

Family Heirloom Plants

By Jim Doyiakos, High School teacher at Amundsen High School

Summary: Students learn the meaning of “heirloom plants,” hear stories of family heirloom plants, think of an heirloom plant for their family, or just a plant that represents home to them, and tell their story to their classmates.

Objective: Students practice writing a story and sharing with classmates.

Grades: 8-12

Time needed: One class periods; 45-60 minutes

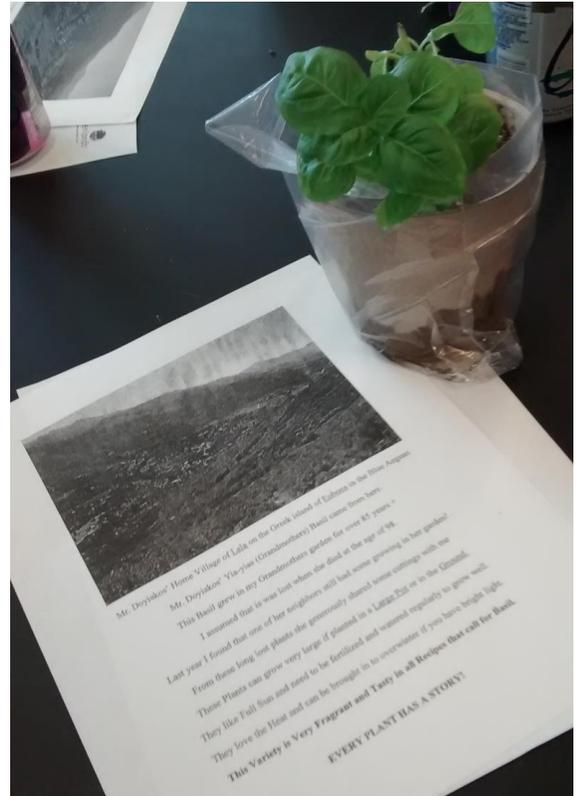
Standards met:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.10:

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Background, preparation and materials needed:

The premise of the lesson is very personal in nature. Students share stories with each other about their family background and heritage, through a relationship with a particular plant. Mr. Doyiakos designed this lesson himself, inspired by the story of a type of basil plant passed on to him from his grandmother in Greece. He acquired this plant, which is only grown on his home island in Greece, and now he populates it in his classroom. In his class, after the conversation about family heirloom plants, students are given the opportunity to pot their own cutting of his basil plant, and take it home to grow themselves.



When teaching this lesson to your class, it is important to share an example of family heirloom plants before prompting the conversation. You may choose to use Mr. Doyiakos’ story (available through Openlands), or you can use your own plant and story to share. If possible, you might consider having plants and potting material available for students so that they can also take the plant home.

Procedure:

- 1.) Ask students what an *heirloom* is (an object that has been in a family over multiple generations). Have they ever seen this word before? What about with plants? Has anyone ever seen “heirloom tomatoes” at the grocery store? These are particular genetic lines of tomatoes that farmers have been growing for generations, differently from the standard round tomatoes that you usually see. Discuss potential benefits of heirloom plants (i.e. genetic diversity because they are not genetically modified, different nutrients, different taste, and great stories!)
- 2.) Provide a written copy of your family heirloom plant story, and have students read it aloud as a class.
- 3.) Ask students if they have any heirloom plants in their family, which have been passed down for generations? Maybe a spice, a vegetable, or a tree?

- 4.) Provide students a piece of paper to write a description of an heirloom plant in their family. If there isn't a particular heirloom plant in their family, what is plant that is special to their family, and why? For example, one person might say that the Maple tree is special to them, because they live on Maplewood Avenue, along with other family members. Students should have about 10 minutes to write the story silently.
- 5.) After students finish their stories, take a few minutes to have them share in small groups.
- 6.) As a conclusion, have students volunteer to share their share their stories with the class.

Assessment:

- 7.) Collect stories for a participation grade.

Extensions

- 8.) If applicable, provide each student with a plant from *your* story to pot and take home to grow themselves. For example, if your story is about a special type of flower that your family has grown, bring in enough flowers for each student to have one.



Jim Doyiakos hosted a workshop in the Writing in the School Garden series. After participating in the Family Heirloom Plant activity, each teach potted a basil plant to take home.