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THE USE OF CONCEPT FORMATION STUDY GUIDES FOR SOCIAL STUDIES READING MATERIALS

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When one contemplates the world in bold broad strokes he visualizes that world in concepts rather than a world of minute objects, isolated events, and single situations. Even in childhood we conceptualize our world because concepts help us to organize and to synthesize large amounts of information. By nature, once a key concept has been acquired, we use it at different levels of abstraction, complexity, and generality, depending upon our stage of maturation. One such key concept, using the Hilda Taba ¹ generic model, would be "conflict." When someone tells us that he has been involved in a conflict, he is not relating his actual experience, but a highly simplified and generalized version of it. Conflict can be physical or verbal. It can represent anything from a one-on-one situation to a multi-national feud over oil.

When kids read social studies materials and they are told to identify the key concepts, they often have a great deal of trouble in abstracting the concepts presented. The importance of using language appropriate for a student's reading level should be underscored, because many of the problems connected with concept formation are caused by linguistic barriers. It should be noted that little empirical evidence has been produced concerning the best way to sequence concept formation in the classroom. De Cecco makes this point, "as yet we have no studies of the concepts and principles with which most American children enter school and of the concepts they should learn first and those they should learn later." ²

Having examined the three generic models of De Cecco, Gagne, and Taba for concept attainment, it would seem that it is the critical attributes of concepts that students and teachers share in common which enable them to meaningfully discuss a particular passage of social studies reading material.

We as teachers ask students to read social studies materials for many purposes. Probably the most common purpose for requiring the reading of these materials involves the acquisition, storage, and retrieval of what we believe to be essential information. The reading process, for this purpose, can be structured as a two-step procedure. Each student, after reading a passage, will acquire bits and pieces of information which are lower-order concepts. These low-order concepts are best described as main and organizing ideas. Next the student must categorize these main and organizing ideas from the passage under a more inclusive higher-order key

concept which then permits the transfer to different levels of abstraction, complexity, and generality.

This article presents one way to systematically approach the problem of extracting the key concepts and their main and organizing ideas from such reading materials through the use of concept formation study guides. A sample use of a study guide to help fourth or fifth grade children in concept formation follows.

Let us assume that the year's study will be, "People in Communities Around the World." Next, let us say that one unit of the year's work will deal with, "Nomads of the World," and that we wish to spend about a week on the "Bedouin" nomads of Saudi Arabia. Borrowing from the Taba generic model, the student's study of the Bedouin nomads will center on the key concept of "interdependence," as this concept is central to the study of people in communities.³ The main idea we wish to use in support of "interdependence" is: interaction between a people and the physical and social environment which surrounds them influences the way they meet the basic needs of life. The organizing idea for the week's study on the Bedouins would be: the Bedouin people change their physical and social surroundings by frequent moves in order to make a living in the desert. The daily lesson plan presented here will feature an original reading passage which follows:

THE MOVE TO WINTER GRASSLANDS

Marzug was ten years old and he was now able to herd camels, goats and sheep, and do a man's work. He was very proud of his family for they came from the Al'Azab clan who are noted as one of the most far-ranging peoples of all the Bedouin nomads. Other clans, who never travel as far as the Al'Azab, call them, "nomads of the nomads."⁴

In a meeting the clan decided that they would move to a winter pasture area known as the Rubayda, northeast of the capital city of Riyadh on the northern tip of the Empty Quarter. Word had been passed by Oil field workers that good rains had fallen there and that winter grasses were beginning to sprout. It would be a journey of some 700 miles across the Empty Quarter and it would take some 90 to 100 days for all the parts of the caravans to complete the trip. The slowest group would be the herders and their animals, for they can only make 5 to 7 miles a day since the herds have to be grazed and watered along the way.

Things have changed a little since oil was discovered in Saudi Arabia. The advanced party of old men and women, who prepare camp sites along the way, now ride in an old pick-up truck. Rubber inner tubes from oil truck tires have replaced the smaller, leaky goatskin water bags of yesteryear. Many of the camp sites are located where deep water wells have been dug. These wells were given to them by the King of Saudi Arabia.

Marzug's family is not large. His father died last winter. Now his older brother Al Kurbi, and a sister, Miliaba, live with Marzug and his mother in a tent. Marzug's little family is part of a big family called a clan. In the big family are all of his father's brothers and their families. His father's oldest brother is the leader or sheik of the Al'Azab clan. This clan, or big family, is

part of a Bedouin tribe called the Al Murrah. A clan of the Bedouin is like a small town in America where many relatives live near each other. In Marzug's clan there are 35 tents, and each tent holds one family. Each tent is divided into two parts. One part, called the shigg, is for men; the women's side is called the muharran.

The women and girls are the ones who care for all the camping needs: tents, clothing, blankets, food, cooking pots, and packsaddles. They set up and take down tents at each stop. The men and boys herd the animals. Older men and women pick the trails, water sites, and camp sites. They know all the best places to camp along the way, because they have made many trips over the barren Empty Quarter.

All fall they travel northward to the winter grasslands. The nights are cold now, and people and animals huddle together to keep warm. When they finally reach their winter grasslands, the tents will be pitched on the east side of rocky hills to protect the people and animals from the cold west winds. The openings to their tents also face east.

The baby lambs and goats are born in February and they must be brought into the tents at night to keep them from freezing to death. But if it is not cold in the daytime they graze and nurse with their mothers.

When summer finally comes the clan will sell some of their animals, skins, rugs, and other handmade goods in the market town of Rumah. With the money they make they will buy the things they need to live another year in the open desert of the Empty Quarter. For their basic needs they will buy pots and pans from merchants, and grain for bread from oasis farmers.

The Bedouin clans move to better grasslands in order to feed and protect their animals. The animals provide them with clothing, tents, skins, milk, meat, and money at the market. Each family member has a job to do, and each family within a clan depends on other families in order for them to make a living in the desert. But the clan goes to a market town once a year to sell what they have and to buy what they need. Like other communities around the world, the Al'Azab clan knows that interdependence among many groups of people is the only way they can meet the basic needs of life.

The End.

Students' Concept Formation Study Guide:
The Move to Winter Grasslands

Key Concept: Interdependence.

Main Idea: Interaction between a people and the physical and social environment which surrounds them influences the way they meet the basic needs of life.

Organizing Idea: The Bedouin people change their physical and social surroundings by frequent moves in order to make a living in the desert.

PART I

DIRECTIONS TO THE STUDENT. Place a check to the left of those

statements below which you believe are true based upon your reading and class discussion of the story, “The Move to Winter Grasslands.”

- ___ 1. All of the 35 families of the Al’Azab clan are related to one another.
- ___ 2. Each family member has a particular job to do when they are moving.
- ___ 3. Marzug’s clan moved to winter grasslands to feed and protect their animals.
- ___ 4. Water and grass are very important to the Bedouin people in order to make a living in the desert.
- ___ 5. A market town, like Rumah, depends on the Bedouin tribes to exchange goods and services.
- ___ 6. Marzug lives in a house with his family.
- ___ 7. The Al’Azab’s do not raise grains for feeding themselves or their animals.
- ___ 8. The Empty Quarter is a desert area with little rain and scarce vegetation.
- ___ 9. Finding good grass for the animals causes the Al’Azab’s to make frequent moves.
- ___10. Older people find camp sites along the way.
- ___11. Marzug goes to school like you do.
- ___12. Even the children of the Al’Azab’s have jobs to do that help all the people in meeting their basic needs for life.
- ___13. The animals provide meat, clothing, tent materials, milk, leather, and saddlepacks.
- ___14. The Al’Azabs, the oasis farmers, and the market town people depend on one another in order to meet the basic needs for life.
- ___15. The Al’Azaba grow crops for people.

PART II

DIRECTIONS TO THE STUDENT. Think of a family that you know who recently moved. What reasons did this family have for moving? In the chart below complete a listing of reasons our families and Al’Azab families have for moving from one place to another.

REASONS FOR MOVING	
Our Families	Bedouin Al’Azab Clan
1. Dad’s new job	1. Good grasslands
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.

5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

From your list above answer the following questions:

1. Select those items under the "our" list that indicate they are reasons which support the idea of making a living. Do the same thing for the Al'Azabs. How are the reasons different? Alike?
2. Based on the information you have organized above, define in your own words what you think "making a living" means.
3. Based on the information you have organized above, make a list of the Al'Azab basic needs of life. Would they be different from our family's basic needs?
4. Based on the information you have organized above, define in your own words what you think "interdependence" is.

Part I in this process has three non-exemplars of the lower-order concepts. This can be varied. The format here is intended for average readers. You may want more non-exemplars and to mix the sequence order of statements for better readers in order to raise the level of reading ability.

A teacher led discussion on the vocabulary of Arabic names, along with a map of Saudi Arabia, and pictures of the Bedouin people and their way of life would be most appropriate as openers prior to using the concept formation study guide. Students may react to the study guide individually or in small groups.

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