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Professor Keller  
LSC 5565

### Author/Illustrator Unit

Author/Illustrator: Ezra Jack Keats  
Grade Level: 5<sup>th</sup>

#### Rationale:

Ezra Jack Keats was selected for author/illustrator promotion since he was a former NYC student that many NYC school children can relate to. He was born, raised, and schooled in Brooklyn, NY. His stories are simple and easy to understand without any hidden agendas. Many students can relate to the story lines and illustrations since they are based in the inner city and involve characters of ethnic diversity. As a New York City Jew, Ezra Jack Keats encountered a great deal of prejudice and discrimination in trying to get his art and books mainstreamed and published, and later for illustrating and using African American children in his work since he was not an artist of color. In order to equalize the playing field somewhat, Ezra changed his name so it would not be obvious he was of Jewish descent. He was born Jacob Ezra Katz. That proved to be the lucky charm as his next book submission, *A Snowy Day*, was published and won the Caldecott Medal. For a period of time, Ezra stopped working and publishing since he was under such harsh criticism for illustrating African American children. It was only after a close friend, an African American librarian with the NYPL, implored him to start again since he had made such lasting and wonderful contributions to the literary world that Ezra continued his art and writing. All of my students can relate to the discrimination and scrutiny Ezra Jack Keats endured. Further, since NYC schools sponsor and participate in an annual Ezra Jack Keats Bookmaking Competition, I felt this was an excellent opportunity to introduce my students to the joys and beauty of Ezra Jack Keats' work and let them know that every student can be an author/illustrator in real life and / or in the school and city wide contest.

#### Promotion Strategies:

I used various strategies to promote Ezra Jack Keats as an author and illustrator unit. Since there are only two computers in my library and there are over 30 students in each 5<sup>th</sup> grade class, I decided paper and pencil was the most fair and equitable route to take. I read aloud a different Ezra Jack Keats' story each time the classes came for their weekly visits. This occurred for three weeks. The first strategy deployed was children were taught about three different literary connections: text to text, text to self and text to world. They were asked to create a three paragraph response identifying their favorite Ezra Jack Keats story and make a literary connection. Upon completion, students were able to illustrate their favorite scene and then share their work with the class.

Author /Illustrator Study

The bulletin board features several items:

- Top left: A drawing of a figure on a green hill with a red object above it, next to a page of handwritten text.
- Top middle: A drawing of a winter scene with snow and a red building, next to a page of handwritten text.
- Top right: A drawing of a person in a blue coat looking at blue star-like shapes, next to a page of handwritten text.
- Middle left: A red book cover titled "WHISTLE FOR WILLIE" showing a person and a dog.
- Middle right: A yellow book cover titled "A LETTER TO AMY" showing a hand holding a letter.
- Bottom left: A drawing of a landscape with a yellow sky and a green field, next to a page of handwritten text.
- Bottom middle: A drawing of a green house with a blue sky and snowflakes, next to a page of handwritten text.
- Bottom right: A drawing of a landscape with a yellow sky and a green field, next to a page of handwritten text.

NYC Born and Bred, Esza i Task K



The second strategy I used was book talks and technology . I introduced students to headphones, microphones and Audacity. They were required to write out a book talk on an Ezra Jack Keats story before they could record their book talk on Audacity. Students loved this as it provided a new, creative and fun outlet to do a time old assignment.



The third strategy I deployed was asking students to create a prezzi on Ezra Jack Keats. This required them independently going online to research information about his life, as well as having them read biography books in the library. After diligent reading and writing, students were able to use the laptop to create a great prezzi.



<http://prezi.com/u-7cxnryf-sb/ezra-jack-keats/>

Reflection/ Self Assessment:

In reflection of the author / illustrator unit, I felt it was very successful. The students really took to the use of technology for book talks and creating a prezzi. It could have been more successful if the library had more technology and every student had access to a computer. Not all students were able to use Audacity and prezzi. I started on a small scale and had students help each other. This had to be accomplished in my time before school since I didn't think it was fair to introduce to the whole class when there wasn't enough computer access for everyone. (There are 3 terminals and one laptop for a student population of 508.) While everyone was exposed to the writing and production of a product, ideally it would have been nice to have better art supplies like paper and 3D hands on things to provide textures so students could imitate Ezra Jack Keats's style exactly. Overall though, the students loved the unit. They were engaged, motivated and focused on completing their work.