LESSON 9  WHAT’S THE MESSAGE?

Overview
Students will read and evaluate children's books to determine what message the author and illustrator are trying to convey. Students will describe and compare the community character portrayed in each book.

Objectives
Students will be able to:

1. Critique written materials to discern an author's message.
2. Identify different perspectives relating to the natural environment, community appearance, sense of place, and changes in community character and land uses.

Duration
Two 50-minute class periods.

Materials
10 or more copies children’s books that address some aspect of community.

Key Vocabulary
perspective, sense of place, community, visual landscape, NIMBY, loaded words, common good

Subjects
Language Arts
Social Studies

Procedures
1. Select a variety of books that relate to the natural environment, visual aesthetics, sense of place, and changes in community character. The following books are recommended:

   River by Debby Atwell. 1999.
   The Empty Lot by Dale H. Fife. 1996.
   Peter's Place by Sally Grindley. 1996.
   The Land of Gray Wolf by Thomas Locker. 1996.
   Where Once There Was A Wood by Denise Fleming. 1996.
See the Curriculum Resources section of this booklet for a description of these books.

Middle school students will recognize that the books are below their reading level. Present the activity as an opportunity for the students to become book critics, and they will rise to the occasion.

2. Place students in groups of three. Each group is given a book to read. When the group is finished reading the book, group members discuss what they have read. Following the group discussion, a book evaluation form is completed by each student, individually. See sample book evaluation form on next page.

Assessment
Allow two class periods for this activity. Students should evaluate one book during each class period. By evaluating at least two books, students become aware of each author's writing style and method of conveying the message. On the book evaluation form that follows, students should write a complete paragraph for each response. Students need to write four to five sentences per response to obtain full credit. Five points may be given for each complete, well thought out response, for a total of 20 points.

Extension
In the book titled, Home: A Journey Through America, by Thomas Locker and Candace Christiansen, each page contains the thoughts of a different poet or writer about the place where they live---California coast, Texas and Nebraska plains, Hudson River Valley, etc. A map in the back shows the places in the country that are written about in the book. After reading some of the poems/prose in the book, ask students to write about their 'home,' and create a landscape drawing or painting that visually expresses how they feel about their 'home.'

Content Standards Addressed
Language Arts
Standard 1. Meaning and Communication
♦ All students will read and comprehend general and technical material.
Standard 3.
All students will focus on meaning and communicating as they listen, speak, view, read, and write in personal, social occupational, and civic contexts.

Social Studies
Strand VI. Public Discourse and Decision Making
Standard VI.1 Identifying and Analyzing Issues
- All students will state an issue clearly as a question of public policy, trace the origins of the issue, analyze various perspectives people bring to the issue, and evaluate possible ways to resolve the issue.

Standard VI.2 Group Discussion
- All students will engage their peers in constructive conversation about matters of public concern.
**Book Evaluation Form**

Book Title: _____________________________________________

Author: _______________________________________________

1. Describe the visual environment in this book.

2. What is the book’s message?

3. Describe what is happening in the book using at least two of your vocabulary words in your description.

4. What would you change about this book? Why?

Student Name: ________________________ Hour: ________