how these fifth graders connected to the wider community of concerned people fighting child labor and created a quilt to benefit impoverished children with direction from a nonprofit group called morethanwarmth.org. Their work with More Than Warmth represented an extraordinary culmination to a thoughtful, in-depth, self-selected curricular inquiry that resulted in a need to take action.



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