

Title of Session: Social Studies Forum - Beyond the Fire

Moderator: Michael Hutchison

Guest Speakers: Sesh Kannan and Elizabeth Meyer

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MichaelH: Let me take a moment and introduce the session, and we'll go to introductions

MichaelH: Welcome to tonight's Social Studies Forum

MichaelH: Tonight's topic is a great one, especially in light of all the recent turmoil worldwide...

MichaelH: we're going to look at a fantastic web resource which highlights the stories of teenaged war refugees from various parts of the world.

MichaelH: we'll look at multimedia resources as well as lessons you can use in the classroom

MichaelH: It's called "Beyond the Fire"... and it was a privilege for me to be associated with them last year

MichaelH: Before we get started, let's do introductions... would all of you let us know who you are, where you're located, what you teach?

DavidWe: I'm David Weksler, a long time Tapped In member. I'm in New Jersey, near New York City and I help teachers learn more about technology for their teaching and learning

ErikaF: I'm Erika, a student at the University of Houston.

GayleT: Gayle-University of Houston, Texas, Preservice teacher in social studies

ChristiGst10: I'm Christina, from San Diego. I teach 4th grade.

GinaBP: I am in a non traditional teacher's training program. My name is Gina Putt. I hope to be in an elementary classroom next fall.

LalitaGst9: My Name is Lalita, I am a teacher in San Diego, CA, a fourth grade teacher

MichaelH is Michael Hutchison, host of the Social Studies forum, and a technology curriculum facilitator in a small school district in Indiana

MichaelH: Sesh, Elizabeth?

SeshGst11: Hi I'm Sesh Kannan in Washington DC and I'm the producer of Beyond the Fire : teens experiences of war

DavidWe waits to hear where tonight's speaker is from

MichaelH: Sesh and I will be picking the brains of some of our elementary education friends before the end of the evening...

ChristiGst10: Oh great

DavidWe . o O (ooh, "picked brains!")

GinaBP: This topic seems a bit scary for elementary students. Maybe 5-6 grade could handle it.

MichaelH: didn't know there was to be a quiz, did you :)

DavidWe runs away from the quiz

MichaelH: Well, Gina, let's take a look at the resource, and then we'll figure if it's scary

ElizabeGst8: Sorry I am having some tech problems - -

ChristiGst10: Then we can ask you questions too. We'll get even

MichaelH: unfortunately, we seem to live in a world where many children younger than grades 5/6 are experiencing scary things

MichaelH: Well, Christi, I will tell you, I have 26 years classroom experience and can answer questions :)

MichaelH: anyway, while Sesh is getting ready, let's talk about the site.

MichaelH: I think last week's events in Russia unfortunately prove to many that children are not safe from the horrors of conflict

MichaelH: While Beyond the Fire doesn't deal with that incident, it's a great resource to bring stories of children who HAVE experienced conflict to our children in our classrooms

MichaelH: Sesh is trying to paste some notes in the chat area from a word processing document, and is having some trouble

MichaelH: it's ok though, if we need to just type directly, we'll do that.

MichaelH: Don't know if that's a guest issue or not. I suspect it isn't.

MichaelH: Sesh, while you get ready for questions, I'll show off the main page for the site for a minute

MichaelH: everyone else, stay with me a sec, and I will show you the main page for BTF.

MichaelH: now, I'll let everyone see the first page, but don't take too long, just a couple of minutes... then come back here for more discussion, ok?

ChristiGst10: k

MichaelH: just click on the blue link and the page will load in another window

MichaelH: <http://www.beyondthefire.net>

GinaBP: Okay

ErikaF: got it

MichaelH: does everyone see the page?

GinaBP: Yes

ErikaF: yes

LalitaGst9: yes

MichaelH hums the "Jeopardy" theme while everyone looks

GayleT: Yes

DeborahEB: Yes

MichaelH: you'll all note that parts of the site need Macromedia flash. If you don't have it, don't worry right now... you can always load that

MichaelH: You'll all note that the site has several components.

GayleT: Noted

MichaelH: there are stories of actual refugees as well as transcripts, and a great message board feature for students AND one for teachers

GinaBP: Should we click on any?

ErikaF: neat

MichaelH: Hey, Sesh is ready to talk about the site, so I'll give you a quick introduction, and let him tell a few things about the site.

SeshGst11: Beyond the Fire (BTF) is an online documentary on teenage war refugees from seven conflict zones. It is funded by ITVS as part of the Electric Shadows competitive grant. The documentary features the real war experiences of 15 teens from Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Iraq, Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. They are

all living here in the U.S. right now.

SeshGst11: BTF is aimed at the American teen audience as a way of engaging them in a peer to peer dialogue about war, the world around them and youth refugees. I felt the peer to peer approach was the best way to initiate the dialog among teens especially since their impression of war and its effects is that it's all smart bombs and bad guys. Also this is to get kids to find out for themselves where are these conflicts on the map, what's the history of these conflicts and what's being done to stop it.

MichaelH: Let's take a second and maybe look at what Sesh is sharing...

MichaelH: Note he said it's geared to the American teen audience... on the other hand, we have some elementary people with us toniht... I'm going to be asking...

MichaelH: if you el ed folks can think of some ways that you can integrate this in an elementary school setting..

SeshGst11: since you are seeing the site.. here's a quick tour o the features

MichaelH: Go ahead, Sesh... remember, you can type urls, and the participants can go to those separate pages

SeshGst11: this is truly an interactive experience that features an individualized virtual passport and travel diary, war zone timelines, Border Control quizzes. There are nearly 60 flash movies and audio stories from the teens. The passport and travelog are key elements for using the site in the classroom. The passport is a very cool concept and is your primary way to navigate the site. You collect stamps for every teen you visit provided you make notes in your travelog. So there is a bit of legwork required for the reward.

SeshGst11: Once you collect all 15 stamps you become a world traveler and this means you need a new world traveler stamp on your passport and your travelog comments become eligible to be posted on the site next to the teen stories. You are also provided with a resource segment. where you can learn about organizations and people working in your area and internationally on refugees, conflict resolution, etc. One hidden feature is the border control quiz which ties the big issues like child soldiers, landmines, lack of education and shelter, etc that the 25 million refugees (and internally displaced people)under the age of 18 are facing.

MichaelH: Sesh, I'm thinking this is a good geography lesson as well ...

SeshGst11: absolutely

MichaelH wonders how many of our el ed people teach world geography

ChristiGst10: It would tricky, b/c talking about war and ramifications is often not okay in elementary...we would probably get flack from parents, however, it would be a great geography lesson....

ElizabeGst8: Michael, you developed some great lesson plans for this site - do you want to talk about those?

MichaelH: Christi, ok, could you maybe get parent permission first?

MichaelH: Elizabeth, I'd be glad to...

GinaBP: I hope to integrate a lot. Right now I sub and am always pulling down the maps to find places mentioned in stories, etc.

SeshGst11: I also wanted to mention class materials

DeborahEB: I'm in middle school, working on a master's. I have a project to do a Global Learning Project, and I see some good ideas here

SeshGst11: All the content I just mentioned (country timelines, story transcripts, Border

Control quizzes, resources page, is downloadable in text format for use in the classroom. Students can print out their passport and their travelog notes in text form if you'd like to assign it as a class or homework assignment. The site also includes two standards driven lesson plans created by Michael.

ChristiGst10: If parents were the only issue, yes, but usually there is one child who's parents would want them totally sheltered from this.

ErikaF: Every group of students is so different. I think the integration of such a topic would depend on that group of students.

MichaelH: Let me take a minute to respond to Christi and Erika, and then I'll show the lessons...

MichaelH: Well, of course, it's unfair to ask you guys about that part of this, because you really haven't seen the site yet

MichaelH: and I don't know what grade(s) you are teaching... but I think there could be a reasonable use of the site for upper elementary

MichaelH: Let me talk about the lessons, and we'll come back to discussing this

DeborahEB: k

ChristiGst10: yes definitely late 4th grade and 5th

MichaelH: When Sesh and Elizabeth approached me about doing lessons, I was a social studies teacher on the high school level, so I geared the lessons to that level. On the other hand, again, the elementary teachers MIGHT be able to adapt them

MichaelH: let me show you each of the lessons, and you can tell me what you think...

MichaelH: here's the first lesson...

GinaBP: I see some things on the resource page that look good

MichaelH: you'll note that these are in html format, and also can be downloaded as .pdf (Adobe Acrobat) files so they can be printed easily

MichaelH: here's the first URL... take a minute to look, and then scurry back here :)

MichaelH: http://www.itvs.org/beyondthefire/Lesson_plan1.html

MichaelH: everyone, let me know when you are back so we can discuss the lessons

MichaelH: ok... what did you think about the lesson?

GinaBP: I could see talking about refugees in elementary classrooms. I just clipped the pic of the Sudanese child from the UNHR site

MichaelH: ready for the second lesson?

GayleT: It has a great component for engaging middle school students in problem solving activities and issues. I would definitely want to use this as an example of what could grab their attention and fire up their involvement.

DeborahEB: Lesson could be easily adapted to any grade level, I think. At least middle and high school/

GayleT: Yes, I am ready

MichaelH: it's no problem at all to adapt the lessons... go for it :)

ChristiGst10: I could see it working in elementary as well.

MichaelH: remember, just like about any resource, it can be adapted

MichaelH: here's the second URL... and then Sesh has some other site information and resources to share

MichaelH: http://www.itvs.org/beyondthefire/Lesson_plan2.html

DeborahEB: Compare and contrast is very adaptable

ErikaF: I think the only hard part about adapting it to younger grades, is the subject of all this. Parents and students can be very touchy about pointing out war and how it hurts children.

MichaelH: let me know when you all get back so Sesh can show some other features of the site

ErikaF: However, I do think that you could have students compare and contrast at any age.

SeshGst11: is it possible to pitch this to parents as this is more about the strength of these refugee teens rather than a depressing story.

MichaelH: Erika, as I mentioned, could you get "by" with that by having parental permission forms prior to starting the lesson?

MichaelH: and of course, you would adapt the lesson for the grade level

MelindaKB: There are several good books out there that would connect well with these topics, both elementary/ picture books as well as "chapter books" and novels for older students

ChristiGst10: compare and contrast is a 4th grade standard over here

MichaelH: any comments or questions about lesson #2

ErikaF: I don't know . I am still an elem ed student. I don't have a class or a teaching job, yet.

ChristiGst10: Then for the second lesson you could do a persuasive essay, which is also great in 4th

MichaelH: sounds good...

MichaelH: anyone else?

GinaBP: I felt that refugees would be a less controversial topic than child soldiers. I could see that in middle school. The resources you bring together are terrific, though.

GayleT: I really like the role playing exercise because it can present a real-life picture of one of the major aspects of going to war: conscripting the natives. This would certainly enlighten middle school students about just what that concept entails, at the beginning.

DeborahEB: I agree with you on that, MH

MichaelH: to be honest, we did gear the lessons to older students... but I think you CAN adapt them to younger kids...

ChristiGst10: They both require higher level thinking, younger kids need that...they don't get enough of it.

MichaelH: as I said in the preface to tonight's session, unfortunately world events don't frequently say, "well, this is a young child, so they shouldn't be exposed to war..."

GayleT: While this may be at the cusp of middle school interest, I would adapt it because it offers opportunities for students to involve their feelings and emotions in a real world topic.

MichaelH: Anyone else?

GayleT: Correction: to involve their feelings..."

ErikaF: Michael, you're right. It's sad that here we are worried to talk to the young children about this subject, but other children are living this.

MichaelH: the other thing here... maybe young kids know more than we sometime give them credit for :)

MelindaKB: A few years ago Time for Kids had a good edition on this topic

ElizabeGst8: Is that a website or a magazine?

MelindaKB: I shared it with 4th graders and it opened up a great discussion ... and learning opportunity

MichaelH: Elizabeth, I think its' both...

MichaelH: I've worked with them before in the Forum...

MelindaKB: both... I wonder if they have it in the archives

MichaelH: they did a really good set of activities and resources on 9/11

MelindaKB: You can access their articles online too... with activities

ElizabeGst8: Ok thanks.

SeshGst11: to add to Erika's comments... there are 25 million refugees (and internally displaced people) under the age of 18

MichaelH: give me a sec and I'll see if I can find the URL... Sesh can go ahead and talk about other resources on the site

MelindaKB: There is also a few great books for kids!

MichaelH: Sesh, go ahead and show the passports, and I'll hold off until you are done

ElizabeGst8: Yes - the passport feature is cool!

SeshGst11: if you can sign up for the passport and try it out

SeshGst11: for a few minutes it would be great. also do type in a few comments in the travelog

MichaelH: Sesh, can you direct everyone to the passport page?

GinaBP: I could see using some of the info in an upper el classroom that was learning about "alphabet soup" i.e. what is the UN? NATO? etc.

SeshGst11: the passport is on the main page right after the flash intro

SeshGst11: click on 'begin your journey

SeshGst11: <http://www.itvs.org/beyondthefire/master.html>

ErikaF: I see it.

ElizabeGst8: It allows you to personalize a passport and travelog and pick these up again when you return. Kids can personalize it even more if they want by uploading a photo or other image to really make it their own. It's important to note though, that this photo or image NEVER appears on the website and is only retrievable by that kid when they sign up with their password.

MichaelH: well, we are getting close to the end of the hour... Sesh, do you have any other things you would like to share, or does anyone have any questions or comments about the site?

SeshGst11: I want to address the privacy points quickly

MichaelH: good points, Elizabeth...

MichaelH: go ahead, Sesh

GinaBP: Cool passport! I think that teens will really enjoy and learn from this site!

SeshGst11: 1)the photo upload feature on the passport is optional and only the teen logging in can see it. No one else can. 2) the world traveler comments that will be posted will be reviewed by us to ensure that it is appropriate for posting. This screening also applies for the talkback sections. 3) the email address is only used to log back in to your passport and is for retrieving your password in case you forget it. we are not collecting private info on the users - the email address is just so that every user has an easy way to remember, individual way to identify with the site. Emails are not being collected and hence no solicitations, etc. Everything stays secure on the site.

ErikaF: That's really good to know

ElizabeGst8: yes - a lot of thought and care has gone into this, since the site is for young people.

MichaelH: and of course, with the e-mail address as the key to the password, a student can log in at school, and then later at home... or anywhere

MichaelH: Sesh, maybe you might talk a bit about the message boards for kids and teachers

ErikaF: yes, Elizabeth, the hard work is very evident.

SeshGst11: There is also a talkback page for educators to share comments, thoughts and ideas on the site.

DeborahEB: A question: when I click on the Journal the passport pops up, Are they the same thing?

SeshGst11: they are two parts of your online experience. you need the passport to get the diary

DeborahEB: I see, thanks

SeshGst11: The passport is a very cool concept and is your primary way to navigate the site. You collect stamps for every teen you visit provided you make notes in your travelog. So there is a bit of legwork required for the reward.

MichaelH: anyone else with questions/comments before I talk about the next session????

DeborahEB: Ok

ErikaF: nope

DeborahEB: Yes, what about the message boards

MichaelH: Sesh?

GinaBP: Thanks for putting up with a newbie! I enjoyed the site and tapped in.

SeshGst11: the message board next to the teen is from your passport

ChristiGst10: Thanks for everything

GayleT: Michael, at the very beginning, Jeff mentioned a very interesting site on people. Will that be on the transcript, or can you reprint it?

MichaelH: it was <http://www.educationalsimulations.com/>

SeshGst11: then there are two boards for visitors and educators to post comments

JeffC: Real Lives

DeborahEB: Sounds great, Sesh

GayleT: Thanks!

MichaelH: Sesh, go ahead... the floor is still yours

JeffC: Pick a country, simulate what it's like to grow up there from birth to death.

MichaelH: I hope everyone will take some time and look at Beyond the Fire, it is a very, very powerful resource you can use in many different ways.

SeshGst11: http://www.itvs.org/beyondthefire/teacher_talkback/talkback.htm is the url for the educators talkback

MichaelH: Thanks, Sesh :)

DeborahEB: Thanks for the url

MelindaKB: I am looking at utilizing the site with pre service Ed teachers

GayleT: This was a most informative discussion. I can't wait to take the time on both Beyond the Fire and Jeff's site.

JeffC: Another site for another time would be <http://www.takingitglobal.org>

MichaelH: That would be cool, Melinda

MichaelH: hey, before we all call it a night...

MichaelH: let's talk about next week's session

DeborahEB: k

SeshGst11: since we are talking about resources

SeshGst11: There is an extensive resources section which is arranged by conflict zone and topic areas. These provide relevant information on the history, culture, politics and issues in the regions through credible local sources. I felt this is important as we seek to understand these conflicts. The resources also includes a list of organizations in the US and national/int'l groups working on conflict resolution, youth refugees, child soldiers, land mine issues, etc.

MichaelH: First, thanks to Sesh and Elizabeth for coming tonight... I had to reschedule them twice in the past two months, and I appreciate them putting up with me...

ElizabeGst8: One more thing! Just want to say that this is one of 3 projects ITVS has funded through our electric shadows initiative. If you like it (and I'm sure you will!) you should check out the others too at www.itvs.org/electricshadows . Thanks for having us Michael!

MichaelH: Next, how many of you are planning to teach something about the 2004 Election?

ErikaF: Thank you all. I am really glad I attended this session.

SeshGst11: thanks so much for arranging this and it was a pleasure to meet all of you

MichaelH: Indiana state law says teachers in the Hoosier state HAVE to

MichaelH: next week, we'll discuss some resources on how to effectively do that...

DeborahEB: I've seen one, the one on Internment camp people, It's wonderful

MichaelH: and, we'll be looking at one of the best political resources out there... C-SPAN in the Classroom

MichaelH: we'll look at everything from streaming video to a free electoral college map you can get from them

MelindaKB: That should be interesting..... I'm in Indiana Michael

MichaelH: that's NEXT week (September 22); 8 p.m. Eastern

GayleT: Thank you, Michael, Sesh, and Jeff.