

4-1-1976

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Nicholas P. Criscuolo
New Haven, Connecticut Public Schools

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Recommended Citation

Criscuolo, N. P. (1976). Reading and the Bicentennial Celebration. *Reading Horizons*, 16 (3). Retrieved from https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/reading_horizons/vol16/iss3/13

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READING AND THE BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

Nicholas P. Criscuolo

NEW HAVEN (CONN.) PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Real functional American citizenship should be appreciated and stressed more in our schools. Many children lack an understanding of the history and government of their city, state and nation. Our National Bicentennial Celebration is a very appropriate time to instill in these youngsters this knowledge in a fascinating manner. It is a time to motivate them to read the stirring accounts of our country's past. It is a time for awareness of the significant contributions of prominent leaders and their impact upon our present city, state and union.

At Quinnipiac School in the New Haven public school system an innovative program has been initiated with fifty fourth-grade children. The emphasis of this program is to develop, through reading, an understanding of American historical contributions capitalizing on the Bicentennial Celebration.

The three major objectives of the program are the following:

1. To develop an understanding of local, state and national history
2. To reinforce reading skills as it interrelates with other disciplines particularly Social Studies
3. To foster independent and creative reading

Bulletin board displays show twelve Bicentennial ships proudly floating into Historic Harbor. Each vessel suggests special intriguing reading activities for a fourth grade student to master at various levels. The student selects and reports on at least six in order to be decorated a Bicentennial Hero.

These are some of the vessels:

Warring Waldo – War accounts 1776-1976

Frontier Fred – Westward movement during these years

Educated Edna – Schools and scholars

Gold Rush Gertie – Significance of gold discovery in 1848

Explorer Ed – Territorial expansion

Leader Larry – Presidents (1776-1976) and their achievements

Farmer Frank – Agricultural development

Manufacturer Mel – Industrial progress

After the Hero has accomplished his mission, he or she is entitled to visit Happy Town. This is a special fun room where a variety of interesting and Bicentennial activities are in progress. The student then selects his or her favorite group, participates in the procedures and reads, listens or writes for pleasure. Dramatization is an inherent part of the program. Children write their own scripts based on their readings and then perform the skits for the rest of class.

At Happy Town, these are some of the choices:

Craft Cranny - Weaving, sewing, embroidering, book-making and simple carpentry tasks.

Story Stall - Related stories, books and kits at various reading levels.

Art Nook - Famous reproductions of the period and explanatory readings; also materials for original work.

Writers' Camp - Tent for original poetry and story writing; also newspaper accounts for the school edition.

Listening Post - Appropriate tape recordings and records.

Play Palace - Collections of dramatic productions and selections for puppet shows; also choral speaking at various reading levels.

Three forty-five minute periods weekly are scheduled for fourth graders to engage in the various phases of this project. Creativity and innovation are encouraged in all the undertakings. Records are kept of all independent reading done as part of the program. In addition, journals are kept in which children note dates and events of historical significance. The children are supervised by their teachers and school aides. Individual and group reports of continuous progress are shared frequently in the classrooms. Maps, charts, dioramas, and numerous multi-media activities have given evidence of the program's success.