

Teacher: Rebecca Benjamin

Grades: Elementary

School: Pleasant Valley Elementary School, Schenectady NY

Project:

At Pleasant Valley Elementary School, students were introduced to the events of 9/11 when we were reading an article about the Harlem Boys Choir. The choir, which includes several younger students, performed some memorial concerts for the families of 9/11 victims. The article discussed feelings of loss and grief, and provided examples of the inspirational song “We Shall Overcome” that was utilized to help inspire people to continue beyond the tragedy.

After being introduced to the response people had to the 9/11 tragedy, students were primed to learn more about what happened in 2001. We read, watched videos, and discussed the event that happened, as well as the reactions that followed. We talked about the feelings experienced by those involved, and the ways that other people joined to help and support each other. We drew several parallels to students and families in our school community who had also experienced loss and grief, albeit from other circumstances in life and not from a mass attack.

We watched, listened to, and analyzed the lyrics for the song “We Shall Overcome,” and wrote about how that song can serve as an inspiration for people suffering through something tough. We extended that activity to a letter-writing call to action, where students selected people in school or in their lives who were dealing with something difficult, and wrote them inspirational letters and messages. Some of the students chose to write or include lyrics or poems with their notes.

In a larger expression of providing hope to inspire people to move past challenges, students planned a positive graffiti project for our school bathrooms. They incorporated some of the lyrics to “We Shall Overcome,” as well as other inspirational messages.

Overall, this project helped to build an awareness of the September 11 tragedy, and supported thinking empathetically towards others. It encouraged students to come together as a caring community to deal with loss, and provided them with some tools for offering positive messages of hope to others.

What Happened on September 11, 2001?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MTJGB5XEUKA>

Boys Choir of Harlem: Singing for America



Lioneldecoster: CC BY-SA 3.0
Boys Choir of Harlem in 1979

Anthony Ajaero goes to school so he can become a lawyer someday. But he also goes to school to sing. Recently, Anthony and his choir mates have been helping many people overcome feelings of grief and loss.

At the Choir Academy of Harlem, in New York City, students learn about math, grammar, history, and music. The school has separate choirs for boys and girls. Recently, the choirs have been performing at many memorial services across the country.

Their concerts have comforted many families of the victims of the terrorist attacks on September 11.

Weekly Reader recently spoke with Anthony Ajaero, 14, a soprano-alto choir member. Anthony is in the ninth grade.

Weekly Reader: What is a typical school day like for you?

Anthony: I leave my house around 7:00 in the morning. My first class starts around 8:00. I take classes in biology, global studies, and piano. I have choir and dance rehearsal from 2:30 until 6:30. I get home around

7:30 or 8:00 at night.

WR: How long have you been singing with the choir?

Anthony: I've been with the choir for two years. I play the trumpet and piano. But I prefer singing. Your voice is an instrument that you can play anywhere.

WR: What has it been like to perform with the choir at memorial services for September 11 victims?

Anthony: It is quite an experience. We've done a lot of shows to support the families of the victims. I feel connected to the families. Singing at these services has taught me to value the little things you get in life. I think the choir has helped the families heal.

WR: What is it like to be a choir member?

Anthony: The choir performs all over the country and the world. We just sang in Japan. I get to see the world through singing in the choir. I work hard at singing. I put a lot of time and effort into the choir. Not many kids get to do what I do.

WR: What is your favorite song to perform?

Anthony: I like singing "We Shall Overcome." It is a song that brings people together. [I] can connect with people while we're singing. It's really touching to see and hear people come together.

WE SHALL OVERCOME

Words and Music by Zilphia Hart, Frank Hamilton, Guy Carawan, and Pete Seeger

We shall overcome,
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome, some day.

Oh, deep in my heart,
I do believe
We shall overcome, some day.

We'll walk hand in hand,
We'll walk hand in hand,
We'll walk hand in hand, some day.

Oh, deep in my heart,
We shall live in peace,
We shall live in peace,
We shall live in peace, some day.

Oh, deep in my heart,
We shall all be free,
We shall all be free,
We shall all be free, some day.

Oh, deep in my heart,
We are not afraid,
We are not afraid,
We are not afraid, TODAY

Oh, deep in my heart,
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome,
We shall overcome, some day.

Oh, deep in my heart,
I do believe
We shall overcome, some day.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Anthony seems like
 - A. a hard worker.
 - B. a good musician.
 - C. a nice person.
 - D. all of the above.

2. To be able to go the Choir Academy of Harlem, Anthony has to
 - A. like biology.
 - B. be disciplined.
 - C. be very wealthy.
 - D. be athletic.

3. This passage is
 - A. fiction.
 - B. an interview.
 - C. a poem.
 - D. a list.

4. Which of the following shows that Anthony is caring?
 - A. He works very hard.
 - B. He has traveled to Japan.
 - C. He sings in a choir.
 - D. He enjoys performing for the families of victims.

5. Why did the author write this passage? Explain with supporting details.

6. Can you explain what must have happened to friends and families when they lost their loved ones? How is that situation similar to any challenging situations in our community?

7. What would you include in a plan for ways to help people in our school suffering from grief or loss? What inferences can you make about how this would affect people?

Lesson Objectives:

Students will be able to recognize local and historical events that cause suffering, and develop compassionate plans for supporting and encouraging each other through communication and community support.

Students will read, write, analyze, discuss, and watch texts in different modalities about historical situations and human reactions.

New York State Standards:

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1](#)

Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.7](#)

Make connections between the text of a story or drama and a visual or oral presentation of the text, identifying where each version reflects specific descriptions and directions in the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.3](#)

Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3.A](#)

Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.

Data used in planning:

- Bloom's Taxonomy for higher order thinking questions
- Accountable Talk tools
- Reading Strategies from Reading Recovery, Guided Reading, and the Integrated Strategies Approach program
- Student performance levels from school assessments and anecdotal notes on performance
- Student interest data from surveys on literacy attitude

September 11 Attacks

On September 11, 2001 the United States was attacked by an Islamic terrorist group called al-Qaeda. They hijacked four passenger planes and used them as weapons to crash into buildings. Two of the planes crashed into the Twin Towers in New York City while another plane hit the Pentagon. The fourth plane crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania after the passengers attempted to retake control of the plane.

The Attacks

It was early in the morning on September 11 when the hijackers took control of the four airplanes. At the time, no one dreamed of their intentions. Here is what happened to each flight in the order that they crashed:

8:46 AM: American Airlines Flight 11 from Boston crashes into the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City.

9:03 AM: United Airlines Flight 175 from Boston crashed into the South Tower at 9:03 AM.

9:37 AM: American Airlines Flight 77 from Dulles Airport in Washington, D.C. crashes into the Pentagon.

10:03 AM: United Airlines Flight 93 from Newark, New Jersey crashes into a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania when the passengers attempt to take control. Authorities believe the terrorists' target was the White House or the U.S. Capitol Building.

When the first plane hit the North Tower, many people thought it was some sort of horrible accident. When the second plane hit, we knew we were under attack.

The Twin Towers Collapse

The airplane fuel on board the passenger planes caused an intense fire and extreme heat in the Twin Towers. Eventually, the structural integrity of both buildings gave way and the towers collapsed. The South Tower collapsed first followed by the North Tower around a 1/2 hour later. Several other buildings and skyscrapers around the Twin Towers collapsed as well.

How many people died?

The death toll from the attacks was devastating. All 246 passengers and crew on the four airplanes died along with 2,606 people at the World Trade Center and 125 at the Pentagon. In all, 2,996 people were killed by the terrorist attacks.

9/11 Heroes

There are many stories of heroes on the ground and in the air during the attacks. The firefighters and police of New York City worked diligently to save thousands of people before the buildings collapsed. Many of them gave their lives including 343 firefighters, 72 police, and 55 military personnel. The passengers aboard Flight 93 also fought back to gain control of the plane. They knew they were probably going to die, but they didn't let the plane crash into a building where more would die. We will never know just how many lives their bravery saved.

Who were the attackers?

There were 19 terrorists involved in the hijackings. They were members of the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda led by Osama bin Laden.

Aftermath

The effects from the attacks were felt for many years. The U.S. economy struggled as the stock market crashed. Things were even worse in New York City which had to deal with the dust, debris, and destruction of so many buildings. Many had to deal with the death of friends and loved-ones and the loss of jobs and businesses. The United States government, led by President George W. Bush, retaliated with a "War on Terror." The U.S. attacked the Taliban in Afghanistan and searched out leaders and members of al-Qaeda. Osama bin Laden was able to hide out in mountain caves for many years before he was finally hunted down and killed in 2011.

Memorials

There are memorials to the victims at each of the three locations of the attacks. There is the National September 11 Memorial and Museum at the World Trade Center in New York City, the Pentagon Memorial in Virginia, and the Flight 93 National Memorial in Pennsylvania.

Interesting Facts About the September 11 Attacks

- The Department of Homeland Security was formed and the Patriot Act passed after the attacks in order to help fight terrorism.
- Around 50,000 people had jobs in the Twin Towers before the attacks.

- All four flights were headed across the country to California. This was part of the terrorists' plans so that the planes would be filled with fuel for a long flight.
- The passengers aboard the planes used cell phones to relay details of the hijackers.

President Bush said after the attacks that "We will not waver; we will not falter, and we will not fail. Peace and freedom will prevail."

September 11 Attacks

Test Quiz

Questions on this quiz are based on information from [September 11 Attacks](#).

1. How many passenger planes were hijacked on September 11?
 - a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
 - e. 5

2. What year did the September 11 attacks take place?
 - a. 1990
 - b. 2001
 - c. 2007
 - d. 2010
 - e. 2014

3. What terrorist group did the hijackers represent?
 - a. Hamas
 - b. ISIS
 - c. al-Qaeda
 - d. Asbat al-Ansar
 - e. Boko Haram

4. Who was the U.S. president during the attacks?
 - a. George W. Bush
 - b. Jimmy Carter
 - c. Bill Clinton
 - d. Barack Obama
 - e. Ronald Reagan

5. What new cabinet department was formed to help stop future attacks?

- a. Defense
- b. Interior
- c. State
- d. Homeland Security
- e. Justice

6. What buildings in New York City collapsed from the attacks?

- a. Empire State Building
- b. Twin Towers
- c. Chrysler Building
- d. Rockefeller Center
- e. All of the above

7. What happened to Flight 93?

- a. It crashed into the Pentagon
- b. It crashed into the Capitol Building
- c. It landed safely
- d. It barely missed the White House
- e. It crashed into a field in Pennsylvania

8. True or False: Hundreds of firefighters and police died trying to rescue people.

- a. TRUE
- b. FALSE
- c.
- d.
- e.

9. How many people were killed in the attacks?

- a. 65
- b. 185
- c. 344
- d. 712
- e. 2996

10. What building did Flight 77 crash into?

- a. Washington Monument
- b. FBI Building
- c. Pentagon
- d. White House
- e. Capitol