

## **Report from the Field: Peace Literacy in Middle School Classrooms**

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As a classroom educator for the last 26 years, I recognize the importance of challenging students with meaningful, engaging material. Currently, schools all over the country are striving to increase academic rigor in classrooms. In this pursuit, metaphors and analogies are powerful tools because they require higher level thinking. Metaphorical thinking allows students to clarify their understanding in a variety of subjects, and also provides students with opportunities to dissect, critique, and evaluate the effectiveness of the comparison.

For the past two years, my teaching partner and I have been steadily infusing reading selections from Paul K. Chappell's books into our classroom instruction. Chappell's writings address both timeless philosophical ideas and relevant issues that engage student's minds. He is able to take complex, difficult concepts and make them accessible to middle school readers through the use of metaphor. The information is chunked into small enough pieces that the material is manageable for a middle school student, and the richness and depth of the metaphors increases the academic rigor of the lessons. The care Paul Chappell has put into crafting each metaphor is evident in the lively discourse that results between students as they ask the necessary higher level thinking questions to discuss, analyze and deconstruct the metaphors.

I teach in a school in which 64% of the students receive free or reduced lunch. Many people incorrectly assume this means students are not able to, or do not want to engage in rigorous academic classes and discussions. This is a misconception. As a result of using Paul Chappell's writings, my students are having philosophical dialogues on complex material such as Plato's Allegory of the Cave. They are comparing and contrasting aspects of Plato's Cave Allegory with what they see and hear on television. They are applying the Cave Allegory to social situations at school, and they are discussing what they can do to get out of the metaphorical cave. My students are not just growing academically, they are evolving as human beings. Paul Chappell's material encourages students to think critically about metaphors on persistence, leadership and world peace, thus allowing them to apply what they have learned to their own lives. His material is helping the students of today become the leaders of tomorrow.

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