

FINANCIAL LITERACY – AN EIGHTH GRADE PROJECT: “ ‘ZINES!’ ”

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What Do You Mean? What’s a “Zine”?

The cumulative project for the Financial Literacy Unit was to complete a research project on a topic of their choosing related to poverty, and to contribute to a collaborative classroom ‘zine. A ‘zine is a self-published, non-commercial, often handmade publication that can be about any topic. ‘Zines can be found everywhere, especially in political or punk scenes, and are usually produced on a photocopier, though they are found online as well. Historically, the easy-to-make and unique format of ‘zines helped spread and share voices that were not always heard. To better reflect each student’s individual voice, they could work within semi-strict guidelines for research, but then had the freedom to format the finished ‘zine pages any way they chose.

Students researched their topics individually. Some students who chose the same topic collaborated in the sense of determining who might tackle the same elements of that topic in order to avoid redundancy, but all students took ownership of their own ‘zine pages. The goal for each student was to contribute their two pages for their class period’s combined ‘zine, resulting in five ‘zines altogether.

Students had the choice of how to present the information on their topic. One of the best qualities of ‘zines is the unstructured presentation of information: students can type, handwrite, doodle, include photographs, present an argument, an infographic, a narrative, or a written speech. Students knew that if the thrust of their call to write was simply to *inform*, then the writer was obligated to present both sides of an argument; but since their call to write was also to *persuade*, they might seek to persuade the reader to take some action.

After examining some real-life ‘zines to generate ideas, the students had the freedom to format the pages on their own. One of the best qualities of ‘zines is that there are no rules governing the presentation of information; students are afforded immense creative freedom to express their ideas.

Some of the topics that students researched were:

- free breakfast and lunch for all students
- raising the minimum wage
- early childhood literacy
- loss of voting rights due to a felony conviction
- homelessness in teens
- universal health care
- loan/credit policies
- the cognitive effects of poverty regarding education and nutrition
- affordable housing
- social/emotional skills
- what happens to pets during a financial crisis
- access to mental health resources for people living in poverty
- food stamps
- foster care
- money management
- the widening poverty gap

When students considered a research topic that interested them (and these were usually topics that one or both of the profiles had grappled with), they told me what they wished to research in order to prevent overlap, and to connect the students into a collaborative group. I kept a master document of each class's research topics, and also provided a list from which students could choose (drawn from the experiences of the profiles) if they were unsure as to which topic to best pursue.

After weeks of research, editing, feedback -- and after sending the originals to a local print shop -- the 'zines were displayed at the local public library, as well as online. Each student received a copy to keep.



Photograph of Ms. Moore and the 2018 Zine Display at the Agawam Public Library

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