

Using *Almost Home* in the Classroom

Context: I am a 7th grade Language Arts teacher in New Jersey. Our textbook includes two selections that explore homelessness: “What Do Fish Have to Do with Anything?” by Avi and “Homeless” by Anna Quindlen. I became aware of *Almost Home* after reading a newspaper article in the Star Ledger and thought it would offer my students a valuable learning opportunity.

The Set-up: I had all of my students read the introduction written by Tina Kelley and Kevin Ryan. I thought it was important to provide them background knowledge about Covenant House and the problem of teenage homelessness. My intention was to then facilitate a jigsaw activity where my students would each read one chapter from the book. My students were very affected by their reading.

While they read, I had them complete double-entry journals so that I could monitor that they were actively engaging with the text. I used every chapter except the one that contained Muriel’s story. I was using this text as an extension of our learning and was concerned about how both students and parents would respond to discussing sex trafficking in the classroom. I also excerpted some sections out of the chapters that I did use, because I wanted to make the readings more accessible and digestible for my twelve-year olds.

The collage project is a modified version of something I learned about in an adolescent literacy graduate course. The professor called it transmediation, which she explained as taking something found in one media (a book) and translating it or representing it to another media (a collage).

The first step in the collage process is to make one yourself. I have found that offering my students a model will give them a frame of reference. It also gave me an opportunity to explain the collage choices I made (the significance of images or the meaning behind words and phrases). I think this is essential in assisting students deepen their end product.

I have included the sheets that I distribute to students.

Results: My students responded very positively to this experience. Their previous notions of homelessness were primarily the adults they have seen in New York City. It was eye opening for them to see the struggle and circumstances that these young people faced. My students worked collaboratively to create their collages and written responses. They were also interested to hear about the lives their classmates were going to share. One class in particular took it upon themselves to gather round the presenters on our floor for a closer view. They were jumping out of their seats to ask questions. Our art teacher happened to stop by during these high-energy presentations and commented on their enthusiasm. I hope to continue to use *Almost Home* in my classroom.

Name: _____

You and your partner(s) are going to create a collage in response to your assigned chapter from *Almost Home*.

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- *These collages will be presented to the class and some will be displayed on the bulletin board.*
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1. Each person must bring in 2-3 school appropriate magazines to work with. If they belong to someone else, you must also have permission to cut them up.
 - a. I will provide you with paper, scissors and glue. But you may bring in your own.
2. You are going to cut out images, words, and phrases from the magazines that relate to what you have learned about homelessness from the chapter you read.
 - a. The goal is to try to capture the story of the person in your chapter and the information about teenage homelessness that is presented.
 - b. The images and words you pick can be symbolic. For example, maybe I could not find the Empire State Building in my magazine to represent the setting for *The Lightning Thief*, but perhaps I could find a red apple.
 - c. Be creative. You cannot cut out individual letters to spell words but you can cut whole words out and string them together to make a phrase.
3. Before you start gluing anything down, play with the layout of your words and images so that there is thought and organization. Glue your bigger pictures down first, before words and phrases.

In addition to the collage, you must prepare a 3-paragraph minimum response with your partner(s) to share with the class.

- In the **first section** I want you to give us a brief biography of the person and share a little about their story and struggle with homelessness.
- In the **second section**, I want you to make connections between the person and the introduction you read over thanksgiving.
 - Do they fall under any of the statistics from your introduction worksheet?

- Which of the 9 adverse childhood experiences have they endured?

- In your **third section**, explain the thinking behind the collage you created. What images, words, and phrases do you think are most significant in your work? What were you trying to communicate overall?

Collage Rubric (50 Points)

Full Credit	The collage <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ is neat with hardly any white space.○ is arranged with a purpose○ contains images and words that clearly reflect the elements of the reading.○ contains images and words that show a sophisticated understanding of the reading.○ Took a creative approach to the assignment
Partial Credit	The collage: <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ is neat and may have some white areas○ contains images and words that reflect the literary elements of the reading (characters, setting, conflict, theme, etc.)○ contains images and words that show a depth of understanding of the reading.
Few / No points	The collage: <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ reflects minimal effort○ little attention is paid to neatness○ has lots of white space○ some images and words used are not related to the text.

Written Response Rubric (50 points)

Full Credit	<p>This response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ addresses all components.○ Includes specific and accurate details.○ Took a creative approach to the assignment○ has few if any errors in grammar / mechanics (including incomplete sentences and spelling errors).○ Students are able to clearly explain their collage choices and connect them to the reading.○ Meets or exceeds the minimum length requirement
Partial Credit	<p>This response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ addresses all components.○ Has few if any errors in grammar / mechanics (including incomplete sentences and spelling errors).○ Students are able to explain their collage choices and connect them to the reading.○ Meets the minimum length requirement.
Few / No points	<p>This response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ does not address the 3 required components.○ May include multiple details that are inaccurate or is lacking details.○ No attention paid to detail and neatness.○ Has many errors in grammar / mechanics (including incomplete sentences and spelling errors).○ Students do not clearly explain their collage choices and connect them to the reading.○ Does not meet the minimum length requirement.